



Organisations going for the gold?

An exploratory case study on the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen

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*Top-class sportsmen are likely to experience difficulties in finding a job during and after their top-class sports career (NOC*NSF, 2008; Randstad, 2008; Randstad, 2010). Based on the knowledge that images determine behaviour (Smelik, 1999), images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen were expected to be the cause of this situation. Information on these images is limited and further research was needed to investigate the expected link. Semi-structured interviews with seventeen respondents from different types of organisations showed that top-class sportsmen were characterised as being extrovert, entrepreneurial and dominant. Respondents came up with functional and social motives for employing top-class sportsmen. Respondents stated that adaptations to recruitment procedures and functions are needed in employing top-class sportsmen. The research showed that the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen are not linked to the behaviour of employing top-class sportsmen. Particularly organisations that are focusing on sport and/or health are employing top-class sportsmen. Other organisations do not take the possibility into account. To facilitate the employment of top-class sportsmen, organisations were recommended to create plans of action to be able to respond to the job application of top-class sportsmen. In turn, top-class sportsmen were recommended to make their knowledge and abilities more transparent by using the STAR methodology or Accredited Prior Learning [APL]. By encouraging organisations to employ top-class sportsmen, economic participation of top-class sportsmen will progressively improve.*

Keywords: *active top-class sportsmen, former top-class sportsmen, top-class sport, image, organisations, societal career, case study.*

INTRODUCTION

During the time of the ancient Romans and Greek, gladiator fights were in the order of the day. Gladiators were a valued possession and masters took good care of their gladiators. When gladiators won their fight, they were rewarded with money or freedom. Gladiators lived a tough life however. Gladiator fights regularly ended with the death of one of the gladiators. They literally needed to fight to live. Despite this horror, gladiator fights were popular and about 50.000 spectators enjoyed every fight. These circumstances may seem old-fashioned, but a similar situation is existent in the Netherlands. The Dutch society is collectively supporting an activity without considering the future well-being of the persons involved. Top-class sportsmen receive positive attention during their top-class sports career (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2011; Mulier Instituut, 2011;

NOC*NSF, 2008; Randstad, 2008; Randstad, 2010; Rijksoverheid, n.d.; Werkgeversorganisatie in de Sport, 2009; Wildervanck & Kuhnen, 2010), but are confronted with a decline in interest in their societal career. Top-class sportsmen regularly experience difficulties in finding a societal job during or after their top-class sports career (Randstad, 2008; Randstad, 2010; NOC*NSF, 2008). The question is whether the behaviour of not employing top-class sportsmen is caused by the image organisations have concerning top-class sportsmen. The concept of image is elaborated upon.

THE IMAGE

Images are everywhere around us. Images exist in conversations and media, and in our heads in the shape of ideas, thoughts and beliefs (Smelik, 1999). The image is a widely used concept that is given several definitions. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus of Cambridge University (n.d.) defines image as "A picture in your mind or an idea of how someone or something is" and "The way that something or someone is thought of by other people." Tuan (1975, p. 205) stated that an image is not only a picture of an object, "it is also a percept sustained by current sensory input, a mental picture in the memory. It is what we see when environmental stimuli do not appear to justify it." Complementary, Assael (1984, as cited in Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 871) defines image as "a total perception of a product that is formed by processing information from various sources over time." Images help us to make meaning and, this way, to influence the way we look at phenomena in the world (Smelik, 1999). Images are expressed in opinions and (value) judgments (Pinto, 2004) and determine our behaviours (Smelik, 1999). Images do not always correspond to reality (Smelik, 1999; Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975); they represent what someone believes to be true (Boulding, 1959). Image formation does not take place in a social vacuum (Vonk, 2002), an interplay between mental images and material images is existent (Smelik, 1999). This interplay is represented in Figure 1. Mental images are also known as personal factors (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and consist of emotional content (Dichter, 1985, as cited in Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 872, Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975). In the formation of mental images, private matters like personal objectives, imagination, opinion, interests and ideas play an important part (Smelik, 1999; Vonk, 2002). This causes mental images to be based on the social and psychological characteristics of the perceiver (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Material images, on the other hand, are also known as stimulus factors and involve the cognitive (perceptual) side of the image (Dichter, 1985, as cited in Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 872; Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975). Material images consist of external stimuli like texts and media as well as previous experiences (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Televisions and newspapers are examples of external stimuli. These external stimuli provide us with a collective image on the society and its members (Sterk, 2005).



Figure 1. Mental images and material images affect the images people have.

IMAGES ON TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN

Images cause people to see others in the way they want to see them (Vonk, 2012). When we see a person behave in a certain way, we automatically associate him with matching characteristics (Ham, n.d., as cited in Vonk, 2002, p. 6). We classify our society by creating generalised images on characteristics of members of a certain group (Pinto, 2004; Willems & Cottaar, 1989). This way, we create stereotypes and cause an invisible standard to arise. This standard includes some people and excludes others (Smelik, 1999). Classification in groups based on gender, religion and ethnic groups is generally not desirable because it goes hand in hand with discrimination (Sociaal Economische Raad, 2007). Classification of the society is however in the order of the day (Pinto, 2004).

