CONSTRUCTION OF SPORTS BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE CULTIVATION INDICATORS IN ASIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research was on the professional competence indicators of Asian sports business professionals. The aim of the research was to establish how scholars planned classes and programmes at the sports business related departments at colleges in Taiwan, Japan, Korea and China by making use of a questionnaire. By analysing selected literature, the first draft of a questionnaire was generated. By combining inputs from the scholars and experts from each country, the questionnaire was finalised. This was followed by a survey involving senior professors from China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. A total of 40 academics, 10 from each country, served as the research sample The analysis revealed the following: General abilities, such as working attitude, communication, and creativity, were recognised by academia as the important abilities for sports business professionals; Professional skills and professional knowledge were valued as less important than the general abilities; There was no difference in sports business professional competence indicators among the main Asian countries.

Keywords: Sports business; Sport management; Professional competence.

INTRODUCTION

According to the report of *Agence France-Presse* at the end of 2009, Asia has had a great influence on the economy and politics worldwide in the past decade. The spotlight of the world has gradually shifted to the East and the 21st Century has become the 'era of Asia'. At the beginning of 2010, *Chosun Ilbo*, the largest newspaper in Korea, published a series of special reports, named 'Asian Era', which revealed different perspectives of the arrival of the Asian era. One of the reports mentioned that the total amount of the foreign exchange reserves held by the first seven Asian countries had been more than the total amount held by all other 149 countries in the world. Asia was like a black hole attracting capital for investments from all over the world. Along with the arrival of the Asian era, the prosperity of sports business in Asia has turned out to be much more profitable.

At the end of 2007, *Sport Business*, a British magazine, published a report entitled "Asia: Opportunities in the business of sport", pointing out the fast growth of the sports business in Asia. The report stated that Asia would be at the centre of the development of world politics, economy, culture, and entertainment. As well as the expansion of China's market and economy, the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the Kaohsiung 2009 World Games, the Taipei

2009 Summer Deaflympics, the Guangzhou 2010 Asia Games and the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai brought Asia to be under the spotlight as the centre of the world's economy. In 2009, the Kaohsiung 2009 World Games brought Kaohsiung US$9.7 million as the gross profit and US$5 million (Sun, 2010) as the added value. All these facts indicate that sport is a great attraction and provides a huge market. The Chinese scholar Siao-Ming Bao (2000) believes that sport is the new economic growth point and could be a key element dominating the economic performance of each country in the future.

Following the fast growth of the sports business worldwide, many colleges established sports business and sport management related programmes and departments. They arranged classes and programmes focussed mainly on the standards of cultivating sport management professionals, as generated by the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) in 1989. However, the sports business has changed substantially during the past decades and these standards of cultivating sport management professionals no longer fulfilled practical needs (Sports Business Journal, 2009). Therefore, the Commission of Sport Management Accreditation (COSMA) replaced the previous standards to provide better professional competence indicators, thereby satisfying the most recent requirements of the sports business.

Experts and scholars have different opinions about the training of sports business professionals. Although Smolianov and Shilbury (1996) and Hsu (2002) analysed the needs of professional competence based on the sports marketing requirements, a number of researchers analysed the needs based on the sports management professional abilities (Quian & Parks, 1986; Jamieson, 1987; Lambrecht, 1987; Farmer, 1988; DeSensi *et al*., 1990; Huang, 1992; Chen, 1993; Cheng, 1993; Lin & Liu, 1999; Lu & Lu, 2002). In spite of the standards set for sports business related programme development worldwide by COSMA, it was still based on sports management professional abilities.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The current research focused on the establishment of the competence cultivation indicators for sports business management professionals within the programmes of Asian higher education institutions. The scope of the current research included four selected Asian countries, namely China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. The concepts of professional competence cultivation and 'professional competence cultivation indicators' are viewed within an educational perspective as pursued in higher education institutions. In order to facilitate the integration of the information collected from each country (China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan), scholars, who are currently involved with advanced development programmes in sports business, were invited to join the research team. With this collaboration, misunderstandings that may arise among the different cultures could be avoided.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Four Asian countries, namely China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, were selected for this study. A total of 11 experts, 2-3 experts from each selected country, were involved in the

preliminary interviews to help finalise the content of the questionnaire. The 11 experts were invited by the senior professors in sport business and sport management and related fields in each country.

