

Let's get Physical: stories of entrepreneurial activity from Sports coaches/instructors

Abstract

The study explores the entrepreneurial experiences of sport coaches/instructors and their operation thus contributing to a nascent literature. There is minimal literature evaluating entrepreneurial experiences in different occupational contexts. This is particularly true in newer entrepreneurial occupations such as sports coaches/instructors and how they function as business owners. This study considers the challenges, drivers, motivations and perceptions sport coaches/instructors exhibit and face. The results provided a plurality of diverse practice and attitudes towards self-employment sports coaches/instructors. In terms of motivations, respondents revealed both necessity and personal enjoyment as a driver to career choice. Respondents stressed the challenges involved with self-employment sports coaching which included time management and problems with financing the business.

Keywords: Sports coaches; lifestyle; Entrepreneur

Introduction

There has been an increase in people seeking employment in lifestyle occupations especially those linked to physical fitness and health issues. Lifestyle occupations are defined as “*those who are likely to be concerned with survival and maintaining sufficient income to ensure that the business provides them and their family with a satisfactory level of funds to enable enjoyment of their chosen lifestyle*” (Rimington et al, 1999, p 13). Mottiar (2007) and Swan and Morgan (2016) suggests that the key common characteristic of lifestyle businesses is that their primary motivation is not being driven by profit but lifestyle choices.

This has led to more people starting their own coaching or instructor businesses as a way to supplement their income or start a new career linked to their lifestyle (Ratten, 2010). Sport coaches/instructors are part of this global trend as people seek a career that connects with their need to have flexibility and a more self-fulfilling career (Ratten and Ferreira, 2017). Previously sport coaches/instructors were employed by clubs or organizations but this has changed as more start their own businesses that are stand-alone businesses or utilised in existing workplaces.

Small and medium enterprises in the United Kingdom (UK) remain a key contributor to employment and economic prosperity (Jones et al., 2008; Beynon et al., 2014). Moreover, Baldassarri and Saavala (2006) identify that Europe requires more people prepared to become entrepreneurs. This qualitative study explores the entrepreneurial experiences of sport coaches/instructors and how they function within their occupations. The study considers the career challenges, drivers, motivations and perceptions of sport coaches/instructors through an entrepreneurial lens. This is a unique study in that no prior study has evaluated entrepreneurial experience of sport coaches/instructors and the challenges faced in what often diverse career paths are involving undertaking both employment and self-employment options concurrently.

The structure of the article is as follows. The authors discuss sport-based entrepreneurship as the theoretical framework underpinning the study then appraise the key literature around self-employed sports coaches/instructors. Next, the methodology is described and adopted to address the research question. The findings are presented, followed by a discussion and conclusion, with managerial and policy implications and recommendations for further research.

Literature Review

Theoretical framework

Sport-based entrepreneurship is the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Originally developed by Ratten (2011) it focuses on the linkage between entrepreneurship and sport management as a way of understanding new business formation. At the heart of sports-based entrepreneurship theory is that physical activity provides a unique and more personal context to develop business ventures (Ratten and Ferreira, 2017). Unlike other industries, there are unique characteristics of sport such as emotional benefits and historical connections, which influence the development of entrepreneurial ventures. This means that sport-based businesses often develop in a different way compared to those in other sectors. This affects the contextual elements of entrepreneurship that are embedded in sport activities such as the competitiveness, ambition and willingness to take risks.

Part of sports-based entrepreneurship theory focuses on the way entrepreneurship is different in sport because of the intersection of personal as well as business goals. Entrepreneurship in a sport context involves the mindset of people actively pursuing new opportunities around sport (Ratten, 2012). Often sport entrepreneurs utilise their passion for sport or experience in the industry to develop new businesses. These businesses can include a variety of different types

depending on the context such as public/private partnerships or piggyback on existing sports clubs or organizations.

The key features of entrepreneurship are the individual, organization, process and environment (Gartner, 1985). In sport, these variables are incorporated into a variety of different types of entrepreneurship including corporate, international and technological. Hemme et al (2017: 2) extends sport-based entrepreneurship to include “self-employed individuals who enact their entrepreneurial roles as innovators, venture creators, and social facilitators, albeit not as members of larger organizations”. The benefit of sports-entrepreneurship theory is that it acknowledges sport as being multi-faceted and dynamic (Ratten, 2012).

