

A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE JOB SECURITY OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS COACHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study targeted at human resources managers and professional sports coaches at sport organisations affiliated to the South African Sports Commission, in all nine provinces of South Africa. It focuses specifically on the job security of professional sports coaches. The methodology involved an extensive literature survey, structured in-depth interviews and the administration of 900 structured questionnaires. The analysis of data revealed that most of the professional sports coaches do not enjoy job security. This may perhaps have contributed to the high turnover of professional sports coaches in many sporting codes.

Key words: Professional; Sports coach; Human resources; Job security, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Sport organisations and their management are concerned with several issues relating to their operations (Chelladurai, 1999). One of these issues is job security, or tenure of employment. Historically employees who performed at an acceptable level and kept out of trouble were guaranteed a job for life (Burke, 1998). However, organisational flexibility, accompanied by increasing uncertainty about job security, has made a job for life a thing of the past in particular industries (Arnold & Feldman, 1988).

Many organisations are less willing to offer lifelong career progression and are increasingly keen to avoid mention of the term “career” (Ball, 1997). Big corporate layoffs, organisational restructuring, downsizing, merging and rightsizing in the past decade have caused many employees to fear for their jobs (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 1988; Burke, 1998). Downsizing does not only have a negative effect on the employees who leave but also has a major effect on the remaining employees (Redman & Mathews, 1998).

The perception that is created in the remaining employees is that all workers have to get used to changing jobs more frequently (Singh, 2001). Handy and other management gurus (Warren, 1996; Smithson & Lewis, 2000) have predicted that job security for employees will become a thing of the past.

Kanter (Warren, 1996) noted that the job-tenure ideal of the past is colliding with the job-insecurity reality of the present. Institutionally dependent careers are declining; self-reliant careers as professionals and entrepreneurs are proliferating, increasing the burden on people.

As she sees it, the only employment security will come from a person's employability and from the skills that will enable him/her to add value to an organisation. Organisations will only be attractive to independent workers if they are able to provide learning opportunities that will enhance their employability in future.

Mirvis and Hall (Burke, 1998) state that in many organisations employee autonomy is encouraged, less care is taken of employees, no detailed long-term career planning exists, and non-traditional career paths are becoming increasingly evident, thus producing a flexible, task-motivated, empowered and responsible workforce.

Job security needs are satisfied for many employees in an organisation by job continuity (no layoffs), a grievance system (to protect against unfair dismissal) and an adequate insurance and retirement benefit package - for security against illness and the provision of income in later life (Griffin, 1990). In many instances job continuity for professional sports coaches in sport organisations is not guaranteed. Much depends on the objectives of the organisation, the organisational structure, the skills of the coach, the talent of the team, the competence of the assistant coach/es and the win/loss record of the coach.

The responsibility for the management of security of employment is shifting in many organisations from the responsibility of the employer to more proactive strategies on the part of employees to ensure that they remain employable (Ball, 1997; Burke, 1998). Therefore, the management and continual updating of a personal portfolio of skills, knowledge and expertise is seen as core to ensuring continuity of employment, if not continuity with a specific employer (Cornelius, 2001).

Warren (1996) states that managers in organisations need to take employment security seriously and build this concept into their professional ideology and practice. Instead of undermining job security, sport organisations should be trying to preserve and support it in the face of destructive competitive pressures and tendencies. If secure employment cannot be supported and re-established, sport organisations will be poorer for it.

According to Singh (2001) security in sport coaching lies in three broad areas. Firstly, coaches must rely mostly on their own ability, regardless of the number of assistants on the staff. Secondly, the head coach must have complete faith in the players in the team. Thirdly, the coach must have faith in assistant coaches, in that they are dedicated enough and possess sufficient knowledge to do an outstanding job of imparting skills and attitudes necessary for excellence in an athlete. Any shortcomings in the afore-mentioned areas may contribute to the job insecurity of the coach.

Professional sports coaches experience problems with job security and continuity since the success of coaching is normally measured in terms of success achieved by the team (Van Zijl, 1984). As a result of this, fluctuating achievements may impact negatively on the professional sports coach. Promising professional sports coaches are frequently lost from sport because there is no provision for job possibilities, job security and continuity in this direction.