The senior professor in each selected country invited the chairmen and the class/programme planners of 10 well-known sports business and sport management related departments in the colleges from their own country to be part of the sample for the survey; thus, totalling 40 academics across the 4 countries. After analysing the collected questionnaires, the research team invited 7 experts and scholars from academia, government and industry to form a focus group (Table 1) to have a meeting to process their view.

TABLE 1: EXPERTS IN FOCUS GROUP

Code	Professional status	Category
A1	CEO of a fitness centre	Industry
A2	General Manager of a marketing company	Industry
A3	Senior Manager of a marketing company	Industry
A4	General Manager of an international sports utility company	Industry
B1	Sub-Head of a physical education department in a city	Government
C1	Professor in sports business related fields	Academia
C2	Chairman of a sports business related institute	Academia

Research methods

At the beginning of this study the research team studied selected documentation and related literature to generate the first draft of the questionnaire. The draft of the questionnaire was modified and quantified according to the comments and the suggestions from the expert interviewees of each selected country. Confirmation of the modified questionnaire was based on the responses from the interviewees to establish the content validity and rater reliability. The final questionnaire served to conduct the survey among the selected sample. Finally, the focus group was involved by providing suggestions and interpretations of the research results.

Measurement tools

Interviews

In order to establish the validity and reliability of the questionnaire interviews were conducted. After the first draft of the questionnaire was generated from the literature, the associate host of this research in each country considered the situation on an academic and industrial level to select the experts and senior scholars in the country to be the interviewees. The draft of the questionnaire was modified and quantified according to the comments and the suggestions from the interviewees.

Questionnaire

Integrating the references related to the professional competence indicators (Hsu, 2002; Williams, 2003; Kuo, 2004; Lin, 2010; Zhou & Hu, 2010) and reviewing the suggestions and the ideas from the experts at 'Asia Taipei International Sport Industry Forum 2009' and adding a 'creativity' dimension, 6 dimensions were constructed for a closed-ended styled questionnaire. The 6 dimensions were: professional knowledge, professional skills, communication, administration, work-related attitude and creativity. These 6 dimensions formed the framework of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 44 questions categorised and spread across the 6 dimensions. A 5-point Lickert scale was used for the responses to the questions. Based on their personal experience and recognition, the participants of the survey responded to the statements by selecting 1 of the 5 options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each.

Research procedures

The available literature on sports business professional competence cultivation indicators was located and analysed. After a thorough analysis and collation of the information available, it was possible to generate the first draft of the questionnaire. This draft was translated into an English version, and it was sent to the associate hosts of each selected country. The latter were responsible to translate this version into Japanese, Korean and simplified Chinese, including the Traditional Chinese which had to accommodate four different language dialects. The experts were interviewed about the draft questionnaire and suggestions were incorporated when modifying the questionnaire and finalising the quantification. This modified version went back to the interviewees to confirm its content validity and followed by establishing the rater reliability.

The 10 experts from well-known sports business and sport management related departments in the colleges in each country were selected by the associate host of that country. Invitations letters and the questionnaires were sent via e-mail to the chairmen and the class/programme planners of the selected departments in the colleges in each country. The completed questionnaires were returned within a 10-day period.

Statistical analysis of data

Using the literature analysis method, researchers studied the current sports industry development situation and the sports business related classes/programmes in colleges in the main Asian countries (China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan). Through the establishment of Endnote Library researchers collected the most complete documents and lectures about sports business for the basis of our analysis. Researchers later interviewed the experts to gather their suggestions and opinions. By using Nvivo8, qualitative research software, the data collected in both oral and written formats were analysed and the related matrix was constructed. From the matrix researchers built up the content validity of the Asian Sports Business Professional Competence Indicators. The final official version of *The questionnaire of Asian Sports Business Professional Competence Indicators* was generated through the integration of the documents, the review of the experts' suggestions and the revision of the draft.