Sports-based entrepreneurship can be classified into the following categories: community-based, corporate, immigrant, institutional, international, social and technological (Ratten, 2011). There has been a growing acknowledgement in the sport management area that self-employed individuals particularly in the fitness industry are important areas to study (Huset-McGuire et al, 2003). Moreover, fitness related businesses are one of the most growth orientated types of sport ventures in the industry and contribute to economic development (Covell and Walker, 2013). Small fitness related businesses enable people to achieve an enhanced work/life balance by incorporating personal interests into work activities (Hemme et al, 2016).

There are both psychological and social benefits to sport due to its role as a democratic and global activity (Eime et al, 2013). Despite the impact of sport in society there is little known regarding the role of self-employed coaches in facilitating an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the

economy. This means that life skills can be developed through sport in a way that encourages more personal connection to work.

Self-employment practices

Employment and self-employment practices are rapidly changing with new trends such as zero-contract hours and short-term contracts becoming increasingly commonplace (TUC, 2014). Indeed, it has been recognised that the number of employees on zero-hour contracts has grown to 3.1% of the overall workforce, which represents approximately one million people in the UK workforce (CIPD, 2013). Thus, just under a quarter (23%) of UK employers report that they employ people on zero-hours contracts. Furthermore, an ONS (2013) study identified a 367,000 increase in self-employment, 219,000, or 60%, between 2011 and 2012 in the UK. Contrastingly, the number of employees fell 434,000 between 2008 and 2012. In addition, self-employed people work longer hours than employees (38 hours a week compared with 36 for employees). Self-employed workers tend to be older than employees and are more likely to be male. In 2012, the average age of the 4.2 million self-employed was 47, and 70% of them were men while the average age of the 25.0 million employees was 40 and only 51% of them were men (ONS, 2013).

Such statistics suggests that the employment market is changing significantly to become a more dynamic and transient environment (Stirzacker and Galloway, 2017). Indeed other non-standard types of employment such as shift work and annualised hours have also been on the increase in the UK, while usage of agency, temporary and fixed-term contracts has remained a feature (WERS, 2011). The impact of this new employment market upon self-employment is yet to be significantly explored in the academic literature. However, it is safe to say that there is likely to be an impact and there is a need to explore this dynamic.

There has been much research into why individuals pursue an entrepreneurial career (Douglas and Shepherd, 2002) and the required intentions and personal characteristics (Krueger et al., 2000). Kolvereid and Isaksen (2006) describe self-employment as a person that is working for oneself either as a freelance or as an owner of a business rather than for an employer. The authors note that this description is a simplification as individuals can be both simultaneously employed and self-employed. Indeed, Carter et al., (1996) and Delmar and Davidsson (2000) suggest that a large number of business start-ups begin as a part-time entity whilst the Owner/Manager is still in employment. Whilst, Vesper (1990) posits that many will remain as part-time enterprises for the duration of their existence.

The reasons to undertake a career in self-employment is self-evident within the academic literature. For example, Benz and Frey (2004) and Lange (2012) suggest that the self-employed enjoy greater job satisfaction than employees and less depression (Bradley and Roberts, 2004). Whilst Blanchflower and Oswald (1994) argue that the self-employed have a more positive mindset than employees. Lange (2012) attributes this to the higher levels of personal autonomy and independence that are available to the self-employed. A further consideration is that many self-employed individuals might operate as a lifestyle as opposed to growth business. Lifestyle entrepreneurs typically start a business not for economic rewards, but for lifestyle choices (Henderson, 2002; Rodriguez, 2003).

Currently, there is minimal literature evaluating entrepreneurial experiences in different occupational contexts (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009). The extant entrepreneurship literature typically explores traditional business start-up with the Owner/Manager working full-time in the business (Birley and Westhead, 1994; Watson et al., 1998). Limited examples of

literature focusing on specific entrepreneurial careers include Avrahami and Lerner (2003) examined whether military service in a combat unit was associated with entrepreneurial activities in their ensuing civilian career. In addition, there is a body of literature that considers the existence of the technology entrepreneur for example Ray and Turpin (1990), Gans and Stern (2003) and Marvel and Lumpkin (2007). However, these studies provide no insight into the complexity of a dual occupation career or specific entrepreneurial career by occupation. The capability of the Owner/Manager is a key factor in the success of a small business. Indeed Walker et al (2007) and Jones et al (2013) suggested small business failure was due to poor management capabilities, a lack of preparedness and a failure to control business costs. Moreover, Birdthistle (2006) and Lin and Jacobs (2008) stressed the significant role played by training and its connection with improved business success and longevity.