TABLE 1. COACH TURNOVER IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL SOCCER TEAM

YEAR	COACH
1992	Stanley Tshabalala and Jeff Butler appointed as national coaches
1993	Augustus Palacios succeeds both Stanley Tshabalala and Jeff Butler
1994	Clive Barker replaces Augustus Palacios
1997	Clive Barker resigns. Jomo Sono appointed 'temporary' coach
1998	Philip Trousier appointed coach of national team
1999	Carlos Queiroz replaces Philip Trousier as national coach
2001	Carlos Queiroz resigns and Jomo Sono appointed as coach
2002	Ephraim 'Shakes' Mashaba replaces Jomo Sono as coach
2003	April Phumo replaced Ephraim Mashaba as caretaker coach

Mark (2002) maintains that coaches do not last long in their jobs. Singh (2001) adds that coaching is a perilous occupation where the pressure is high and the life expectancy increasingly short. Professional coaches like Hoddle (the ex-England and Tottenham Hotspur football coach), Venerables (the ex-England and Leeds United football coach), Kasperazak (the ex-Tunisian football coach) and Charreyre (the ex-Romanian rugby coach) were dismissed although they had impressive track records.

The situation with regard to South African sport appears no different. There has been a high turnover of coaches, especially in the national soccer team (refer to Table 1) and the national rugby team (refer to Table 2) in recent years. Poor performances from the national soccer and rugby teams in international competitions have resulted in calls from the media, fans and administrators for coaches to be dismissed. There is a worldwide trend of professional coaches being sacked by clubs that are impatient for success.

In South Africa, the situation is no different. In 2002, four domestic soccer coaches had departed from their clubs with the season barely three months old (Mark, 2002). The situation worsened in 2003. With the season just over two months, seven coaching changes have taken place, with four coaches leaving their respective clubs in one day (Matshe, 2003). This is a South African record.

Similarly, the Springbok rugby team has also witnessed a high turnover of coaches with nine national coaches being appointed in 10 years. Table 2 illustrates the turnover trend that exists in rugby. Rudolph Straueli, the South African national rugby coach, became the latest casualty when he was forced to resign when both players and fans called for his resignation.

TABLE 2. COACH TURNOVER IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL RUGBY TEAM

YEAR	COACH
1993	John Williams was the national team coach
1993 - 1995	Ian MacIntosh succeeded John Williams as coach
1995 - 1996	Kitch Christie replaced Ian MacIntosh
1997 - 1998	André Markgraaff was the national coach
1998	Carel du Plessis became the national coach
1998 - 2000	Nick Mallet replaced Carel du Plessis as national coach
2001	Harry Viljoen became the new national coach
2002 - 2003	Rudolph Straueli was the national coach
2003	Jake White was appointed as national coach

The media and fans play a significant role regarding the job security of coaches. They tend to “add fuel to the fire”. A team might win a tournament but they will still complain that the style of the team was not artistic enough, imaginative or attacking enough (Singh, 2001). A “vote poll” on an internet website of the Orlando Pirates Soccer Club asked the fans the question: “After a string of disappointing results, do you think the coach, Barreto, should go?”. Eighty nine percent (89%) of the 481 voters voted in the affirmative (Mark, 2003). Regardless of the result of the poll, this reflects how insecure a coach is at his/her own club. Good results, however, do not guarantee a coach’s security. Kompela, the Manning Rangers football coach was dismissed immediately after his team progressed to the second round of the Coca-Cola Cup.

Workers’ perceptions of job insecurity are said to affect a number of economic variables. A study by Manski and Straub (in Anon., 1999) revealed that job loss tends to decline as age increased, but so do expectations that a subsequent job search would be successful. It was further found that insecurity tended to decline as educational and skill attainment increased. This implies that if coaches’ education and skills were improved job security would increase.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to investigate the job security of professional sports coaches in South Africa. It sought reasons for the job insecurity that professional sports coaches experience and makes recommendations that can help improve the job security of professional sports coaches in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for this study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted separately and individually with 10

human resources managers and 10 professional sports coaches to elicit perceptions and ideas with regard to the management of professional sports coaches. The interviewees had to have at least five years experience in their respective fields and were employed by sport organisations affiliated to the South African Sports Commission (SASC), a legislated national sport coordinating body.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, 450 questionnaires each were distributed to human resources managers and professional sports coaches at sport organisations affiliated to the SASC. The return rate of the questionnaires was 54% (242) for professional sports coaches and 51% (231) for human resources managers. Sport organisations that were associated with soccer, rugby, cricket, swimming, boxing, tennis, track and field athletics, basketball and netball were identified. These codes were identified on the basis of either having the highest spectatorship or participation in South Africa (SASC, 2002). The questionnaires solicited information about the management of professional sports coaches with particular reference to recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation, job security and labour relations; as well as demographic information. The different human resources dimensions in both questionnaires were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 expressing strongly agree, 3 indicating neither agree nor disagree and 5 expressing strongly disagree. The respondents were requested to select choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The data were analysed using the Social Sciences Software Package (SPSS – version 11). Frequencies, means and cross tabulations were used to report on the data.