Hair *et al*. (1998) stated that the range of Cronbach's Alpha value should be between 0 and 1.

In general studies, *α-values* are supposed to be more than 0.7. The minimum eligible limit would be 0.6. In this research, through Cronbach's Alpha value test, it was found that the reliability of each dimension was between 0.65 and 0.86 and that the reliability of the main scale was 0.92. All these coefficients were more than 0.6, which means they were above the suggested eligible limit.

Statistics used for calculating the results of the questionnaire and for comparing the results of the countries were as follows. The mean and standard deviation (SD) were computed to rank the main indicator dimensions and the features of Asian sports business professional competence cultivation indicators. Pearson's correlation was applied to calculate the related analysis of professional competence dimensions. By using the one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) a comparison was made to compare the Asian sports business professional competence cultivation indicators among the selected countries.

RESULTS

This research surveyed the scholars planning classes and programmes at sports business related departments at colleges in China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. From the 10 departments in each country, a total of 40 completed questionnaires were collected, processed and analysed. The results are to follow.

Ranking of the main indicator dimensions

As seen in Table 2, the scholars in the main Asian countries (China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan) ranked the main indicator dimensions of sports business professional competence (from the most to the least important) as working attitude, communication ability, creativity, administration ability, professional knowledge and professional skills. The mean scores ranged from 3.69 to 4.44 indicating that there was agreement that all dimensions have good relevance. The standard deviations ranging from 0.45 to 0.52 were fairly similar for each dimension.

TABLE 2: **RANKS OF MAIN INDICATOR DIMENSIONS OF ASIAN SBPC CULTIVATION**

Dimensions	Rank	Mean	SD
Working attitude	1	4.44	0.45
Communication	2	4.32	0.51
Creativity	3	4.30	0.45
Administration	4	4.19	0.49
Professional knowledge	5	4.02	0.52
Professional skills	6	3.69	0.52

SD= Standard Deviation

Related analysis of professional competence dimensions

Concerning the 6 dimensions of Asian sports business professional competence indicators,

each pair of dimensions had a coefficient between 0.25 and 0.80 (Table 3). Most of them were moderately correlated, yet all but 1 correlation was significant ($p<0.05$). It shows that the variances had no significant co-linearity or unrelated variables. Further analysis could be processed.

***TABLE 3*: PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION COEFFICIENT ANALYSIS OF ASIAN SBPC INDICATOR DIMENSIONS**

Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Professional knowledge	—					
2. Professional skills	0.68*	—				
3. Communication	0.70*	0.45*	—			
4. Administration	0.71*	0.44*	0.80*	—		
5. Working attitude	0.62*	0.48*	0.57*	0.60*	—	
6. Creativity	0.66*	0.25	0.62*	0.67*	0.50*	—
Mean	4.02	3.69	4.32	4.19	4.44	4.30
Standard Deviation	0.52	0.52	0.51	0.49	0.45	0.45

* $p<0.05$

Comparison of Asian SBPC Cultivation Indicators

By means of a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), differences in the importance of the required sports business professional competence indicators recognised by the managers at higher educational institutions in the four Asian countries were investigated.

***TABLE 4*: MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF ASIAN SPORTS BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL ABILITIES**

Source of variation	df	SSCP						Λ
Interclass	3	0.494	0.289	0.745	0.640	0.268	0.490	0.667
		0.289	0.430	0.327	0.184	0.115	0.115	n.s.
		0.745	0.327	1.176	1.089	0.377	0.837	
		0.640	0.184	1.089	1.223	0.129	0.904	
		0.268	0.115	0.377	0.129	0.394	0.154	
		0.490	0.115	0.837	0.904	0.154	0.681	
Intraclass	36	10.152	6.953	6.554	6.391	5.467	5.524	
		6.953	10.110	4.293	4.143	4.285	2.113	
		6.554	4.293	9.048	6.638	4.754	4.685	
		6.391	4.143	6.638	8.008	5.025	4.796	
		5.467	4.285	4.754	5.025	7.577	3.778	
		5.524	2.113	4.685	4.796	3.778	7.167	

df= Degrees of freedom;   n.s.= No significance $p>0.05$;   SSCP= Sports business professional competence

