

Learning example Royal Dutch Hockey Bond

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Introduction

MoU

Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) and its South African counterpart, the Dutch Royal Hockey Bond (KNHB) trained about 100 South African hockey coaches between 1999 and 2005. This project was launched by the KNHB with financial aid from the Dutch Ministry of VWS. The South African Hockey Association (SAHA) served as the local partner organisation. Under the three-year agreement with SAHA, hockey coaches were trained in South Africa to improve the quality of hockey in South Africa. A SAHA staff member was recruited to get the project off the ground. This process of trial and error in the end proved quite successful. The KNHB is evaluating the effort.

The KNHB objective

The objective for this three-year project was formulated as follows. Throughout this period, a trainers' course was organised each year and taught at progressively more advanced levels. The first year began with a broad base of coaches, and the third year concluded with coaches who had the potential to coach or train a national team. Another project aim was to create hockey-coaching opportunities for potential and current trainers and coaches from 'previously disadvantaged areas.'

Programme

As requested by SAHA, a course was taught in five districts and the same programme run in each district. In the past, the districts tended to offer their own version of the courses. The project proposal was therefore pyramid-based: progressively fewer courses (8-day courses in the 5 regions the 1st year, 8-day courses in 3 regions the 2nd year and one 8-day course in 1 region the 3rd year).

Results

Between 1999 and 2005 about 100 South African hockey coaches were trained.

Objective for local partner SAHA

In this three-year project, SAHA aimed to organise courses for trainers at progressively more advanced levels, starting with a broad base of coaches and concluding with coaches that have the potential to coach or train a national team. In light of the limited time that participants would be in contact with Dutch instructors (and the lack of a coaching structure within SAHA), the KNHB explained from the outset that 'creating' national coaches in 3 two-week sessions would be difficult, and that putting a greater emphasis on promoting recreational sports would be wiser.

SAHA, however, was far more interested in professional sports and cared less about training basic coaches. The project proposal was therefore pyramid-based, offering progressively fewer courses (five the first year, three the second year and one course

centre the third year), ultimately serving only the best of the group. Although the level did in fact advance each year, the number of course centres (5) remained unchanged to enable more coaches to participate.

Another project objective was to generate hockey coaching opportunities for potential and current trainers and coaches from the 'previously disadvantaged areas'. While this did happen, the final number of participants from these areas depended on the network of the local coordinator. In most centres the ratio of white - black / coloured was 50 - 50, although whites prevailed in Durban.

Organisational structure

As with every course, organisational structure (i.e. instructors, project coordinators and local coordinators) is essential for the course to succeed.

Instructors

The KNHB selected highly experienced instructors that had worked with a variety of groups (at both higher and lower levels), were aware of current trends regarding trainers and exhibited high levels of cultural sensitivity. On the specific aspect of cultural sensitivity: criticism cannot be expressed as directly as in Dutch coaching circles. This can create misunderstanding because KNHB trainers expect feedback. Teaching participants need to be discerning and express their opinions and beliefs while being sensitive to local customs and ways of expression.

The instructors went beyond their coaching duties, due mainly to their passion for hockey and training. In a hockey-friendly country such as South Africa, where the sport revolves around volunteer efforts, the efforts of the visiting instructors were greatly appreciated.

Project coordinators

The KNHB and SAHA project coordinators needed to be able to work together and with the organisations they represented. The KNHB had a good working relationship with the SAHA coordinator. However, the KNHB did not get the impression that SAHA directed or supported its coordinator. The advantage was that tasks could be accomplished without significant delays, but the disadvantage was that the course did not become embedded within the SAHA structure.

Local coordinator

Overall, the local coordinators were highly motivated and produced excellent work. When coordinators became lost in their work, quality was affected: far fewer arrangements were made. Current and potential participants were less well informed in these cases, and turnout was lower. Failing to enable or to encourage these local coordinators to organise a follow-up once the Dutch instructors had left was a missed opportunity. The KNHB project coordinator strongly recommended this, but SAHA did not follow up on it. In one province (East London and surrounding areas), the follow-up was good and consisted of monthly coach meetings at the Hockey Academy of the local coordinator. The Dutch instructor who taught here reports that 'his' participants achieved greater progress.

