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"Transition from Sports to Professional Life"

Interviews with Ex-Athletes

A successful transition from a sports career to a professional career is influenced by various factors. These *Success Factors* and *other influences* were examined in the **exploratory heuristic interview study** with former competitive athletes from a retrospective perspective.



INTRODUCTION

Athletes focus their lives on sports and strive for excellence. Private and professional goals are subordinated to this sporting commitment, the concentration lies on the sports career. Therefore, the end of an active career and the beginning of the post-sports phase of life implies particular importance. Ex-athletes have to master the transition and find new goals for the time after competitive sports.

PROBLEM

An overview of the state of research on the transition from sports careers to working life is presented in empirical studies on sociological, pedagogical or psychological basis. When looking at the examinations, it is important to distinguish between the content and the time span. This distinction is illustrated in the upper part of Figure 1. The sequence of the phases **Sports Career - End of Sports - Transition - Start of Work - Professional Career** - represent the time spans in the curriculum vitae of a competitive athlete.

Studies on the periods "**End of Sport**" and the subsequent phase of the "**Transition**" are characterized by a mixture of completion and new beginnings. Former athletes need to engage in far-reaching new and reoriented activities during this phase. According to the results of the research so far, the end of a sports career and the transition from those concerned are described in the majority as a problematic period.

After the transition phase, there are periods in which the content is concerned with "**Start of Work**" and "**Professional Career**". The majority of research on these phases of entry and beginning of a professional life also describe difficulties of ex-athletes. The adjustment to the new phase of life, or to a very different employment, requires some time of habituation. There are significantly fewer investigations about these post-sport phases of transition and the following professional Career.

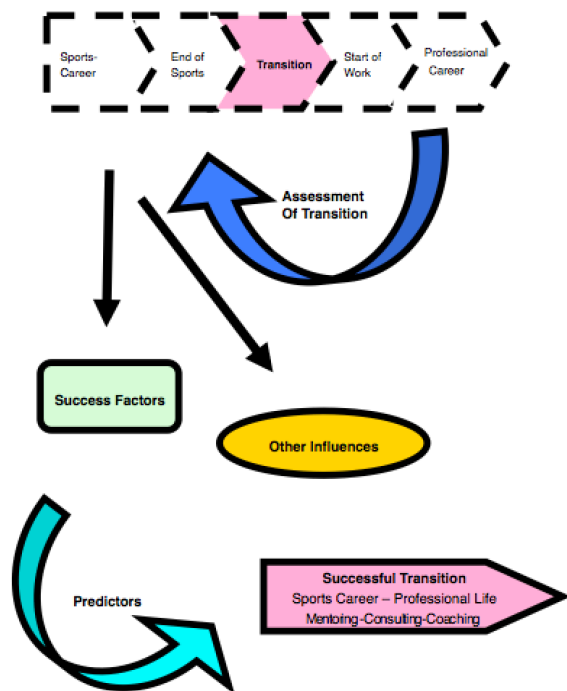


Figure 1: Influences on a Transition

Present Study

The topic "Transition from a sports Career to Professional life" is examined from the retrospective in the present study (see Fig. 1 - "Assessment Transition"). This retrospective view captures the subjective assessment of the sports career, the Transition and the professional career until the survey.

This exploratory heuristic study aims to investigate a **Successful Transition** from a sporting career to professional life. Based on **Success Factors** and **other Factors** that positively influence the transition, **Predictors** for a successful transition should be investigated.

METHOD

For the present study, the **problem-centered interview** was chosen. This interview technique developed by Witzel (1982) is called "problem-centered" because a social problem poses the starting point of the investigation. It represents a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that highlights the strengths of both methods and minimizes their weaknesses.

In addition to a structured interview, a short questionnaire and two tests - the sports-related performance motivation questionnaire (Allmer, SLM) and the stress-management questionnaire (Janke, SVF) - were used. The **Success of the Transition** is estimated according to the subjective satisfaction with the professional career.

Criterion Variable "Transition"

The assessment of the Transition is based on the answers to two variables. This combination of traits examines the **Satisfaction with the Professional Career** since the end of the sports career:

- **Profession so far** *How do you rate your previous career?*
- **Profession today** *Does your current occupation correspond to your ideas?*

The ratings from the 2-step scaled statements for the variables "Profession so far" and "Profession today" are added up and combined in the criterion variable "**Transition**".