The results from the homogeneity test for the MANOVA covariance matrix were as follows. Transferring Box's M=107.679 to be F-ratio, 1.171 was found. The p-value from the significance test was 0.170 which is greater than 0.05 and thus does not reach the level of significance. The null hypothesis for the data structure did not violate the assumption of the variance/covariance matrix in homogeneity, and the correctness of the analysis was ensured. From Table 4 Wilks Λ=0.667 (p=0.748>0.05) has not reached the level of significance (0.05). The mean vector of each country (China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan) has no significant difference. It can therefore be concluded that the main Asian countries have no significant difference in the 6 dimensions of sports business professional competence.

Rankings of features of dimension of Asian SBPC cultivation indicators

Six dimensions were constructed for the SBPC and, based on the integration of the lectures and all relevant documentation; it was possible to generate the features for each dimension. The associate hosts in each country helped to verify the content of the dimensions. The rankings of the features within each dimension were as follows.

Professional knowledge

Among the features of the *professional knowledge* dimension, 'sport marketing knowledge' (M=4.22, SD=0.95) was ranked as the most important feature, while 'sport management knowledge' (M=4.15, SD=0.92) and 'understanding of the benefits of every sport' (M=4.15, SD=0.66) awere ranked second and third.

TABLE 5: **RANK OF FEATURES OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE DIMENSION**

Features	Rank	Mean	SD
Sport marketing knowledge	1	4.22	0.95
Sport management knowledge	2	4.15	0.92
Understanding of benefits of every sport *	3	4.15	0.66
Ability to analyse the fashion	4	4.03	0.73
Ability to appreciate sports **	5	4.00	0.78
Knowledge of regulations related to sports business	6	4.00	0.75
Knowledge of sports business financial management	7	3.83	0.71
Recognition of a crisis and ability to resolve problems	8	3.75	0.81

SD= Standard Deviation   * Includes watching and participating in sports
                              ** Understanding uniqueness of each sports related product

Professional skills

Among the features of the Professional Skills dimension, 'ability to analyse sports business' (M=4.37, SD=0.81) was ranked as the most important feature. 'Ability to set up the contracts' (M=3.90, SD=0.87) and 'ability to use computers' (M=3.90, SD=0.71) were ranked at second and third. Interestingly, the lowest ranked item was 'experience as an athlete'.

TABLE 6: **RANK OF FEATURES OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DIMENSION**

Features	Rank	Mean	SD
Ability to analyse sports business	1	4.37	0.81
Ability to set up contracts	2	3.90	0.87
Ability to use computers	3	3.90	0.71
Practical skills at operating sports business	4	3.70	1.09
Experience at sports	5	3.43	0.87
Ability to coach sports	6	3.40	0.87
Experience as an athlete	7	3.10	0.81

SD= Standard Deviation

Communication

Among the features of the Communication dimension, 'good relationship with the customers' (M=4.45, SD=0.60) was ranked as the most important feature. 'Ability to handle customer complaints' (M=4.38, SD=0.63) and 'ability to coordinate' (M=4.35, SD=0.66) were ranked second and third. Within this dimension of administration, 'language ability' was ranked last, yet the means were not far apart from one another and still it has a noteworthy mean.

TABLE 7: **RANK OF FEATURES OF COMMUNICATION DIMENSION**

Feature	Rank	Mean	SD
Good relationship with the customers	1	4.45	0.60
Ability to handle customer complaints	2	4.38	0.63
Ability to coordinate	3	4.35	0.66
Teamwork	4	4.25	0.74
Language ability	5	4.17	0.71

SD= Standard Deviation

Administration

Among the features of the Administration dimension, 'ability to make the correct decision' (M=4.45, SD=0.68)was ranked as the most important feature. 'Ability to handle the emergent issues' (M=4.45, SD=0.71) and 'ability at planning and execution' (M=4.33, SD=0.73) were ranked second and third. The items 'Ability to set up the budgets' and "Ability to analyse financial reports" both had low rankings and both had to do with finances. The lowest ranked "Ability at exploring human resources" was a challenging feature as it would require a sensitivity regarding human relations and handling conflict situations.