Sport entrepreneurship

Olivier (2006) noted that although sport has been studied from a variety of disciplines including management and sociology but there is a lack of research focusing on the entrepreneurship discipline. This is particularly true in newer entrepreneurial occupations such as sports coaches/instructors and how they function as entrepreneurs. Therefore, new research is required to investigate entrepreneurial experience within this grouping and contrast against other self-employed occupations. Occupations such as sports coaches/instructors have become increasingly commonplace with the increased interest in personal fitness. Such occupations often include self-employed individuals employed by gyms and fitness studios who undertake sports coaching or instructing on a contractual part-time basis whilst holding down other forms of employment (Maguire, 2008). This model of self-employment is likely to be increasingly commonplace in the current employment market as previously indicated.

Previously, Ball (2005) identified that the hospitality, leisure, sports and tourism industries are archetypical entrepreneurial organisations which contribute significantly to employment, wealth creation and innovation. Southall et al., (2003) noted that the sports industry has grown exponentially in the last 20 years in comparison to generic business growth and represents the sixth largest global industry. Within the sports industry specifically, there has been significant growth in the coaching/fitness type enterprise and resultant need for qualified sport coaches/instructors (IBIS World, 2014a). Such enterprises are typically micro-sized and independently owned with the sport coaches/instructors acting as a self-employed contractor or personal trainers. This study therefore seeks to address this research gap by connecting the sports coaches/instructors self-employment occupational experiences and entrepreneurship disciplines.

A report by IBIS World (2014a) has identified that the UK gyms and fitness centres industry has changed significantly during the past five years. Economic recession has meant that some gym-goers have cancelled their gym membership or exercise independently. Whilst other gym-goers have traded down to budget gyms such as Pure Gym, which do not require long-term contracts and charge less because they only offer basic services. As a result, established businesses like Fitness First and LA Fitness have suffered from falling membership numbers and been forced to sell or close gyms. This has meant that many self-employed sports coach instructors have had to change organisations. IBIS World suggests that industry revenue is currently worth £2.4 billion with an annual growth rate of 0.8% expected between 2010-2015. The industry is said to employ in excess of 38,000 people in over 1,500 registered businesses. Roe (2009) noted that according to the Register of Exercise Professionals, the number of officially registered sports coaches/instructors acting as personal trainers in the UK has risen by 50% since 2005 and now numbers over 19,000. Thus, in conclusion, self-employed Sports

Coaches/instructors represent a significant grouping of micro business sole proprietors in the UK with minimal extant literature exploring their existence. This study represents an attempt to fill that void. The study will therefore explore the following overriding research question:

Evaluate the entrepreneurial experiences of the self-employed sports coaches/instructors and their motivations and key attributes.

Approach

This study represents an initial investigation into the experiences of sports coaches/instructors and their entrepreneurial experiences. The study employs a qualitative methodology with in depth semi-structured interview undertaken with 20 self-employed sport coaches/instructors on a one to one basis. Respondents were drawn from self-employed sports coaches/instructors from regions in the UK. The authors identified semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate data collection strategy as this was a nascent area of research and there was a need to explore the experience of the self-employed sport coaches/instructors in an open discourse to identify the emergent themes (Neck et al., 2004). Use of semi-structured interviews is a recognised data collection method in the entrepreneurship discipline providing a richer understanding of organisational behaviour (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004, Jones et al., 2014). The content of the questionnaires was informed by related prior studies including Politis and Landström (2002) and Patzelt and Shepherd (2011). Interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis at gyms/fitness centres where the sports coaches/instructors were employed. A semi-structured research questionnaire was developed with a set of open-ended questions (Partington, 2002) enabling the respondents to discourse widely on the topics (Johannessen et al, 1999). These questions were used as prompts for each interview, ensuring no variation from the research foci (Poon and Swatman, 1999). Permission was sought through the Owner/Manager

of each gym/fitness centre to undertake the interviews. Participation in the interviews was on a voluntary basis although all participants had to fulfil the requirement of being self-employed. Prior to the commencement of the interviews all participants were informed that the questionnaires were for research purposes only (Souitaris et al. 2007). The interviews were undertaken on a face to face basis and typically lasted between 30-40 minutes and the interviews were recorded with the permission of the individual concerned. The following topics were considered within each interview:

- The nature of their employment/self-employment career in sports coaches/instructors.
- Motivations for a self-employed career as sports coaches/instructors.
- Skills and attributes required/developed to be successful as a sports coach/instructor.
- Problems/barriers faced as a self-employed sports coach/instructor.
- Growth/progression plans for the business.
- Provision and need for business training.

Findings

In total, 20 Sports coaches/instructors were interviewed from several different sports centres/gyms. Overall, the gender balance of respondents was fairly equal with nine males (46%) and 11 females (54%) within the sample. In terms of age, the average age of the sample was 38 years old. When analysed by gender, the average age of females was 43 whilst the male population was slightly younger at 33. The age spectrum ranged from 28 to 60. Overall, 62 per cent of the sample cohort were aged between 30 and 39. So in summary, it was worth noting that the profile of the self-employed Sports coaches/instructors was mature especially in the case of females.

The respondents were asked to describe their role as Sports coach/instructor. All of the respondents employed a variety of descriptions including Sports coach (e.g. Hockey and karate coach), fitness instructor (e.g. Zuma, Spin and Insanity classes) and personal trainer. Thereafter, respondents were asked the time duration that they had been self-employed for. The findings indicated that on average the respondents had undertaken their self-employed part time role for at least 11 years. By gender, this revealed major difference with the average length of self-employed being 5.5 for males (1-13 years) and 18 for females (1-40 years).

Respondents were asked to identify the nature of their self-employment and employment career history. Table 1 illustrates the self-employment role, employment role and other roles. As can be seen the respondents undertook a variety of employment roles which included public sector to private sector, career professionals (e.g. medical doctor, teachers) to lower skilled roles in call centres and supermarkets. It was noteworthy that several of the respondents undertook further additional related activities which included sports massage and selling related nutritional products. Such activities demonstrates the entrepreneurial spirit of these individuals who maximise their expertise and knowledge through related diversification although admittedly on a small scale lifestyle business. One respondent had acquired additional training in a diverse range of sports activities to enable them to maximise their earnings but also to work as a sports instructor in Canada.

Table 1: Self Employment/ Employment History

Self-Employment Role	Employment Role	Other
Fitness Instructor/sports coach	Student	Snowboarding and squash coach, Sports Therapist
Sports coach	Manager for a Residential Care Home.	

Sports Coach/Instructor	Head teacher in Junior School	
Personal Trainer	Sales person	
Sports Coach Instructor	University Administrator	Life coaching and hypnosis
Sports Coach (Hockey)	IT Architect	
Personal Trainer	Work as an administrator	Sell Nutritional products
Sports Coach (Karate)	Day Service officer working with adults with disabilities	
Sports Coach/Instructor	Treasurer for Hoover	
Sports Coach/Instructor	NHS care assistant	Sports massage therapist
Sports Coach Instructor	Medical Doctor	
Fitness Instructor /Personal Trainer	Primary School Teacher	Sports massage therapist
Sports Coach Instructor	Massage therapist/ reflexologist/ guitar tutor	
Sports Coach/Instructor	Local Authority administrator	
Sports Coach/Instructor	Supermarket employee	
Personal Trainer	Call Centre	
Fitness Instructor	Car Mechanic	
Personal Trainer	Shop Manager	
Sports Coach/Instructor	Salesperson for Furniture company	
Sports Coach/Instructor	Administrator for building company	

The respondents were asked to explain their motivations for undertaking their Sports Coach/Instructor role. Their responses identified a range of motivations including assisting

people and groups to achieve targets, self-actualisation whereby they can use their knowledge, skills and capabilities to assist others. It seems that there is minimal financial motivation involved in these decisions and it is typically done for the betterment of others. Representative comments included:

“Seeing other people achieve greatness. Motivating people helping them overcoming fear or negativity. Getting people to enjoy exercise as much as I do and showing them that they can achieve anything they put their mind too.”

