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Abstract

Although sports or any other kind of physical activity can be entertaining and beneficial for people's health, they can also become perilous and conceal risks. Risk has always been related to unpleasant outcomes like harm, danger, hazard or loss. In order to minimize or even eliminate these risks, the sport and leisure industry needs to implement an effective risk management process as part of a well-designed management system. The purpose of this paper is to present a process of risk management that includes a methodical risk assessment; identification of an appropriate risk management strategy, and application of all necessary safety measures. The present study provides an extensive review of literature in the area of risk and safety management.

Key Words: *Risk Management, Risk Assessment, Risk Strategy, Safety, Leisure, Sport.*

Most sports conceal a certain level of risk, ranging from a small injury to a serious accident, especially when people are not cautious (Beech and Cladwick, 2004; Appenzeller, 1998). Hence, it is important that operators and governing bodies within the sport and leisure industry understand these risks and apply all measures needed to manage them. Bearing this in mind, they should not only implement a comprehensive «risk management» process (Beech and Chadwick, 2004; Swarbrooke et al, 2003), but also ensure that realistic safety measures are applied, in terms of time, money, materials and people involved (GNVQ, 2000).

An effective risk management process means that all risks are being controlled and that no problems will occur. In order to control these risks though, it is necessary to do the following:

- a) identify and understand the risks
- b) try to foresee any possible consequences
- c) predict who is going to be involved or affected and
- d) implement successful safety measures that will minimise or even eliminate the risks.

In other words there is a need to assess any possible risk involved in each activity (*risk assessment*); decide how to approach the problem (*risk strategy*), and employ all measures needed for the participants' protection (*safety measures*).

Methodology

The present study aims to present a process of risk management that includes a methodical risk assessment; identification of an appropriate risk management strategy, and the application of all necessary safety measures. The methodology that has been used included an analysis of international literature sources, as well as an examination of significant documents.

Discussion

Before analysing the significance of the risk management process, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term «risk» and all the possible ways that this may affect sport activities. According to the Oxford dictionary (www.askoxford.com 074/04/2005) risk is «a situation during which there is the possibility of exposure to danger with an unpleasant outcome». The

Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2003) mentioned that risk is perceived as «a high or low chance of somebody getting harmed» or «the frequency with which the danger appears and the amount of its consequences». As Lee and Jones (2004, pp. 14) argue, risk is chronic, all human actions include it and even though it can be increased, decreased or transferred due to different circumstances, it is hardly ever eliminated.

1. Risk Management

Risk management is a key factor in an effective sport management process since it can predict and even avoid unpleasant situations, like accidents, injuries or even losses (Fuller and Drawer, 2004). Its objectives should be first to identify any possible hazard or risk that someone could face during a sport and recreational activity and then to assess the possibilities these risks have for materialising. In an effective risk management process, it is essential that managers provide all necessary safety measures and present all possible solutions and alternatives, with an aim to decrease or even eliminate the risks through a comprehensive strategic plan (Parkhouse, 2005; Beech and Chadwick, 2004).

Swarbrooke et al (2003) have suggested a «model of risk management» that can be helpful for the safety of sports (*Figure 1*). According to this model, managers should first conclude a risk assessment process and then identify which risk management strategy they will follow.

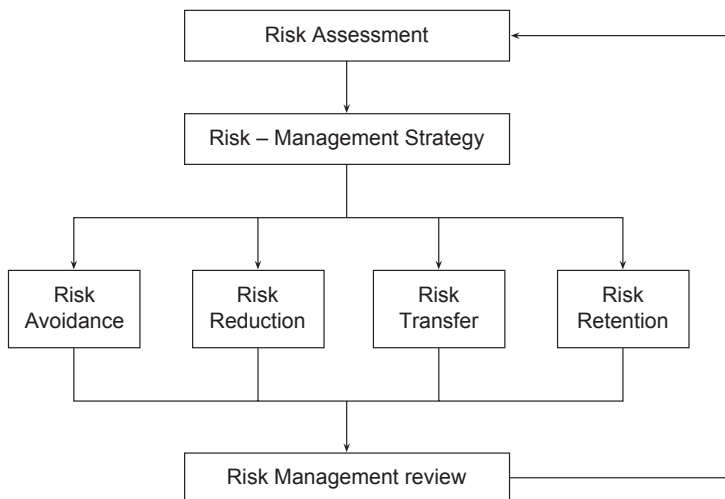


Figure 1: Model of Risk Management (Swarbrooke et al, 2003).

2. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a process during which managers must evaluate the circumstances of the environment they are functioning in; estimate possible dangers; take precautions and measures according to legislation, and ensure that nobody, personnel or customers, will get hurt (HSE, 2003; GNVQ, 2000). Risk assessment is accomplished through certain stages.

1. The first one is the identification of all possible risk factors that managers might face during an activity. These risks can be associated with materials, substances, activities, equipment or the environment (Spengler et al, 2006, GNVQ, 2000).

2. During the second stage, after detecting the possible hazards, managers should identify which participants can actually be harmed by those risks and what might be the consequences.

3. The next stage involves evaluating the degree of risk, that is, estimating the probability of whether the hazards present in an activity can harm the participants (probability) and if so, to what extent (severity). This information will determine whether more precautions need to be taken (HSE, 2003; Outhart et al, 2003). For estimating the probability, it should be first defined whether the hazard is current or potential, in other words, if it already exists or if it might occur in the future (Outhart et al, 2003; Lee and Jones, 2004). When identifying that, managers should also estimate the frequency with which a hazard has occurred in the past. In order to do so, managers can look at relevant statistics, consult managers from other organisations, do their own research or seek advice from governing bodies and emergency agents (Outhart et al, 2003). The second thing to be evaluated is the severity of the hazard, that is, whether the danger is of minor, medium or major severity. All the data collected during the risk estimation and evaluation stages need to be transcribed and remain as a written record that will help in similar future situations (HSE, 2003).

4. The final stage of the risk assessment process is the revising procedure. It is important for the organisation to check constantly if all precautions are being taken and that they work effectively. Additionally, this stage is essential, because new hazards can appear, the level of risk may increase or a change in law measures could be realised (Outhart, 2003; HSE, 2003).

However, even when all possible safety measures have been taken, there is always the fear that these might fail and therefore risk will remain. This residual risk (Boyle, 2000) can be dealt either by just accepting it and hope that it will never occur or by using secondary control measures such as adjusting the activities in a way that every participant is capable of completing them.

3. Risk Strategies

There are four types of strategies that are being used according to the level of risk that exists: risk avoidance, risk reduction, risk transfer and risk retention (Figure 2). *Risk avoidance* takes place when there are either poor arrangements or hazards that cannot be controlled, and hence, managers postpone the activity or offer an alternative one (Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Parkhouse, 2005; Beech and Cladwick, 2004). In *risk reduction*, all activities should be managed by capable and well-trained leaders, who have the experience and the competence to cope with possible risks (Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Beech and Cladwick, 2004; Outhart et al, 2003). Managers often employ the risk transfer method, in which the risk is transferred to insurance companies, to the clients or to third parties (Centner, 2005; Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Beech and Chadwick, 2004; Boyle, 2000). Finally, *risk retention* is a strategy during which mainly low risks are being accepted either unconsciously or because of incapability to transfer them to others.

Frequency of Risk Potential ↑	High	Reduce Risk	Avoid Risk
	Low	Retain Risk	Transfer Risk

Figure 2: Risk Evaluation Matrix (Wilks and Davis, 2000, within Swarbrooke et al, 2003).

4. Safety Measures

Besides a risk assessment procedure and a strategy selection process, an effective risk management process also needs reliable safety measures. In other words, to assure good safety management, sport and leisure industry managers, in addition to efficient planning and best possible communication, should do the following:

- have well-qualified and skilled people to manage the different activities
- exercise good leadership, that is, provide the best kind of direction and support people's needs so that they will be efficient and productive (Covell et al, 2003)
- collect information on weather forecasts
- ensure excellent collaboration and communication among participants (HSE, 2003; Robinson, 2004)
- ensure that all participants have covered their basic needs, for example in food arrangements (Priest and Cass, 1997)

- keep record of participants
- keep record of previous dangerous situations (Connaughton, 2002; Appenzeller, 1998).

Conclusions

In summary, all physical activities could be both beneficial and perilous for one's health and this is something that all participants should be aware of. Therefore, risk and safety management should be considered as an enabler of an effective and efficient sport management process. It might not be feasible for managers in the sport and leisure industry to provide absolute safety, but they should be able to ensure the maximum level of awareness and attentiveness to safety issues. To do so, they ought to develop and apply policies; consider all potential risks; take as many precautions as possible; choose an operative strategy, and always take appropriate safety measures.

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