TABLE 8: **RANK OF FEATURES OF ADMINISTRATION DIMENSION**

Feature	Rank	Mean	SD
Ability to make correct decisions	1	4.45	0.68
Ability to handle emergent issues	2	4.45	0.71
Ability at planning and execution	3	4.33	0.73
Ability to promote products or services	4	4.28	0.64
Leadership	5	4.23	0.62
Ability to analyse customers' requirements	6	4.22	0.70
Ability to set up the budgets	7	4.00	0.64
Ability to analyse financial reports	8	3.90	0.71
Ability at exploring human resources	9	3.90	0.74

SD= Standard Deviation

Working attitude

Among the features of the Working Attitude dimension, 'being responsible' (M=4.70, SD=0.56) was ranked as the most important feature. 'Passion at work' (M=4.65, SD=0.53) and 'personalities and morals' (M=4.63, SD=0.59) were ranked second and third. Each feature had a mean above 4.0 which is high. In spite of the rankings, this could suggest that each feature was nearly equally important.

TABLE 9: **RANK OF FEATURES OF WORKING ATTITUDE DIMENSION**

Feature	Rank	Mean	SD
Being responsible	1	4.70	0.56
Passion for work	2	4.65	0.53
Personalities and morals	3	4.63	0.59
Complete work thoroughly	4	4.38	0.67
Good concepts of service	5	4.38	0.67
Passion for sports	6	4.35	0.77
Willingness to serve	7	4.30	0.65
Positive behaviours during learning	8	4.27	0.68
Time management	9	4.27	0.68

SD= Standard Deviation

Creativity

Among the features of the Creativity dimension, 'willingness to take the challenge of new things' (M=4.55, SD=0.55) was ranked as the most important feature. 'Creativity' (M=4.53, SD=0.68) and 'good observation' (M=4.37, SD=0.67) were ranked second and third. Once again each feature had a mean above 4.0 and the lowest and the highest mean only differed by 0.50. This could suggest that each feature was of equal importance.

TABLE 10:   **RANK OF FEATURES OF CREATIVITY DIMENSION**

Feature	Rank	Mean	SD
Willingness to take challenge of new things	1	4.55	0.55
Creativity	2	4.53	0.68
Good observation	3	4.37	0.67
Clear thinking	4	4.23	0.70
Curiosity	5	4.10	0.63
Ability at reasoning and logic	6	4.05	0.55

SD= Standard Deviation

DISCUSSION

In Asian Higher Education Perspective, 'Working Attitude', 'Communication' and 'Creativity' are considered as the most important abilities at sports business professional competence cultivation indicators. When comparing the ranking of professional competence indicators in each country with the ranking of professional competence indicators in the whole of Asia, it is clear that the first three items had a minor difference (Table 11).

TABLE 11:   **RANKINGS OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE INDICATORS FOR ASIA AND ITS FOUR COUNTRIES**

Dimension	Asia Rank (mean)	China Rank (mean)	Japan Rank (mean)	Korea Rank (mean)	Taiwan Rank (mean)
Working attitude	1 (4.33)	3 (4.43)	1 (4.41)	1 (4.31)	1 (4.59)
Communication	2 (4.33)	1 (4.54)	3 (4.32)	3 (4.06)	2 (4.36)
Creativity	3 (4.33)	2 (4.47)	2 (4.37)	2 (4.12)	3 (4.27)
Administration	4 (4.33)	4 (4.43)	4 (4.27)	4 (3.97)	4 (4.11)
Professional knowl.	5 (4.33)	5 (4.16)	5 (3.98)	5 (3.86)	5 (4.06)
Professional skills	6 (4.33)	6 (3.81)	6 (3.53)	6 (3.67)	6 (3.72)

Knowl.= Knowledge

The main countries in Asia generally value 'working attitude' as a very important feature. The professionals in Japan, Korea and Taiwan, all ranked 'working attitude' highly, whereas the professionals in China ranked 'communication ability' higher than 'working attitude'; this is probably because sports business development in China is still in the early stages of development. When comparing this finding with those from earlier research carried out on sports business, significant differences were found. In order to have a benchmark for comparing the recent results with those from earlier research, the abilities and the features were categorised for the comparisons. In the study by Quilan and Park (1986), sports promotion, sports marketing and sport management were found to be the three categories with the highest relevancy to sport management. However, any further comparison with the research of Quilan and Park (1986) was not possible because only eight abilities within six categories of sport management related jobs were included and there was no detailed description of the professional abilities.