A group that may not directly be seen as a minority group, but is characterised by a relative deficit in economic participation, is the group of top-class sportsmen. Top-class sportsmen experience difficulties in finding a job during and after their top-class sports career (NOC*NSF, 2008; Randstad, 2008; Randstad, 2010). The research of Randstad (2008) showed that fourteen percent of the employers prefers the active sportsman to the regular candidate and seventeen percent of the employers prefers the former top-class sportsman to the regular candidate. With regard to the enthusiasm of the Dutch society about top-class sport (Ministerie van Volkgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2011; Mulier Instituut, 2011; NOC*NSF, 2008; Randstad, 2008; Randstad, 2010; Rijksoverheid, n.d.; Werkgeversorganisatie in de Sport, 2009; Wildervanck & Kuhnen, 2010), these numbers are remarkable. The enthusiasm on top-class sport seems not to be apparent in the societal career of top-class sportsmen. Given the fact that images are a predictor of behaviour (Smelik, 1999) and that images are important in employing staff members, the expectation is that the images of organisations can determine whether the organisation is willing to employ a top-class sportsman. Research specifically considering the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen is however limited.

To obtain insight in the possible link between the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen and the behaviour of employing top-class sportsmen, the images of organisations need to be investigated. Organisations need to be questioned on what characteristics top-class sportsmen have and what these characteristics do to the organisation which is employing the top-class sportsman. The research provides us with information on the motives of organisations for (not) employing top-class

sportsmen. At this point in the research, it may become clear that the images of organisations are not linked to the behaviour of employing top-class sportsmen. In this case, the cause of organisations not being willing to employ top-class sportsmen has to be sought in another angle. This is the perspective of the employment of top-class sportsmen. Researches show differences between top-class sportsmen and regular employees: top-class sportsmen are equipped with divergent educational careers, enter the labour market at a later age and regularly lack work experience (Van Hoeymissen, 2004). These differences cause the research to work from the assumption that organisations are likely to experience difficulties in employing top-class sportsmen. To test this hypothesis, organisations need to be questioned on which recruitment procedures they think are suitable for employing top-class sportsmen. Problems organisations (expect to) encounter in employing top-class sportsmen come to the light and a sketch of organisations that are specially suitable for employing top-class sportsmen can be made.

This problem statement presents the research with four research questions:

- What images do organisations have concerning top-class sportsmen?
- What motives do organisations have for employing top-class sportsmen?
- What should the recruitment procedure of top-class sportsmen look like concerning organisations?
- What types of organisations are suitable for employing top-class sportsmen?

METHOD

Research design

Being one of the first to investigate the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen, this research was in need of a broad perspective. The exploratory case study research design matched this format by obtaining data to create a first broad exploration of the field (Yin, 1984). The case study is regularly used in complex social phenomena (Swanborn, 1996) and aims to link propositions to outcomes (Yin, 1984). Based on the information that one's perspective determines the nature, assessment and valuation of images (Willems & Cottaar, 1989), different perspectives were included in the research to create a complete image. Four perspectives, divided on two dimensions, were involved. The first dimension concerned profit organisations and non-profit organisations. The second dimension concerned organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen and organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen. A 2x2-matrix represents the comparison sample of the current research.

Table 1. Matrix representing the four types of organisations involved in the research.

	Organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen	Organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen
Profit organisation	Type 1: Profit organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen	Type 2: Profit organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen
	Organisation 1 and 2	Organisation 3 and 4
Non-profit organisation	Type 3: Non-profit organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen	Type 4: Non-profit organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen
	Organisation 5 and 6	Organisation 6 and 7

The dimension of profit vs. non-profit organisations was involved because of the different working methods of these organisations (Lückerath-Rovers, Quadackers & Rovers, 2008) which were expected to affect their images. Profit organisations are deeply attached to their profit goals and Public Relations and reason in terms of money (Daft, Murphy & Willmott, 2010). The performance of profit organisations is measured in terms of returns on invested capital (Daft, Murphy & Willmott, 2010). The organisation is looking for employees that cause the organisation to make money. This led to the expectation that profit organisations would favour top-class sportsmen because of their notoriety. Non-profit organisations on the other hand, are not in business to maximise profits (Dawson & Dunn, 2006). Non-profit organisations are regularly funded by government grants and private foundation grants (Daft, Murphy & Willmott, 2010). These organisations are focused on non-commercial and societal objectives (Dawson & Dunn, 2006). Non-profit organisations regularly provide their services to non-paying clients (Daft, Murphy & Willmott, 2010). This type of operational management was expected to cause non-profit organisations to look for employees who contribute to society. And the other way around, in employing staff members non-profit organisations were expected to make social considered choices.