Most sport organisations in South Africa do not have a position specifically for human resources managers. Therefore, in the context of the present study, the human resources manager at sport organisations is regarded as the individual responsible for human resources planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and benefits systems and performance appraisal. For purposes of this study the professional coach is regarded as the coach who possesses a body of knowledge in a particular sport code and derives his/her main income by imparting this knowledge.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factor analysis was performed on the data obtained from the responses of the professional sports coaches and human resources managers. Five factors, namely recruitment and selection; training and development; compensation; job security, and labour relations were extracted. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the job security of coaches' factor was 0.8154 for professional sports coaches and 0.8389 for human resources managers. According to Nunally (1978), the recommended coefficient alpha to conclude that the extracted factor is reliable is 0.7 and greater. Therefore the job security factor in both instances is deemed reliable.

The items in the job security of coaches' factor for both professional sports coaches and human resources managers (refer to Table 3 and Table 4) were analysed and several conclusions were drawn. Table 3 refers to the professional sports coaches' extent of agreement towards the items in the job security of professional sports coaches factor.

TABLE 3. PROFESSIONAL COACHES' EXTENT OF AGREEMENT TOWARDS THE ITEMS IN THE JOB SECURITY OF PROFESSIONAL COACHES FACTOR

ITEM	ITEM DESCRIPTION	STRONGLY AGREE		AGREE		NEUTRAL		DISAGREE		STRONGLY DISAGREE	
		%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1	There are measures in place to ascertain whether I am secure in my job	11	26	24	58	11	27	43	105	11	26
2	My views are taken into consideration by management in the selection of athletes	55	131	37	89	4	9	3	8	1	2
3	I am treated fairly at my organisation	46	110	44	106	5	13	4	10	1	3
4	I feel secure about my future at this organisation	12	30	31	75	15	27	32	76	10	23
5	I am satisfied with my remuneration package	9	21	28	69	14	33	42	101	7	18
6	The organisation promotes good relations at work	30	71	54	130	12	28	2	5	2	6
7	I am given professional counselling to improve my performance	10	24	25	60	12	29	37	90	16	39
8	There is high morale among coaches	20	49	37	90	35	84	7	16	1	3
9	I am treated with respect at work	38	92	55	134	5	11	1	3	1	2

Table 4 refers to the human resources managers' extent of agreement towards the items in the job security of professional sports coaches factor. Equally as many professional sports coaches responded that they felt secure about their future at their federation as those that felt insecure at their federation. This implies that there are as many professional coaches that enjoy job security as those who do not enjoy job security. Sigler (1999) comments that employees that are underpaid or unmotivated may leave the organisation. There may, however, be other reasons why coaches may not feel secure. The qualitative research supports the view that coaches feel insecure in their jobs. The criteria used to assess the job security of coaches were compensation, training and development and job satisfaction. Some of the comments of the professional sports coaches during the in-depth interviews included the following:

- ❖ "I don't feel too secure about my job"
- ❖ "No, we don't enjoy the benefits of pension funds, medical aid and unemployment insurance"

- ❖ “No. I have seen many coaches come and go. When my turn will come is anybody’s guess”
- ❖ “I don’t feel secure because of my age. The buzz word here is transformation and I am white”
- ❖ “There is no job security” and
- ❖ “No. Any injury could mean the end of my job here”

TABLE 4. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGERS’ EXTENT OF AGREEMENT TOWARDS THE ITEMS IN THE JOB SECURITY OF COACHES’ FACTOR

ITEM	ITEM DESCRIPTION	STRONGLY AGREE		AGREE		NEUTRAL		DISAGREE		STRONGLY DISAGREE	
		%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1	There are measures in place to ascertain whether professional sports coaches feel secure about their jobs	10	23	29	68	14	32	37	85	10	23
2	The organisation provides sufficient employee benefits to ensure job security for professional sports coaches	15	36	35	80	9	20	29	67	12	28
3	There are measures in place to ascertain whether professional sports coaches are satisfied with their jobs	11	25	26	61	10	24	39	89	14	31
4	Professional counselling is offered to professional sports coaches to improve their performance	9	21	26	59	13	29	35	82	17	40
5	The views of professional coaches are taken into consideration in the selection of athletes	51	117	39	90	4	10	4	8	2	5

The qualitative study conducted with the human resources managers supports the views of the professional sports coaches. During the in-depth interviews the following comments with regard to the job security of professional sports coaches emerged:

- ❖ “Coaches are not multi-skilled and this makes them feel insecure”
- ❖ “No, although the organisation offers a competitive salary and other benefits – the coach’s position is not guaranteed”
- ❖ “No, my experience leads me to believe that the average lifetime of a coach in any organisation is plus minus 3 to 5 years”
- ❖ “Our coaches have contracts. This, however, ensures his security only for the period of the contract”
- ❖ “No job security – the only way that a coach can ensure that his job is secure is to work hard at it in order to keep it”

Just over half of the professional coaches (54% = 131) disagreed that there are measures in place to ascertain whether coaches are secure in their jobs. Similarly, 47% (108) of the human resources managers disagreed that there were measures in place to ascertain whether coaches were secure in their jobs. There were thus similarities between the responses of professional sports coaches and human resources managers. This implies that at most of the sport organisations there were little to no measures in place to ascertain whether coaches were secure in their jobs. This is perhaps one of the reasons why coaches do not enjoy job security at most sport organisations. This supports the view of Singh (2001), that although professional coaches have the most prestige, they also have the least job security.

Most professional coaches (92% = 220) agreed that the views of coaches are taken into account by management when athletes are selected. This is in line with the responses of the human resources managers where 90% (207) agreed that the views of professional coaches are taken into account when athletes are selected. This implies that the views of the professional coaches are regarded as important and are taken into account at the majority of the sports federations when athletes are selected. This is supported by the qualitative study where human resources managers’ comments in the in-depth interviews included the following:

- ❖ “They are given the opportunity to voice their opinion as well as participate in the selection of teams”
- ❖ “Many of our coaches have a say in the running of the organisation as well as in talent identification and the selection process”
- ❖ “... they are called on when major decisions and team selection has to be done”
- ❖ “He does the team selection and we merely ratify it”

There were, however, conflicting views arising out of the in-depth interviews conducted with professional sports coaches with regard to the role of the professional coach in the selection of athletes. Some of the views expressed by the professional coaches included:

- ❖ “I have a lot of say in what I want for my sport”
- ❖ “We are never consulted on any matter”
- ❖ “I have little involvement with management”
- ❖ “We work together” and
- ❖ “We work together in establishing what we want”

Approximately half of the coaches (53% = 129) disagreed that they are given professional counselling to improve their performance. Similarly, approximately half of the human resources managers (52% = 122) disagreed that professional coaches at their organisations are given professional counselling with regard to their careers. Just under half of the organisations do implement professional development programmes. The lack of clear guidance with regard to their careers and future, may result in a feeling of inadequacy and insecurity amongst coaches.

Fifty one percent (114) of the professional coaches agreed that their performance was measured by their win-loss record, whereas 61% (139) of the human resources managers indicated that the win/loss record of the coach was used to measure the performance of the coach. This implies that at most sport organisations the win-loss record of the coach is used to appraise his/her performance. This results in professional sports coaches experiencing problems with job security since fluctuating results may impact negatively on their careers (Van Zijl, 1984).

With regard to compensation, a minority of 37% (90) of professional coaches indicated that they were satisfied with their compensation packages. However, in contrast, 51% (116) of the human resources managers agreed or strongly agreed that the organisation provides sufficient employee benefits such as travelling allowances, medical aid and pension fund to ensure job security for professional sports coaches while 41% (95) disagreed. Nine percent neither agreed nor disagreed. This implies that the views of human resources managers concerning the compensation packages that the sport organisation provides for the coaches are divided.

The fact that 50% of the human resources managers indicated that their organisations provide adequate compensation for the coaches suggests that equally as many human resources managers perceive that their organisations are not providing compensation packages to the satisfaction of their coaches. This may be one of the factors that contribute to the high job insecurity of coaches in sport organisations. The views of the professional sport coaches are supported by the qualitative study where professional coaches' comments in the in-depth interviews included the following:

- ❖ "The salary could be higher"
- ❖ "I know that coaches elsewhere are being paid better"
- ❖ "I am not satisfied, but I have got no option but to stick around"
- ❖ "Many of my friends who are coaching elsewhere in a similar position as mine are better off than I am – better salary, better working conditions etc."
- ❖ "Salaries are not fair"
- ❖ "Not the greatest salary"
- ❖ "My salary is not adequate"

The views of the human resources managers, on the other hand, differed from those of the professional sports coaches. The human resources managers perceived the compensation that professional sports coaches received as fair and adequate. Some of the comments of the human resources managers in the in depth interviews included the following:

- ❖ "Coaches are being paid fairly ..."
- ❖ "We offer a good salary package"
- ❖ "Rugby coaches are well paid"

- ❖ “I feel that they are being paid more than adequately”
- ❖ “We have had no complaints yet about salaries”

The fact that the human resources managers and professional sports coaches perceive the issue of compensation differently may contribute to the job insecurity of professional coaches.