Jamieson (1987) stated that the five most important professional abilities for the middle-level sports business staff were in the fields of administration ability, community ability and professional skills. Farmer (1988) studied the members of the sport management associations in Australia and found the five abilities relating to administration ability were ranked in the top 10 of the sport management professional abilities. DeSensi *et al.* (1990) studied 14 categories of managers. For the managers at fitness centres, communication ability and administration ability were the most important. For the managers in professional sports administration, excluding communication ability and administration ability, the professional skills, such as computer skills and sports skills, were also important. Smolianov and Shilbury (1996) studied sports marketing related professional abilities for sports marketing staff and found seven administration related abilities were ranked within the top 10 of the professional abilities. Two abilities relating to professional skills and two relating to communication were also ranked within the top 10 important abilities. The studies considered above were all conducted at least 10 years prior to the current study that produced different results. Smolianov and Shilbury (1996) pointed out the differences between their research and previous research, as caused by the gap in time; this was because their study had significant differences to Bretting's study of 1983. This suggests that similar research should be conducted at least once within 5 to 10 years.

Comparing the results of this research to those of earlier studies, it was found that communication ability is also ranked highly but administration ability has been replaced by working attitude and creativity, and traditional knowledge has been replaced by practical working ability. These facts match the tendency of the developments in the modern sports industry and the current situations. These facts are in agreement with H. Pinnington's extended statement of KSAs theory (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities), in which professional abilities, such as skills, attitudes and personal characteristics, should also be valued highly, as well as the factors concerning knowledge (Jorgen & Ashly, 2009). The attitude and personalities related to working attitude are covered in the current research as well.

When comparing the results from this study to the current situation in academia and industry, and after integrating and analysing the questionnaires, a forum was set up to seek the opinions and suggestions from the industry. Experts from industry reviewed the results of our study and then shared their comments. They believed that working attitude was ranked first of

the six dimensions because the requirements of professional abilities have changed due to the fast growth of the industry. Regarding communication ability, administration ability and working attitude, the experts suggested that the schools should have students learning from practical experience and participation, instead of through theoretical lectures.

Below are some comments from the interviewees. The number in brackets, which follow the section, is the code of experts listed in Table 1.

> *Working Attitude is the fundamental of each job position, no matter if the job is related to sports business.* (B1)

> *In the dimensions of communication, administration, and attitude, every kind of feature should be connected to the practical works. The educators should cultivate the students from the basic part of the real works, not from the lectures. In this way, the teachers and educators can find the potential talented students for sports business.* (A3)

> *Different fields have different requirements at a human resource level. Academia focuses on the people with professional knowledge. Industry focuses on the people with creativity. We should educate the students with the professional knowledge from the fundamental part, and have their knowledge combined with the learning from the real works. In this way, the students can have a better understanding of the learning, and will apply it to the works in a better manner.* (B1)

Creativity as a professional ability is seldom mentioned in research. Only Lin and Liu (1999) and Hsu (2002) mentioned professional abilities related to creativity and a few creative concepts. They also thought the creativity mentioned should provide effective help in real business.

> *To industry, whether the creativity from an individual could bring the business a new chance, a new idea, and a new scope is more important.* (B1)

Higher education should not only concentrate on teaching students the professional skills and the professional knowledge to enable them to obtain the professional certificates. The educators should also provide more training on practical experience and pay attention to cultivating the so-called soft powers, such as working attitude, communication and creativity.

SBPC cultivation indicators as viewed by higher education institutions in the main Asian countries

A further comparison was made on how people in the various higher education institutions in the selected Asian countries perceive sports business professional competence cultivation. No significant differences were found. Beside the fact that the potential errors of the research were limited to the minimum, the questionnaire was also reviewed by other affiliated senior professors in each country. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the way in which academics from the four Asian countries consider sports business professional competence cultivation. This point could form the grounding base for similar large-scale research in the future.