Willems and Cottaar (1989) stated that images are hypotheses that can be measured against reality. By involving the dimension of experienced vs. inexperienced organisations, the images of organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen were compared to the images of organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen. This way, images of organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen were tested on their accuracy. Organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen are, most of the time, not equipped with policies on working with top-class sportsmen. The respondents within these organisations mainly talk from their mental images, their expectations. They are not equipped with experiences and base their images on their personal beliefs and external factors. Organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen on the other hand, adapted their images to their experiences. Their resulting material images

are justified and likely to correspond to reality. Organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen can be divided in organisations that purposefully chose to work with top-class sportsmen and organisations for whom the possibility to employ a top-class sportsman was a coincidence.

The involvement of multiple types of organisations created a comparison sample in which different points of view were included. Data can be analysed within and across settings (Swanborn, 1996). This causes the research to be qualified as a multiple case study (Swanborn, 1996). For all four types of organisations two autonomous organisations were included, resulting in $n=8$ organisations to participate. Each of these organisations represented an individual case study which enhanced the validity and generalizability of the research (Galloway & Sheridan, 1993, as cited in Campbell & Ahrens, 1998, p. 542). By involving multiple participants for every organisation, images were created on the basis of information from different levels within the organisation. This caused the research to be defined as an embedded case study (Yin, 1984). Taken together, the research was qualified as an exploratory multiple-case embedded design (Yin, 1984).

Participants

It was strived to involve three members from different functions per organisation. In an ideal situation, a board member, a Human Resource manager and a regular employee were questioned. The board member was selected because of his top-down point of view on the organisation. The HR manager was selected because of his knowledge of recruitment and personnel. He was expected to tell about what the organisation is looking for in their employees and the competences employees should be equipped with. The regular employee was involved because of his ability to represent the culture and to tell about what he is looking for in a colleague. In case of an organisation experienced in working with top-class sportsmen, a colleague of the top-class sportsman was questioned instead of a regular employee. This colleague was able to tell about his experience in working with the sportsman. Not all organisations provided the research with the opportunity to interview a board member, a HR manager and a regular employee/colleague of the sportsman. When another employee was believed to be an appropriate substitute, he became the respondent for the organisation. When there was no other option, two respondents from the organisation were involved in the research. In the specific case of Organisation 6, only one respondent took part in the research. This respondent was able to speak from a dual point of view: a board member and Personnel manager. In total $n=17$ interviews were conducted: four with a board member or related function, seven with a HR manager or related function, two with a regular employee and four with a colleague of the top-class sportsman.

Instrument

The formation of images is a mental process, which causes images to be hard to grasp (Smelik, 1999). The semi-structured interview was believed to be the only method suitable for making the images of the respondents explicit. Despite the fact that case studies are characterised by method triangulation (Swanborn, 1996), other data collection methods, like participatory observations, were not suitable for making images explicit in an objective way. Interviews enabled the research to gather information on behaviours, opinions, attitudes, expectancies and experiences (Boeije, 2008). To structure the interview and to enable the interviewee to talk freely, topic lists were created (Boeije, 2008). As a result of the limited knowledge on images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen, the topic list involved broad, exploratory topics. The images of respondents concerning top-class sportsmen were made explicit by asking participants on the (expected and experienced) characteristics of top-class sportsmen. Similarities and differences between regular employees and top-class sportsmen were put to the table and respondents were asked to describe the ideal employee for their organisation. This information was used to assess whether the top-class sportsman meets with the characteristics of the ideal employee. By questioning respondents on the advantages of employing top-class sportsmen, motives for employing top-class sportsmen were brought out. Based on the information that top-class sportsmen differ from regular employees (Van Hoeymissen, 2004), respondents were subsequently asked whether they thought that top-class sportsmen would have a chance of being selected when regular recruitment procedures were used. In case that respondents were convinced that recruitment procedures needed to be adapted, they were questioned on which measures needed to be taken. To be able to provide the research with recommendations, the topic of which types of organisations would be specifically suitable for employing top-class sportsmen, was included. The resulting topic list encompassed the following topics: a) the ideal employee, b) recruitment procedures, c) images on top-class sportsmen, d) motives for employing top-class sportsmen and e) working with top-class sportsmen. The topic list is included in Appendix 1.

Procedure

During the period July to October 2013, organisations were contacted via telephone and email to ask whether their employees were willing to cooperate in the study. When cooperation was pledged, interviews were directly arranged with the interviewees or via secretaries. It was aimed to perform all interviews individually, face-to-face and in quiet rooms. Three interviews were held in the central hall of the organisational building and another interview took place in the canteen of the organisation. One organisation was only willing to participate in a combined interview with both the director and a HR manager. Preliminary to every interview, permission to record the interviews was requested. These recordings helped the researcher to get better understanding of the data and served as a kind of quality assurance (Boeije, 2008). It was highlighted that results would be processed anonymously and would not be used outside the scope of the research. During the interviews, topic lists were used as a

guideline (Boeije, 2008). All interviews lasted about an hour. After the first two interviews (with a Type 1 organisation) were held, the two participants were asked whether the topic list was satisfying and/or other topics needed to be included. This way, it was tested whether the topic list connected to the reference framework of the study (Boeije, 2008). Both participants did not provide any recommendations for improving the topic list.