“I enjoyed Zumba so much that I decided to do the basic training so that I could take classes for the secondary aged pupils at an after school club. This led to my staff asking for me to run a class for them. As a school we then ran a 12 week family activity programme of which Zumba was one of the activities, after this I was approached by the parents to start a class for them. Over the summer of 2013 I was then approached by someone, through the Zumba website, so run a class at a local village hall. Recently I have completed the toning and step training with the view to starting classes after Easter in school. All money from my classes go to the school fund to help fund school projects. I have a passion for sport and fitness and truly belief in physical education for children as a lifelong experience.”

“I want to use my knowledge to help people achieve their goals. The majority of my work is for weight loss, and being able to see someone have more energy, freedom, abilities and just a greater passion for life is so rewarding. That’s why I love my chosen ‘job’. The job is flexible and I can fit it in around my family.”

Other respondents recognise that the self-employment opportunity offers the opportunity to enhance their communication and mentoring skills, working with others plus create innovative solutions for their customers:

“The flexibility and freedom it offers. Working with people and seeing them achieve their goals. I am a people person. I love the communications and guidance opportunities this job offers. The ability to innovate and create fitness plans for people.”

“Being autonomous and using my creativity to put together a good class.”

The majority of respondents indicated a commitment to their sport and recognise to do so they must evolve and change their involvement to supporting others. Thus adopting a coaching role enabled them to assist others whilst still retaining their involvement and commitment to the sport.

Thereafter, the respondents were asked what skills and personality traits they required to be successful as a Sports coach/instructor. The respondents identified a wide range of skills and personality traits were required. Firstly, there was the technical knowledge of the sporting activity that was essential to be regarded as an effective Sports coach/instructor. People skills were regarded as essential with effective communication as a central tenant. The need to be proactive to identify new opportunities and customers was also judged as important as was the need to motivate others. Effective leadership was also identified as managing customers effectively. The following comments are representative:

“I am very proactive always looking for new opportunities, in the local gyms, training for new classes, trends etc to increase my earning potential. Also has been snowboarding instructor. Good communicator and listener. Good people skills. Very precise instructor these skills come through whatever you are teaching. I always want to be the best.”

“Personally I think in order to be a successful sports coach you must be outgoing and have the ability to make people relax and feel comfortable around you, if someone does not feel comfortable around you then they are not going to perform to the best of they’re ability. Being friendly and reassuring is a must. Personally I feel that often the most effective way to coach is to lead by example. I think I am quite innovative and creative putting a class together. I have good people skills and I am a good communicator/ listener. Confident and able to motivate people.”

“I feel I can communicate well with others and develop rapport on several levels. I also believe that because I practice what I preach I gain the trust of my clients. Finally because I am always available and accessible in so many ways (phone, e-mail, social media etc) I am always there to help them when needed. I am quite innovative and creative – you have to be in this industry. Always looking for the next new trend. Good communicator / listener. I am flexible and fit in with my clients requirements. I am opportunistic and always looking for new opportunities be it clients / programmes and ways of developing my business.”

In summary, the Sports Coach/Instructor must exhibit a range of key skills to be successful in their role. A key element is a close relationship with the individual customer which requires

leadership, communication and clearly identifying the needs of the customer. There is also a need to be proactive in developing their skills and customer base and innovative in meeting the requirements of the customers via novel exercise routines.

Thereafter, the study respondents were asked what skills/ personality traits they had developed during their Sports Coach/Instructor career. Typical responses suggested that respondents believed that they had developed their skills set especially communication. Most respondents identified that they had acquired experience, knowledge and understanding of the markets that they operated within. As a result they were able to differentiate themselves in terms of their services provided. They noted that is required creativity and innovation in the design of their programmes and services and enhanced proactivity.

The study respondents were asked if they had encountered any difficulties in terms of their business and its development. The typical response was their concerns and lack of knowledge regarding obtaining licences, business finances, completing tax returns and appropriate insurance. These concerns were eased through a gradual process of understanding best practice and imbedding systems. An alternative approach was to employ suitably qualified professionals and rely on their expertise e.g. accountant. One respondent identified the initial expense of starting up the business. Typical responses included:

“Yes it seems there is so many things to take on broad and to try and understand once established it’s straight forward but getting established and obtaining insurances, music licenses and registering with HMRC can be stressful.”