Content analysis of Asian SBPC cultivation indicators

'Sports marketing related knowledge' is viewed as an important part of the knowledge dimension. At the meeting of the focus group the experts commented as follows:

> *In the sports marketing related fields, the largest problem is that we seldom get the chance to find a professional with the abilities at both sports and marketing. Those who have a passion for sports but have no financial management knowledge would lack the knowledge to operate the business. Those who have the sports related knowledge but have no passion would not last long in this field and might not have an outstanding performance at work.* (A4)

When discussing the 'knowledge of the sports business related regulations', some scholars thought that the involved regulations should not only cover the ones related to the sports business. This is because many regulations could be applied to several kinds of business and it should therefore view this ability in a general context. This would be an interesting enquiry topic for further study.

> *In the dimension of 'professional knowledge' the knowledge of regulations is very important. For example, 'Personal Information Protection Regulation' covers a lot of works and activities, such as the announcement of the sweepstake winner's name, and the publication of the brochures with individual information. To cover the sports business from all the directions we should not only look at the sports business related regulations but also at all the business related regulations.* (A3)

The dimension of professional skills is ranked in the last place when it comes to Asian sports business professional competence indicators. However, within this dimension, 'ability to analyse sports business' has scored far higher than other features. Obviously, this ability is valued as a very important one by the class/programme planners in colleges. 'Experience as an athlete' is ranked as the lowest within this dimension. The rankings of 'experience of sports' and 'ability to coach sports' are both higher than 'experience as an athlete', which means 'experience as an athlete' is not that important in the sports business. Whoever has experience of sports and is able to coach sports seems to be good enough.

When analysing communication ability, the professionals from within academia valued the abilities to interact with the customers and to handle their complaints higher than the abilities to coordinate and to cooperate with the team. Many earlier studies revealed the importance of the ability to communicate with the customers and to handle their complaints. Jamieson (1987) stressed the importance of communication with customers. Lambrecht (1987) also mentioned the importance of communicating with customers and handling their complaints. Farmer (1988) and DeSensi *et al*. (1990) all referred to the importance of communication. Regarding the ability to communicate, the comments from the scholars and the experts were expressed as follows:

> *For the concern of the human resource requirement in business management related departments, communication ability and creativity are more helpful at accomplishing works, although professional skills and professional knowledge are also important.* (B1)

> *How people perceive sports business professional competence cultivation*

indicator in each country is very similar. When interviewing the professionals in sports business from each country, we found the results were pretty much the same. It shows that the goal of college education is not only to enable the students to get the professional certificates, but also to enable the students to have soft powers, such as a good working attitude, communication ability, and creativity. (C2)

Concerning the dimensions of 'administration ability' and 'ability to make the correct decision', they were valued as the most important abilities. Most experts and scholars thought that the ability to make decisions involved the ability to integrate information, analyse the conditions and select the optimal options. It is thus viewed as the integration of many kinds of abilities. In any further research, the detailed parts should be separated from this topic and investigated more thoroughly.

As to the ability to make the decisions, the ability to make the correct decisions should not be viewed as a single feature because the correctness of a decision is the result of a series of the correct works. Therefore, I would take the ability to make the decisions out from the dimension. I think making a right decision is a consequence ... (A2)

The professionals did not consider it right that the 'ability to analyse financial reports' ranked in the second to last place. They thought financial report analysis was very important in a real business setting. However, the importance of this ability depends on the job position.

... later on, I care more about the financial reports because many businesses are bankrupted for financial issues. I feel financial ability is very important. (A1)

The ranking of professional competence could be matched to the requirements of the job positions. For the middle and high-level professionals, professional skills may be not that important. However, for the first-tiered customer support staff at fitness centres, professional skills may be very important... (A3)

The gap in the opinions on financial report analysis could be caused by the difference in perceptions of roles, depending on the interviewees. Some of the interviewees were lower-level staff, whereas some were middle-level managers. In a more precise investigation in the future, the questionnaire needs to be revised by providing clearer definitions of the components.