A comparison of the perceptions of professional sports coaches and human resources managers revealed that whereas most professional sports coaches indicated that they were not secure in their job situation, the perceptions of the human resources managers in this regard were divided. One can conclude that at some sport organisations human resources managers are unaware whether their coaches feel secure in their jobs or not. More coaches (54%) than human resources managers (39%) indicated that there were no measures in place to ascertain whether professional sports coaches felt secure in their jobs.

One can thus conclude that either at some sport organisations there are measures in place to ascertain the job security of coaches, which the professional sports coaches are unaware of or that such mechanisms do not exist at certain sport organisations. Furthermore, while most professional coaches indicated that they were dissatisfied with their compensation packages, most human resources managers were of the opinion that adequate compensation packages were provided at their organisations. In order to enhance the job security of professional sports coaches, it is important for coaches and human resources managers to be on the same wavelength with regard to an important issue such as compensation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although job security seems to be obsolete at most organisations (Bagshaw, 1997) there still remains the opportunity to offer professional sports coaches an alternative in the form of opportunities to gain inner security to make themselves more employable. This can be done by assisting the coach to improve his/her skills. The advantages to the individual include a greater sense of fulfillment, increased job satisfaction and a higher degree of marketability (Ball, 1997). The problem with this approach, however, may be that the coach may focus on this at the expense of meeting the needs of the organisation.

Currently there are no trade unions specifically for professional sports coaches across sports federations in South Africa. A trade union may play an important role in ensuring the job security of coaches by providing a “mouthpiece” for any grievances that coaches may have. Unions can also negotiate for better contracts and better compensation, which may increase the job security of professional sports coaches and motivate them to remain longer in the organisation.

The contracts that professional sports coaches are expected to abide by needs close scrutiny. It should be equally binding on both the professional sports coach and the sport organisation. Contractual agreements that are equally binding may reduce uncertainty for both the sport organisation and the professional sports coach because they establish formalized links between the two. The links serve as protection against any change in the relationship between them for a specified time period.

Human resources managers should determine what benefits are being offered to their coaches and add benefits that could possibly contribute to the job security of coaches. The compensation package that the sport organisation offers to its coaches should include benefits

like medical aid, pension and traveling allowance – benefits that will make the professional sports coach feel more secure in his/her job situation. Furthermore, regular interaction between professional sports coaches and human resources managers is encouraged to discuss and attempt to solve problems associated with job security.

Human resources managers should also ensure that professional sports coaches are given autonomy in their job functions (for example, a coach is given the latitude to draw up his/her own programmes and coaching rules) and are given meaningful assignments, allowing them to be involved in the decision making for their area of expertise (for example in the selection of players). Sports coaches also need to understand that economic success for their organisation may mean greater job security and continued opportunity to develop (Choppin, 1997). Therefore professional coaches need to understand the role that they can play in ensuring the economic success of their sport organisations. Furthermore, professional sports coaches should be given professional counselling with regard to their careers. Professional counselling may help the coach cope with the pressures associated with the job, thus increasing their job security.

CONCLUSION

Research on job security in South Africa is fragmentary and anecdotal (Singh, 2001). Some of the findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of Singh (2001). Both studies conclude that most professional sports coaches are dismissed because of poor results and pressures from fans' expectations, the media and administrators. The present study, however, provides additional insights regarding the job security of coaches. Variables such as compensation, training and development, performance appraisal and job satisfaction play a critical role in determining the job security of professional sports coaches. Furthermore, the contracts that the sports coaches have to adhere to determine the extent to which they experience job security.

South Africa's re-entry into the international arena has resulted in greater interest in sport which in turn has created a greater need for qualified and competent coaches in all sport codes. Sport managers therefore need to look at strategies that will make coaching a more stable and secure job. Job security is critical for influencing job-related outcomes and is an important determinant of employee health, psychological wellbeing of employees, employee retention and employee turnover. Relevant information is needed to educate future sport coaches about what is expected of them and whether coaching is a stable and secure job. In order for sport organisations to increase the job security of their coaches, sport organisations need to ensure that coaches have: a clear sense of the objectives of the organisation; an awareness of their role in the organisation; the ability, skill and experience to manage their own input; clear guidelines; and a degree of authority, power and responsibility. This will prove beneficial to both coaches and the organisation, and will contribute not only to the job security of the coach but also to the job satisfaction of the coach.

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