So in summary the key concerns were the specific issues related to operationalising and maintaining the day-to-day operations of their self-employment roles. Dealing with financial management and tax returns were regarded as especially problematic. No mention was made about the actual process of business start-up aside from the initial costs involved.

The following question investigated the future intentions for the Sports Coach/Instructor business. Responses to the question were somewhat mixed in that many were happy for the business to remain as a life style business. Typical responses included:

“At the moment I am happy with the number of classes and the workload and am not looking to change anything.”

“I am happy with the balance I have currently between work, gym instructing and family life.”

“Future expansion will have to fit in with my full time job.”

A minority of respondents suggested that they were looking to grow the business by acquiring more customers and income.

“I am looking to grow the business to become my main job and source of income.”

One respondent identified their uncertainty regarding the future of the business:

“I’m honestly not sure where my business is going. IT may even be on the verge of closing due to the competitive nature of the industry. I have to be constantly

finding new clients. The industry is very cut throat in that you can have 20 classes on week and the following week the gym will cut your classes to invest in a new fad.”

In summary, the majority of respondents treated their self-employment as a lifestyle business which provided income and a level of personal enjoyment. Several respondents undertook the role because they enjoyed the role of coaching and they were not particularly interested in growth or income generation. A couple of respondents voiced their concerns regarding the future of their self-employment due to competition from others.

The final question enquired into the level of business training undertaken. The majority indicated that they had not received any training but all identified that they would benefit from its provision. Of those that had received training it was focused on the acquisition of practical business skills such as book keeping. In terms of training requirements, the respondents suggested that they would benefit from training in completion of tax returns, financial documents and how to obtain grants for training. Typical responses included:

“How to source funding and grants for training....”

“Help with setting it up including what licenses were required and what insurances were needed and where to get it from.”

“I feel that some training on setting up bank accounts to ensure you I had money aside for bills, expenses etc would have been useful at the start. I also feel that

perhaps having a sort of template to follow for typical start-up practices with a PT business would have been good.”

In summary, it was apparent that business training received had been minimal. Of that which had been undertaken, it was viewed as relevant and useful towards their businesses. All of the participants in the study welcomed the prospect of further relevant training. Relevant training was perceived as any knowledge or skills which would assist them in the day-to day management of the business and its operation. Greatest relevance was given to completion of tax returns and basic book keeping knowledge.

Discussion

This pilot study of self-employed Sports Coach/Instructor represents the first insight into individuals undertaking dual careers of self-employment and employment simultaneously. In each case considered the Sports Coach/Instructor worked as a self-employed sole proprietor within a micro business which contracted their services to a larger fitness facility. This unusual career path is becoming increasingly more commonplace with the changing nature of the job market in the UK resulting in people having to undertake more diverse and complex choices. This study attracted a wide range of respondents in terms of age and background. Female respondents were generally more established in their business with an average business age of 18 years. Thus the authors argue it represents a reasonable cross section of UK society albeit in the context of those in Sport Coach/Instructor self-employment occupation.

The motivations for undertaking self-employment within both Sports Coach/Instructing and an alternative career where varied. Firstly, there was a commitment to a sporting interest which had evolved beyond individual participation to assisting others. This role had typically evolved from coaching amateur sporting teams on a volunteer basis to the provision of services on a

paid basis. This evolution had occurred because the services provided were valued. The provider gained high levels of personal satisfaction from delivering the coaching/instructing and the organisation valued its provision enough to remunerate the individual concerned. In several cases, the income attained was not a significant motivating issue to undertaking the role. The job satisfaction obtained from undertaking the role was the driving motivation thus agreeing with studies by Benz and Frey (2004) and Lange (2012). The personal satisfaction derived from enabling others to achieve goals was identified as a key motivation. Thus respondents were happy to continue in their Sports Coach/instructing role for the foreseeable future as a lifestyle business rather than pursue any business growth strategy (Henderson, 2002; Henricks, 2002). Relevant examples included a Medical Doctor and a Head Teacher who worked as Sports Coach/Instructors as a second job. This business behaviour could be classified as a form of social enterprise whereby the Owner/Manager is working towards well-being of others and community rather than for a significant profit making intention.