Participants

In the first year, the group of participants was very mixed and comprised teachers with little hockey experience and trainers without any background in method. It would have been better, if two different 'pre-courses' had been held before the MoU courses: one for teachers to improve their knowledge of hockey and another to inform trainers about methods and didactical aspects.

In the second and third years, the group level was far more homogeneous. This meant that fewer hockey trainers dropped out of the programme. The Dutch trainers proposed running the programme with two levels while the instructors were visiting: a lower level in the morning and a higher one in the afternoon (or vice versa). This proposal was rejected.

Only 25 participants attended the entire three-year course. The main reasons were inadequate communication (the course was announced late) and little or no follow-up after the course ended. In a future project, mentors should be assigned to guide individual participants.

At all centres participants were highly motivated throughout the three years of the course.

Program

- The plan was to run the same programme at each course site. This was successful, especially during the second and third years, when the programme content was reviewed in greater detail during the preparatory meetings. In addition to the general preparations, each instructor developed a specific subject in detail and showed this presentation to the other instructors. This gave each instructor 5 detailed, up-to-date presentations and easily completed five days of training.
- While some coaches had difficulty identifying with the ideas of other instructors, this format helped to reach the objective of providing identical programmes for every district.
- In Year 3 the smaller groups enabled greater consideration for and input in teaching. This time-consuming activity was not possible during the first two years due to the high level of enrolment.
- The teaching groups format (this was used during the 3rd year and should have been arranged more effectively during the 1st and 2nd years) helped to identify the stronger-skilled teachers from the weaker ones. In the absence of teaching groups, participants needed to simulate 'players' themselves. This was exhausting and in many cases, camouflaged teaching mistakes.
- The first-year programme (8 consecutive days of about 12 hours each) overburdened both the participants and the instructor. The second and third course years were planned much better: 2 x 4 days, interspersed by 2 to 3 day breaks.
- Some teaching assignments were too difficult. In two districts, the basics needed to be reconsidered.
- Courses that coincided with a tournament or advanced competitions were especially useful for analysing these events.
- At centres where such competitions were not played, KNHB video analysis material was used. Especially during the 2nd and 3rd years, this material reflected input from the instructors and was extremely useful.
- Other course materials, such as a manual, were unavailable. This was a major shortcoming. All material brought by the Dutch instructors or produced and pre-

mented by participants, however, was bound together and provided to participants.

Evaluation

- Evaluating participants was far too complicated during the first year. Instructors were expected to provide detailed evaluations of far more participants than could be realistically expected. During the second and third years, the evaluation form was simplified, became far easier to use and far more relevant.
- No proper agreements were reached regarding accreditation and certification. The first-year course was equivalent to Level 1 (KNHB: JHT course), the second year equivalent to Level 2 (KNHB: between JHT and A level) and the third year equivalent to Level 3 (KNHB: between levels A and B; in Durban and Cape Town: Level B). This did not necessarily mean that the participants reached the Dutch JHT/A/B levels. The course was much too short for that.
- Some centres issued certificates of participation, although other districts issued none.
- Instructors indicated clearly the level of each participant, but SAHA did not follow up by presenting each instructor with a certificate.

Partnership

In retrospect, organising the MoU SAHA-KNHB project funded by the Ministry of VWS was definitely worthwhile. Chairman of the project Charles Smith stated: 'with these courses we have created around 100 happy coaches who are able to empower the community.' The organisational challenges encountered both 'en route to' and 'along the way' were to be expected, although they were also rather frustrating. Even though the MoU is aimed at making the project advantageous to both organisations, the two partners are not on an equal footing. KNHB/VWS gave, and SAHA received; that was the general arrangement. Given these circumstances, the KNHB had difficulty accepting that:

- SAHA took 3 years to take on the project. During the previous years, the KNHB had consistently indicated that the MoU grant was available, but SAHA did not respond to this information. SAHA did not demonstrate the willingness to assume responsibility for such an initiative. Each month the KNHB liaison was referred to a new staff member.
- The SAHA association office offered very little support, did not issue certificates and provided no follow-up to the MoU courses. Presumably, this was because of the absence of an established coaching structure.
- Financial difficulties led SAHA to dismiss the project coordinator from his 'regular' high-performance office with the South African hockey association. In the process, SAHA abandoned the organisation of the 3rd year of the MoU project, without stipulating who would be responsible. The KNHB project coordinator then urged SAHA to have the person who had coordinated years 1 and 2 to continue with the project. While this intervention may not have been appreciated, it salvaged the project in the end.