Analysis

As a result of the open way of data collection, a complex amount of data was gathered. This data needed to be analysed to be able to interpret the results. A coding process to unravel the data obtained was needed (Boeije, 2008). To facilitate the coding process, a start list of codes was created prior to the fieldwork (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This start list of codes consisted of broad and non-content specific codes. The start codes were seen as sensitizing concepts and reflected the key variables of the study (Boeije, 2008). The list helped to think about the categories in which codes needed to be developed (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The start list of codes is included in Appendix 2.

All interviews were transcribed after they were held. Transcription is a way of data preparation and enables the data to be analysed (Boeije, 2008). Participants were asked to check the transcription of their interview on accuracy and completeness. This technique is called member checking and increases content validity (Baarda & De Goede, 2005). When all interviews were transcribed, the coding process was started. The start list of codes was used as the starting point (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Additions to the coding framework were made according to the field materials (Boeije, 2008). These additions were made by using the three phased coding process (Boeije, 2008). The coding process started with open coding in which verbatim was divided into fragments. Important fragments got a first broad code (Boeije, 2008). The second part of the coding process, applying axial codes, concerned connecting different parts of data and putting them together in one code (Boeije, 2008). Finally, transcriptions were coded selectively. Selective coding concerns combining and structuring codes with a focus on integration and connections (Boeije, 2008). Some fragments were assigned multiple codes because they were related to more than one topic. As a result of adapting and completing the list of codes during the coding process, interviews that were coded later in the process were equipped with a broader lists of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). By repeating the coding process once again, all interviews were exposed to the same list of codes and the reliability of the research increased (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The final coding scheme is included in Appendix 3.

After the coding process was finished, all interviews were summarized per organisation. This resulted in eight case summaries describing the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen. Subsequently, these case summaries were used to create summary diagrams for all eight organisations. These diagrams facilitated the possibility to compare the results for each type of organisation. Information resulting from the coded interviews, case summaries and summary diagrams was combined and used to interpret the data and answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Seventeen respondents from eight organisations were questioned on their images concerning top-class sportsmen. Four topics were at heart of the interviews: characteristics of top-class sportsmen, motives for employing top-class sportsmen, employing top-class sportsmen and organisations suitable for employing top-class sportsmen. There is elaborated on the most substantive findings for every topic.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN

In their characterisations of top-class sportsmen, no clear differences were existent for the four types of organisations. Respondents came up with a variety of competences, skills and attitudes that top-class sportsmen gain during their top-class sports career. The majority of the respondents was convinced that these characteristics do not come under work experience. They named it life experience and were convinced that the top-class sports experiences can be translated to the regular work environment. The top-class sports experiences do not cause top-class sportsmen to be better than regular employees, they are different from each other.

“The top-class sports experience is a relevant experience: you can use aspects of it in the societal career.” (Respondent 1, Organisation 5)

Respondents stated that top-class sportsmen could have characteristics of the ideal employee. This would however be dependent on the person and is not inherent to being a top-class sportsman. The characteristics respondents brought about are combined in men types. These men types reflect the personality and attitude of the top-class sportsmen and, in this way, represent the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen. There is elaborated on three man types: the extrovert man type, the entrepreneurial man type and the dominant man type. Some overlap between the men types is existent.

Respondents characterised top-class sportsmen as being friendly, social, spontaneous and confident. These characteristics fit in the extrovert man type. Extrovert people are confident, enthusiastic, talkative, action-oriented and like to be with others (Stichting Wijzer, n.d.). During their top-class sports career, top-class sportsmen constantly have to deal with sports related objectives. To be able to achieve these objectives, passion, motivation and courage are needed. Top-class sportsmen need to be disciplined, ambitious and competitive, which matches the second man type: the entrepreneurial man type. Entrepreneurial people are characterised by confidence, rationality, extroversion, persistency, motivation, result orientation and leading roles (Lievens, 2007). Motivation, result orientation and persistency of top-class sportsmen shows from their willingness to move boundaries and to take risks to achieve their goals. Respondents emphasized that failure is not an option for top-class sportsmen; they have a strong need to succeed an win. Finally, respondents mentioned characteristics that fit in

the dominant man type. Dominant people are willing to take control (InfoNu, 2011). Dominant characteristics show from the independency of the top-class sportsman, the likeliness of taking the lead and their comfort in having control. Top-class sportsmen are used to work for their own success. Respondents stated that the dominancy of top-class sportsmen might cause them to be somewhat selfish. Moreover, they expected top-class sportsmen to experience difficulties in adapting to the relations and hierarchy within the regular work environment. The high demands they are used to make on their fellow top-class sportsmen and their trainers are not appropriate in the work environment.

To add to the general description of top-class sportsmen, respondents distinguished between individual sportsmen and team sportsmen. Respondents were convinced that whether a sportsman chooses to perform an individual sport or a team sport is determined by his personality. And the other way around, the type of sport a top-class sportsman performs affects the characteristics he gains during his top-class sports career. Individual sportsmen were believed to be more dominant than team sportsmen. The individual sportsman is more selfish, less social, focuses on his own achievements and is less prone to collaborate. Compared to individual sportsmen, team sportsmen are more involved. Respondents characterised team sportsmen as social, enthusiastic, optimistic, positive and self-confident. The two types of top-class sportsmen do not rule each other out. Individual sportsmen can be social and team sportsmen can be selfish. Two respondents supported this statement by arguing that individual sportsmen also function in a team as a result of which all top-class sportsmen should be characterised as team sportsmen.