In the dimension of 'working attitude', academia valued the cultivation of taking responsibilities and character education highly, and chose 'passion at work' as the key element in human resource cultivation. In the results of the study, 'passion at sports' was ranked lower than 'passion at work'. In the dimension of 'professional skills', 'experience of sports' and 'experience as an athlete' were ranked low. This complements the results of the observation in the sports business referred to before.

In particular, the current sports business professionals might not have a passion for sports. However, the passion for work and being responsible would definitely impact the ways that the managers look at the staff. (B1)

In the dimension of 'creativity', 'willingness to take the challenge of new things' is always

encouraged, especially in academia. However, the feature of 'creativity' and the dimension of 'creativity' share the same word. This might have confused the participants. This needs to be rectified by revising the feature of 'creativity' as 'creativity in multiple fields' for any future research. In this dimension, 'curiosity' and 'ability at reasoning and logic' are ranked in the last two places. The professionals from industry did not agree with this result.

> *'Creativity' and 'ability at reasoning and logic' are important. This kind of logic and reasoning ability is not just an ability for systematic logic but also 'the ability to learn, understand and use the new skills and the concepts'. The ability indicator should present this concept further, so that it could demonstrate the potential of the personal creativity more precisely.* (A3)

> *As I said before about the ability of logic and reasoning, academic experts had different points of view from us in industry. From my personal experience, when interviewing a new job candidate I do not really mean to know what the candidate wants for his or her salary and benefits but how he or she responds to my questions. So, in the interviews, I try to ask the questions from different directions, such as about professional abilities, financial concepts, or sociological points. I do not mean to get the correct answers but to let the candidate think and realise. So, I think the professionals in academia should understand what we think in industry about logic and reasoning ability. The ability of logic and reasoning was ranked in last place, which is totally out of my expectation. I think the ability of logic and reasoning is very important.* (A2)

CONCLUSIONS

Within the sports business professional cultivation indicators, 'working attitude', 'communication', and 'creativity' are generally valued highly within the academia circle. Within the six dimensions of sports business professional abilities, 'working attitude' is valued as the most important one. In this dimension, 'being responsible', 'passion at work', and 'character education' are most important features. 'Communication ability' centres on the communication with customers. In the dimension of 'creativity', besides encouraging the willingness to take challenge, the opportunity to practise it within a work situation should be given more attention.

The importance of professional skills and professional knowledge was of less importance than the other general abilities. Professional skills and professional knowledge were ranked low, which could mean that the professionals in industry do not consider having the professional abilities or talents. Compared with the other general abilities, sports ability was also ranked low.

There were no significant differences in how the academia in the four Asian countries viewed the sports business professional competence indicators which was based on comparisons of the averages of the importance of the indicators. This fact implies that most professionals in each country supported the sports business professional competence indicators identified in this research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, further research is needed to revise the questionnaire and the process should be based on involving a larger sample in Asia. The sample of this research only covered four countries and 40 participants. The validation of the results could be low. A larger sample of countries and participants could be a better resource for reference and provide acceptable validation.

A confirmatory analysis of the relevance of professional competence indicator titles and the content and meanings of the dimensions confirm their relevance. For example, in this research, although the dimension of professional skills included sports-oriented skills, such as 'practical skills at operating sports business', 'ability to coach at sports', 'experience at sports' and 'experience as an athlete', other more general abilities, such as the ability to analyse sports business, the ability to set up the contracts and the ability to use computers, could also be included. Furthermore, future research could study the relationship between the gross output value of each country's sports businesses and their ranking based on the contents of the professional competence indicators.

This research was planned to be completed within a year. Due to limited time, the data and information collected about the gross output value for each country could not be analysed more thoroughly, which would have assisted with the interpretation of the results. Therefore, in a further study based on the situation of the sports industry in each country, the sports industry output value can be calculated and validated. Additionally, through the comparison and analysis of the professional competence indicators of each country's sports industry's output value, the relationship between the sports business output value and professional competence indicators could be revealed. This could be a new avenue to be explored in.

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(Subject Editor: Prof Wim Hollander)