Lessons learned

Recommendations

The KNHB urges its own association and any other organisations launching a new project to:

- Use project coordinators that have good working relationships with each other and with the organisation they represent.
- Invite instructors who are experienced with different groups and cultures and aware of recent trends in training and coaching.
- Work with qualified instructors. The KNHB has appointed people who are nationally active and teach KNHB courses as well. In addition, all had worked abroad before.
- Organise a preparatory session to explain South African culture and hockey practices in addition to the programme. The instructors greatly appreciated this.
- Appoint local coordinators who are well-organised and punctual, understand the current, multicultural society and have the time to do the job.
- Instruct the counterpart (i.e. SAHA) in advance about the importance of good support from the project coordinator and his activities, such as issuing course materials and certificates, handling PR, organising follow-up and anchoring the course in the established coaching structure. If no such structure exists, then the value (level/accreditation) of the courses is put at risk.
- Organise two different preparatory courses for:
 - teachers who need to learn about the sport or to refresh their knowledge
 - trainers who need to learn about methods or didactical approaches.
- Keep the groups manageable (no more than 20 participants).
- Organise teaching groups instead of assigning participants the role of players.
- Allow enough space to accommodate teaching practice (by the participants). That is what really matters!
- Use a standard programme at each course site.
- Have instructors prepare programme sections about a recent topic that will be useful to all instructors. These presentations need to be prepared in detail and to be reviewed at a preparatory meeting.
- Request a financial report each year from the recipient institution, and have any surplus amounts repaid immediately (once a year).

Suggestions

- Allow ample time to formulate the project.
- Involve several layers from the recipient organisation in formulating the project to ensure an adequate support base.
- Have the recipient party state its wishes clearly; do not attempt to do this on their behalf.
- Make clear from the start what is expected of both parties and what is not.
- Regarding training: determine the level of the target group, and differentiate as needed.
- Cultivate good relations with the local liaison/focal point.
- Dispatch people who know how to handle cultural differences.
- Work with people/organisations that have expertise in certain areas, such as fundraising.

- Demand support from the national association (before, during and after the end of the Dutch 'intervention').
- Select local project coordinators who know 'the market' well (not just the 'white' or the 'black' market!).
- Establish a good training structure prior to inserting trainers from abroad.
- Dispatch your best instructors (experienced in the subject and with international/intercultural experience).
- Arrange to receive clear feedback (and check to see how things are proceeding as well).
- Ask for an annual financial report.

Do's and don'ts

Capacity building

Do's

- Good structure and organisation within the local national association.
- Capable and reliable project coordinators (who have time).
- A clear distribution of responsibilities.
- Support from the board for the project coordinators.
- Careful communication between all organisations involved, both nationally and locally.
- Follow up (after the Dutch instructors have left).

Don'ts

- Confusion about the distribution of responsibilities on the project. This delayed launching the project.
- Insufficient support from the association and the board to:
 - project coordinators
 - trained coaches (no supporting course materials, certificates or follow-up after the KNHB instructors had left)
- Inadequate communication from the local association to the regions.

Monitoring and evaluation

Direct link

The project underwent annual evaluations by the SAHA project coordinator, the KNHB project coordinator, the instructors and the participants. This train-the-trainer project was never linked directly with capacity building or with building a sports infrastructure. The indirect link (better-educated trainers and consequently a better local infrastructure) was quantifiable, based on the level the participants attained. In the upcoming project, a direct link is both identifiable and quantifiable between the project and the local sports infrastructure (how many courses take place and where; how many participants attain A/B levels and where). In the first year the evaluation forms were too complex and too comprehensive for instructors and could be interpreted in various ways (the project in one region was described in entirely different terms from an equivalent project in a different region).

Do's

- Simple and clear evaluation forms (to include participants in the evaluation process)

- Good consultation between the Dutch instructor and the local project coordinator
- Advice regarding follow-up (period that the Dutch instructor is absent).

Don'ts

- Overly complex evaluation/assessment forms
- Evaluation criteria that can be interpreted in various ways
- No consultation between the Dutch instructor and the local project coordinator.