“I am convinced that team sportsmen and individual sportsmen are equipped with the same competences. The competences of a team sportsmen are however more visible to the outside observer.” (Respondent 1, Organisation 8)

MOTIVES FOR EMPLOYING TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN

After the respondents elaborated on the characteristics of top-class sportsmen, they were asked whether these characteristics cause top-class sportsmen to have an added value for the organisation. Respondents from all types of organisations elaborated on functional motives and social motives for employing top-class sportsmen.

Functional motives for employing top-class sportsmen involve internal and external organisational benefits. Internal organisational benefits concern factors like operational management and culture of the organisation. In their descriptions of internal organisational benefits, respondents distinguished between deliberately taking advantage of the internal organisational benefits and regarding them as secondary benefits. In case of deliberately taking advantage of the internal benefits, organisations chose to employ a top-class sportsman in order to obtain these benefits. The employment of the top-

class sportsman is part of their organisational strategy. For the other organisations, internal organisational benefits were not the main reason for employing a top-class sportsman. These organisations considered the internal organisational benefits to be a bonus. The first internal organisational benefit respondents came up with concerned employing a top-class sportsman because it is consistent with their organisation. Two of the organisations involved in this study highly valued (top-class) sport. When sport is the core business of the organisation, a top-class sportsman is the embodiment of the organisation. The organisation might benefit from the sportsman's knowledge and contacts in the field of sport. The second internal organisational benefit is the (positive) influence a top-class sportsman can have on the other employees within the organisation. Respondents stated that top-class sportsmen can help to foster collegiate relationships and motivate and/or inspire other employees. The top-class sportsman is able to tell about his sports experiences and lifestyle. Employees are likely to follow his example and can get more involved in sport. Employees are following the sportsman's matches and associate themselves with him. Especially respondents from profit organisations and respondents from organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen stated that the active top-class sportsman would be able to create a 'we' feeling and a feeling of pride in the organisation. The top-class sportsman is thus affecting the organisational culture by creating shared feelings. The last internal organisational benefit respondents mentioned is related to health policies. As a result of employees being more involved in sport, health and well-being are likely to increase and organisational absence due to sickness is likely to diminish. Organisation 4 strategically employed a top-class sportsman in a health related function. Employees from this organisation were convinced that no one else would be better suited to tackle the health issues of this organisation. Other organisations defined the health related benefits as extra role behaviour. In this case, respondents came up with the example of providing the employees with sports clinics and talking about taking good care of your body.

“I think that a top-class sportsman is the right person to tell others what lifestyle means for your health.” (Respondent 2, Organisation 5).

External organisational benefits are related to the positive effects of the employment of the top-class sportsman on the image of the organisation to the outside world. Respondents from all types of organisations, especially from organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen, stated that a top-class sportsman can be the marketing instrument of the organisation. The top-class sportsman is the face of the company, their ambassador and their business card. The fact that an organisation is working with a top-class sportsman can attract clients and can open doors which otherwise remained closed. Two respondents expected that people could link the success of the top-class sportsman to the success and healthiness of the organisation. Despite the fact that top-class sportsmen are regularly used in campaigns and PR, several respondents from all types of organisations

stated that the notoriety of the top-class sportsman should not be the main reason for hiring him. The internal organisational benefits are most important, the external organisational benefits are a bonus.

“You have to look for what he is good at. [...] You have to look for the talents next to top-class sport.” (Respondent 1, Organisation 8)

Additional to the functional motives, respondents came up with social motives for employing top-class sportsmen. Organisation 3 for example, is employing top-class sportsmen to provide them with the opportunity to create work experience. This work experience causes the sportsman’s deficit on the labour market to diminish and other organisations to be more willing to employ the top-class sportsman. Other organisations saw employing a top-class sportsman as their social responsibility: social diversity should be reflected in their staffing. Additionally, organisations hoped to stimulate others to employ a top-class sportsman too.

“We have specific functions in which all kind of top-class sportsmen are hired for a short time; after they have gained work experience they leave.” (Respondent 1, Organisation 3)