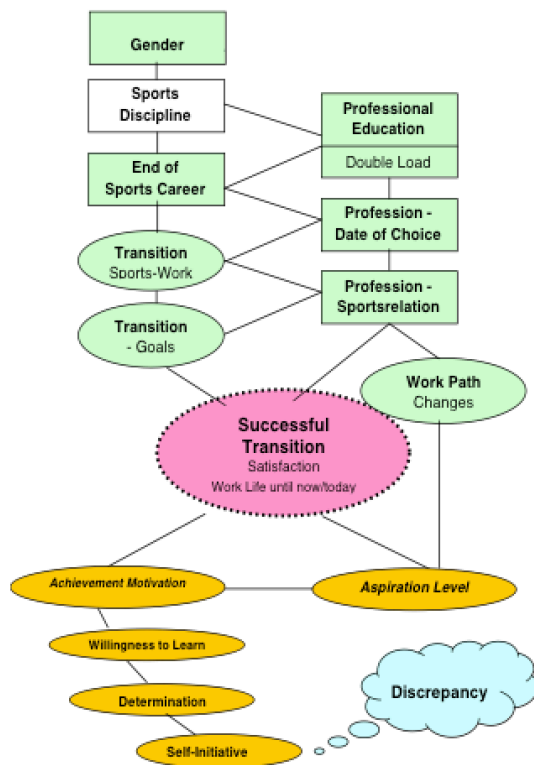


Fig 2: Success Factors, Other Influences

Sample-Selection Criteria

For the study, the individual sports Track & Field, Road-Cycling, Alpine Skiing and Tennis were chosen. Respondents had a successful career in competitive sports for many years, at least two years have passed since the end of their careers and the former athletes should have started a career or a post-sports career. The ex-athletes have achieved a high level of national and international performance in their sports - the sample combines eleven Olympic victories, 18 World Championships, 12 European and over 130 German Championships.

For the interview study **a total of 37**, including 21 males and 16 females, *ex-athletes* were interviewed. With 12 people, Tennis provides the largest group, followed by 10 Alpine Skiers and 9 Track & Field-Athletes and 6 Cyclists.

RESULTS

The following results section explains the **Success Factors** (top half) and **Other influences** (bottom half) of a successful transition shown in Figure 2. These are composed of the information of the quantitative (rectangles) and qualitative data (elliptical form).

The group of **Successful transitioners** are characterized through a vocational training (partly in double load), an early career choice, a voluntary end of the sports career and goals for the post-sports professional life. Successful transitions of ex-athletes are characterized by achievement motivation and a realistic level of aspiration in professional life.

Other influences - qualitative results

In addition to the described Success Factors, Other influences (lower half in Fig. 2) on the transition became obvious. The quality of the transition, or the satisfaction with the professional career since the end of the sports career is determined by the *Achievement Motivation* and the *Level of Aspirations* a person has in relation to their employment.

A successful transition will be influenced by a preparation for working life or the choice of a profession. Abilities learned in sports such as *Willingness to learn*, *Determination* and *Self-Initiative* have a positive effect at the start of professional life and a persons satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

Even if the two problematic groups of **Partly** or **Not Successful transitions** are in the minority, they should be enough warning, to make changes for the transition from a sporting career to life. In addition, a critical combination of variables has to be pointed out, which has been found in all three groups of the transition and can lead to unfortunate constellations and difficulties during that phase.

Risk Factors - Dropout, Male, Tennis

Dropout seems to be a particularly important aspect of a more or less successful transition. An involuntary end of a sports career represents a real risk for competitive athletes. Also, the groups of **male** athletes and **Tennis** players are prone to neglecting vocational training and seem to bother less about life after retirement from sports.

Competitive athletes are in an ambivalent situation: while the full focus lies on competitive sports there is a risk of a sudden, involuntary career end. Therefore the combination of an active career with a vocational training can make sense.

Sensitization of the Environment

As the results show, there is a need for action on the topic of "Transition from a Sports Career to Professional Life". However, this does not only apply to ex-athletes themselves. Rather, it is important for the environment and sports organizations to be involved in the transition of "their athlete".

Useful, effective support for the transition includes raising awareness of the sports and private environment - coaches, trainers, officials, managers, but also family and friends - of an athlete. All persons wanting to help an athlete when transitioning need to understand the life of a competitive athlete in order to be able to provide support.

Responsibility of Sports Organizations

With the professionalization and increased performance requirements in sports, sports-related care measures were intensified everywhere. Sports organizations and associations have to face up to responsibilities for their athletes and should accompany transitions from competitive sports to professional life.

Post-sport advice can also be rewarding for sports organizations insofar as the majority of former athletes choose a sports-related profession. This way their support might enhance cooperations with clubs, associations or other sports institutions open up promising opportunities. It also makes it easier for athletes to choose a sports career, despite the difficult job market and increased demands.

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For Literature-Sources view the poster at "Diploma Thesis".