Secondly, there was recognition that undertaking a Sports Coach/Instructor role provided benefit in terms of personal development enhancement. Thus the skills acquired (e.g. people/communication skills, leadership, creativity and innovation) in the Sports Coach/Instructor roles were seen as beneficial to the development of the overall career of the individual concerned. Within the role with acquired experience, respondents identified that they felt that they had refined their knowledge and skills and were able to provide a more individual and sophisticated product. All respondents identified that the key focus to be successful in the role was developing and maintaining effective customer relations.

Finally, there were individuals who undertook the role to generate another income (typically males) to supplement the income from their other role. They were driven by economic necessity although they all identified that they enjoyed their Sports Coach/Instructors role and regarded it as “more than a job”. A number of respondents maximised their sporting knowledge by

offering additional services to their sports customers such as sports massage and selling nutritional products. This demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit and an ability to maximise opportunity.

In terms of business related challenges that the Sports Coach/Instructors faced, several respondents voiced their concerns regarding issues related to the setting up and maintaining the business operation. For example, obtaining licenses and appropriate insurance to undertake classes, financing the business and completing financial information. These concerns typically eased as knowledge and expertise developed over time. However, it must be noted that this study focuses on established Sports Coach/Instructors who have established and maintained their enterprises and overcome any obstacles. Such barriers to start-up will undoubtedly deter or delay a number of aspirant Sports Coach/Instructors. Indeed, one respondent identified the need to employ a qualified accountant as a means of focusing on their key activities. This suggests that Sports Coach/Instructors do have the capacity to think strategically and employ professional expertise on occasion. Thus it can be confidently stated that Sports Coach/Instructors are impacted upon by barriers to effective practice. These seem to be typically related towards operational as opposed to strategic issues.

The majority of Sports Coach/Instructors identified that they had not received any related business training. Any training provision was welcomed especially related to the day to day management and operation of the business. This contrasts to the extant literature which stresses the importance of training and its connection with business success (Birdthistle, 2006; Lin and Jacobs, 2008). Sport Coach/Instructors typically operated as lifestyle businesses with minimal inclination towards growth. However, this should not detract from the performance of the Sport Coach/Instructors who evidenced a range of entrepreneurial behaviour within this study. For example, respondents were able to successfully evidence self-employment and employment dual occupations over a significant time period. Sport Coach/Instructors were able evidence

novel behaviour and many acted as social entrepreneurs in providing improved services to their community.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has offered the first insight into a dual occupation self-employment and employment career in the context of the Sports Coach/Instructor. The study has provided some novel insights into the behaviour of the self-employed individual within a dual occupation career. The study meets the call of Blackburn and Kovalainen (2009) in providing new insights into entrepreneurial career paths. It was apparent that Sports Coach/Instructors were typically flexible and resourceful individuals who had created sustainable enterprises in addition to their other employment existence. The Sports Coach/Instructor exhibit many novel behaviours including elements of social entrepreneurial behaviour. Sports Coach/Instructors were typically life style businesses that were not seeking growth. It was apparent that Sports Coach/Instructors practices were impaired by the existence of some barriers which restricted business performance. The provision of specific training to enhance operational processes would benefit this sector. However, this study recognises that this study is an initial investigation and there is a need for further research to fully explore behaviours within this context. Indeed, there is a need for further studies in other self-employment occupations and professions to fully understand this emergent phenomenon. Future research needs to examine the increase in self-employment in the sports sector by focusing on the career trajectory and entrepreneurial lifecycle of a Sport Coach/Instructor. As sport has emotional aspects that are unique compared to other industries future research needs to delve more deeply into why individuals become a Sport Coach/Instructor and what kind of psychological or social attachment they develop towards their career. Another relevant research path would be to

examine the successes and failures of Sport Coach/Instructors in an international context to see if there are any additional contextual variables affecting their entrepreneurial behaviour. Thus the authors hope this paper has provided a springboard for further research to focus on the role of Sport Coach/Instructors in the entrepreneurial ecosystems of communities. These results will be of interest to entrepreneurial support agencies, policy makers and the research community in terms of understanding the behaviour of self-employed Sports Coach/Instructors. The trends in employment patterns suggest that such occupations are becoming more prevalent. Thus it is important that such career paths are assisted by supportive legislation and eco-systems.

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