EMPLOYING TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN

Respondents explained that their recruitment procedures were established to go and find the ideal candidate. Top-class sportsman were described not to meet with the characteristics of the ideal candidate: top-class sportsmen are likely to have a divergent resume, to lack education and/or to lack work experience. This way, top-class sportsmen are not having a chance of being selected. To provide top-class sportsmen with a fair chance, respondents were convinced that recruitment procedures needed to be adapted to the interest of top-class sportsmen. Respondents came up with several ideas for adapting the recruitment procedures. The suggestion to free application requirements was mentioned the most. In employing top-class sportsmen, organisations cannot expect the top-class sportsman to meet with all their requirements. The organisation should make concessions. By looking at the top-class sportsman’s previous processes, abilities and results in a creative way, there can be evaluated whether these experiences (partially) compensate his lacking education and/or work experience. Respondents also mentioned the possibility of letting the top-class sportsman start at a lower level job to accustom to the new working conditions. Next to adapting the recruitment procedures, respondents stated that active top-class sportsmen are in need of adapted functions. Respondents characterised active top-class sportsmen as having a dual focus, prioritising sport and not being regularly present at the workplace. Because of their regular absence, active top-class sportsmen should not be employed in a function or be involved in activities that require presence at the workplace. Tailor made solutions and flexibility are needed. Mainly respondents from profit organisations gave examples of manners in which the organisation could provide the active top-class sportsman with flexibility: flexibility in work days, work hours, work location and work activities.

Respondents came up with the suggestion to employ active top-class sportsmen in temporary positions and/or projects. Temporary positions and projects are suitable for active top-class sportsmen because they can be planned in advance, can be performed at any location and have a clear ending. These temporary functions are like internships and are based on the idea of creating work experience. One of the organisations involved in the research provided top-class sportsmen with additional positions. These positions were specially created for the active top-class sportsman and meet their needs.

“The additional employee is not part of the standard staffing, so if he is gone you will not miss him and if he is present, he is able to perform something extra. And that is a great solution for the active top-class sportsman.” (Respondent 3, Organisation 2)

Former top-class sportsmen, on the other hand, were characterised as being a lot like the regular employee, but without the corresponding resume. This caused former top-class sportsmen to fit in a regular function and to only be in need of an adapted recruitment procedure.

ORGANISATIONS SUITABLE FOR EMPLOYING TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN

In adapting recruitment procedures and functions on behalf of the top-class sportsman, time, effort and money is invested in his employment. Respondents emphasized that these investments should be limited and that they expect something in return. The majority of the respondents stated that when the employment of the top-class sportsman requires more investments than the employment of a regular employee, employing a regular employee becomes more appealing. Making a lot of investments on the top-class sportsman is not fair to other employees and it may cause them to feel that the sportsman is preferred over them.

You have to check whether it causes equal benefits for both sides. Is it a win-win situation?” (Respondent 2, Organisation 1)

The investments and adaptations that are needed to be able to employ a top-class sportsman cause one organisation to be more suitable for employing top-class sportsmen than the other. Respondents elaborated on facilitating and hindering factors in employing top-class sportsmen. In their elaborations, respondents recognised differences for profit and non-profit organisations, and smaller and larger organisations. Respondents were not unanimous in their sketch of organisations suitable for employing top-class sportsmen. No clear view was created on which type of organisation would be specially suitable for employing a top-class sportsman.

In line with the literature, respondents stated that profit organisations are committed to making profit and attracting customers. Public Relations and marketing are important factors. Respondents expected profit organisations to gain external organisational benefits from the notoriety of top-class sportsmen. Because of the marketing budgets profit organisations are regularly equipped with, respondents considered profit organisations to be able to invest in the employment of a top-class sportsman. On the

other hand, respondents stated that profit organisations are not flexible enough to create a customized function for the top-class sportsman and that employing a top-class sportsman can involve a risk on the profit rates of the organisation. Considering flexibility and the importance of profit, respondents were convinced that non-profit organisations are more suitable for employing top-class sportsmen. Non-profit organisations however need to fulfil their social responsibility and most of the time are not in need of new clients. Non-profit organisations do not have to sell themselves, need to stay in the background and are not focused on marketing. This causes the non-profit organisation to be able to benefit from the notoriety of the top-class sportsman to a limited extend. Complementary, non-profit organisations are equipped with public money, need to keep costs as low as possible and need to justify their expenses. Investments in top-class sportsmen should be reconsidered on the basis of the added value of the top-class sportsman to the organisation. The investments should be worthwhile and not too many investments should be made.

“Non-profit organisations have to deal with interference of the Dutch government. This causes the organisation to be less structured. The non-profit organisation is equipped with more freedom and space to employ a top-class sportsman.”
(Respondent 3, Organisation 4)

With regard to the size of the organisation, larger organisations are equipped with more facilities compared to smaller organisations. These facilities cause the larger organisations to be able to customise functions to the needs and wishes of the sportsman. Smaller organisations are able to provide the top-class sportsman with flexibility because of their smaller decision-making structures, whereas larger organisations can experience difficulties in providing the top-class sportsman with tailor made solutions because of bureaucracy. Larger organisations are regularly equipped with marketing budgets, smaller organisations regularly have smaller budgets which prevent them from investing in a top-class sportsman.

“For larger organisations it is harder to employ a top-class sportsman because of their decision-making structures. Larger organisations are however equipped with more facilities.” (Respondent 3, Organisation 2)

“I can imagine small organisations to experience difficulties in employing top-class sportsmen, they often have small budgets. And the employment of a top-class sportsman costs money.” (Respondent 1, Organisation 3)

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Since top-class sportsmen are likely to experience difficulties in finding a job (NOC*NSF, 2008; Randstad, 2008; Randstad, 2010) and images affect behaviour (Smelik, 1999), the images organisations have concerning top-class sportsmen were expected to be linked to the organisations' willingness to employ top-class sportsmen. The following four research questions were central to the

research: “What images do organisations have concerning top-class sportsmen?”, “What motives do organisations have for employing top-class sportsmen?”, “What should the recruitment procedure of top-class sportsmen look like concerning organisations?” and “What types of organisations are suitable for employing top-class sportsmen?”.

By involving different types of organisations in the research, multiple points of view on the concept image were included. Respondents from profit and non-profit organisations elaborated on their own point of view and expressed their expectations on the other type of organisation. Respondents then confirmed each other’s expectations. The distinction between organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen and organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen reflected the distinction between mental and material images. During the research, the difference between mental and material images did not show up in another way. Organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen differentiated themselves from organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen by expressing more detailed images of top-class sportsmen. They supported their images with examples from their experiences. Whether an organisation was experienced or inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen, made no clear difference. Organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen confirmed the expectations of organisations inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen. Despite the differences between profit and non-profit organisations and organisations experienced and inexperienced in working with top-class sportsmen, respondents from all types of organisations thus did not provide the research with different images concerning top-class sportsmen. Respondents were relatively unanimous in their opinions.

When respondents were asked to describe top-class sportsmen, they characterised top-class as being extrovert, entrepreneurial and dominant. Additional distinctions between individual sportsmen and team sportsmen and between active and former top-class sportsmen were made. Respondents were convinced that the characteristics of the top-class sportsmen cause them to have an added value for organisations. Respondents focused on functional motives for employing top-class sportsmen. Internal and external organisational benefits were distinguished. Social motives appeared to be of less importance. Respondents stated that employing a top-class sportsman is different from employing a regular employee. Active top-class sportsmen are in need of flexibility and customization of functions. Because of the differences in education and work experience, both active and former top-class sportsmen are in need of adapted recruitment procedures. The investments and adaptations necessary for employing top-class sportsmen cause not all organisations to be able to employ a top-class sportsman. When respondents were asked what type of organisation would be specially able to employ a top-class sportsman, no clear image was provided. Respondents were convinced that both profit and non-profit organisations and large and small organisations would experience facilitating and hindering factors in employing top-class sportsmen.

It can be concluded that the images organisations have concerning top-class sportsmen are not linked to behaviour and do not differ for different types of organisations. Even though respondents are convinced that top-class sportsmen could have an added value for their organisation, this does not mean that the organisation is willing to employ a top-class sportsman. Most organisations are not aware of the possibility of employing a top-class sportsman and are not adapted to the needs of the top-class sportsman. The affinity of organisations with sport and/or health seems to be a crucial factor in employing top-class sportsmen. Organisations that are linked to sport and/or health are more likely to consider the possibility of employing a top-class sportsman. This conclusions show that the Dutch society is not taking its moral responsibility for employing top-class sportsmen in their societal career. Organisations are selective in their recruitment procedures, even though Dutch organisations are obligated to provide all candidates that meet with the requirements of the organisation with an equal treatment (Werving & Selectie Gids, 2014).

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

To be able to create a first broad exploration on the images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen, the current research involved a small sample of seventeen respondents from eight organisations. Creating generalizable information is not the aim of the case study. The research sample involved a diversity of Dutch organisations, which was not expected to represent all Dutch organisations. This expectation comes from the fact that all respondents involved in the research were positive on top-class sportsmen, whereas not all Dutch organisations have a positive attitude towards top-class sportsmen. Not one respondent involved in this research believed that employing a top-class sportsman would have more adverse than beneficial effects. The image that was created in this research thus might be more favourable than when negative oriented organisations would have been involved. Follow-up studies are recommended to purposefully select organisations which are not interested in employing top-class sportsmen. Next, a remark has to be made on the data collection method. Case studies are characterised by method triangulation (Swanborn, 1996). As a result of the difficulty to gather images in an objective way, interviews were the only data collecting method. This endangered the internal validity of the research (Boeije, 2008). To increase the internal validity of the research and to avoid subjectivity, results were underpinned by quotes of the respondents. This way, the accuracy of interpretation of data is proved. Another factor having a negative impact on the internal validity is the research being performed by only one researcher. Interpreting data on your own might cause personal interpretation to play part and might cause the research strategy to change during the research process. A change in question phrasing during data collection is distinguished. Based on the results of earlier interviews, questions were phrased in another order and another manner. This was not expected to affect the results of the research. Interviews were meant to be semi-structured. The topics of the interviews were broad and answers were expected not to differ as a result of a change in

the order of questions. To be able to make improvements on the internal validity, there is advised to provide follow-up studies with multiple methods of data collection and to involve multiple researchers. To complement the interviews from the current study, the follow-up study can be provided with a questionnaire that tests theses with the help of a Likert scale. Involvement of multiple researchers makes it possible to discuss and interpret the findings together. Each researcher is able to analyse the data on its own after which inter-rater reliability can be calculated. The systematic of the coding process is improved (Boeije, 2008).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strive for a labour market in which top-class sportsmen are provided with equal chances of being employed, there has to be sought for manners that make it easier and more attractive for organisations to employ top-class sportsmen. It is recommended to start a project that encourages organisations to provide top-class sportsmen with the possibility of gaining work experience. Employing a top-class sportsman in a short termed function requires less investments than employing a top-class sportsman in a regular function and provides the top-class sportsman with the possibility to catch up his deficit on the labour market. In addition, research on the adaptations that organisations experienced in working with top-class sportsmen have undertaken, should be performed in the near future. This research helps to create insight in the ways these organisations facilitated the employment of the top-class sportsman. When the research is performed at a large scale, results can be used to create a framework on which types of organisations (profit or non-profit, larger or smaller) are able to employ top-class sportsmen and in what way recruitment procedures and functions need to be adapted.

Until the time that these projects are performed, each organisation is recommended to think about the possibility of employing a top-class sportsman. Organisations need to look for a win-win situation in which both the organisation and the sportsman go for the gold. A mediating foundation can be involved in the recruitment procedure. Top-class sportsmen are recommended to comply to the difficulties organisations have in employing top-class sportsmen. By making the top-class sports experiences explicit, recruiters get insight in the top-class sports career and the gained skills and competences. This could be done by using the STAR methodology. The STAR methodology helps top-class sportsmen to elaborate on their action taking in specific situations. The description shows the way the person dealt with a problem and is a predictor for future behaviour (Van Oosterhout, n.d.). To add to the use of the STAR methodology, prior learning may be accredited [APL]. APL recognizes the knowledge and skills gained during the top-class sports career and shows it in a certificate (Kenniscentrum EVC, 2011). With the help of APL top-class sportsmen are able to prove their gained competences which makes it easier for recruiters to determine whether the top-class sportsman is suitable for a function and will be an addition to the organisation.

Let us follow the example of the ancient Greek and Romans by providing our ‘gladiators’ with appreciation during their top-class sports career and their societal career.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Topic list Images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen.

Table 2. *Topic list images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen.*

IMAGES ON TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN	
Topic	Subtopic
Ideal employee	Skills Motivation Personality Attitude Expectations Unique contribution
Regular recruitment procedure	Selection criteria Selection process Importance of resume, motivation, personality, attitude Investments Special arrangements
Investments in employees	Reach towards perfection Ability to invest Education
Divergent employees	Possible experience Importance of resume, motivation, personality, attitude Recruitment process Unique contribution
Image top-class sportsmen	Competences Skills Motivation Differences to regular employee Benefits top-class sports experience Disadvantages/consequences top-class sports experience Career opportunities Problems Top-class sportsmen in organisations Ideal employee
Motives	Publicity Organisational contribution Unique contribution Conscious decision
Working with top-class sportsmen	Possibilities Added value Ability, willingness Future

Appendix 2: Start list of codes.

Table 3. *Start list of codes, drafted before analysing the interviews.*

IMAGES ON TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN	
Selective code	Axial code
Information organisation	Function participant Background information organisation Experience in working with top-class sportsmen
Ideal employee	Skills Motivation Personality Attitude Expectation Unique contribution
Image top-class sportsmen	Competences Skills Motivation Differences regular employee Benefits Disadvantages Career opportunities Expected problems
Recruitment procedure	Selection criteria Recruitment process Special arrangements Investments
Motives	Publicity Added value Conscious decision
Working with a top-class sportsman	Willingness Possibility Interventions Future

Appendix 3: Coding scheme Images of organisations concerning top-class sportsmen.

Table 4. *Interview coding scheme.*

IMAGES ON TOP-CLASS SPORTSMEN	
Selective code	Axial code
Characteristics top-class sportsman	Active top-class sportsman Advantages Attitude, behaviour Competences Development Disadvantages Former top-class sportsman Individual top-class sportsman Influence on others Match organisation Personality Stereotypes Team top-class sportsman Work environment
Expectancies	Advantages Attitude, behaviour Competences Development Differences regular employee Difficulties Disadvantages Function Guidance Match organisation Personality Reactions Relation Satisfaction Success Type of function Type of sport Value top-class sportsman
Experiences	Advantages Attitude, behaviour Competences Development Differences regular employee Difficulties Disadvantages Guidance Match organisation Personality Reactions Relation Satisfaction Share experiences Success Type of function

	Type of sport Value top-class sportsman
Ideal employee	Attitude, behaviour Competences Drive Match Minimum rules Motivation Unique contribution
Information organisation	Activities Culture Development employees Employees Function respondent Match Non-profit organisation Procedures Profit organisation
Publicity	Exemplary role Image organisation Publicity organisation Publicity top-class sportsman
Recruitment procedure	Importance additional activities Importance education Importance motivation Importance recruitment procedure Importance resume Importance work experience Recruitment process Selection criteria
Working with a top-class sportsman	Arrangements Choice Contact Creating new function Familiarization organisation Flexibility Flexible working Function Guidance Investments Match Willingness