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THE NATURE OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN SPORTS ORGANISATIONS IN SLOVAKIA AFFECTS EMPLOYEES AND ASSOCIATED RISKS

CHARAKTER PRACOVNÉHO PROSTREDIA V ŠPORTOVÝCH ORGANIZÁCIÁCH NA SLOVENSKU VPLÝVAJÚCI NA ZAMESTNANCOV A S NÍM SPOJENÉ RIZIKÁ

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Autori pôsobia ako interní doktorandi na Fakulte bezpečnostného inžinierstva Žilinskej univerzity v Žiline. Vo svojom výskume sa venujú problematike systémom včasného varovania na monitorovanie rizík pre oblasť športových organizácií na Slovensku a procesne orientovanému modelu manažmentu rizík pre malé a stredné podniky.

Abstract

Sport plays a number of important roles in contemporary society. The sports organisations that cover these activities in their activities, therefore, appear to be important entities with a significant impact on this area of social life. However, like other organisations, they face new challenges brought about by the inherently unstable and highly variable environment in which they operate. One of the key attributes of any organisation is its employees, who represent its core functional component. However, like all other components of the organisation, they are also affected by the effects of an unstable environment. To this end, it is essential to look at the conditions that organizations create for these employees and the conditions in which employees work. Therefore, the aim of this article is to highlight the risks that are associated with ensuring such working conditions that will allow for increasing the motivation, satisfaction, and performance of employees of sports organizations in Slovakia. Satisfied and high-performing employees are one of the basic prerequisites for the success of any sports organisation.

Key words: working conditions, employees, risks, sports organizations, work environment

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Abstrakt

Športová činnosť zohráva v súčasnej spoločnosti celú radu významných úloh. Športové organizácie, ktoré tieto aktivity vo svojej činnosti zastrešujú sa preto javia ako dôležité subjekty so signifikantným vplyvom na túto oblasť spoločenského života. Podobne ako iné organizácie, však aj ony čelia novým výzvam, ktoré so sebou prináša prirodzene nestabilné a vysoko variabilné prostredie, v ktorom pôsobia. Jedným z kľúčových atribútov každej organizácie sú zamestnanci, ktorí predstavujú jej základnú funkčnú zložku. Podobne ako na všetky ostatné zložky organizácie tak aj na nich však pôsobia vplyvy nestabilného prostredia. Za týmto účelom je nevyhnutné zaoberať sa podmienkami, ktoré organizácie týmto zamestnancom vytvárajú a na podmienky, v ktorých zamestnanci pracujú. Cieľom tohto článku je preto poukázať na riziká, ktoré sú spojené so zabezpečením takých pracovných podmienok, ktoré umožnia zvyšovanie motivácie, spokojnosti a výkonnosti zamestnancov športových organizácií na Slovensku. Spokojní a výkonní zamestnanci sú totiž jedným zo základných predpokladov úspechu každej športovej organizácie.

Kľúčové slová: pracovné podmienky, zamestnanci, riziká, športové organizácie, pracovné prostredie

Introduction

In today's society, sports activities are an important component that shapes its social but also cultural context. At this level, it is necessary to see the sport in terms of a leisure social activity but also in terms of the professional gainful activity of a part of the population and a part of the economic system at regional, national, and international levels. Organisations active in the field of sports business are also extremely important as part of the national economy, where they represent a segment that creates and maintains a significant number of jobs. Like businesses, sports organisations operate in a competitive environment that brings a range of risks affecting their operations. The volatility of the business environment brings new challenges that need to be taken into account. In order to achieve the desired level of sustainability for sports organisations, it is necessary to look at what tools can help these organisations deal with the challenges and risks they face. One of the main pillars of the success of sports organisations is their employees, especially in the context of performance and quality. A specific component compared to other organisations or businesses is that success or failure is closely related to the performance and results of the athletes who fall under the organisation. Maintaining a stable work environment and conducive working conditions is a major prerequisite for retaining and enhancing employee performance. A stable work environment and working conditions are prerequisites for enhancing employee performance in sports organizations and are affected by several risks and this topic will be discussed in this article.

The stability of the working environment in the sports organization industry has been influenced by a number of factors. One of the most significant has been the COVID-19 pandemic. This has affected almost all working and living conditions, necessitating the search for new ways to adapt to changing conditions and navigate in an unstable and uncertain environment. In this context, the pandemic has brought about the massive application of practices such as teleworking, virtual communication, and the massive deployment of

technology. This situation has also significantly affected sports organisations, which have had to massively suspend their activities, close their facilities, or cancel planned sporting events as a result of the situation. Their staff, including athletes, have had to cope with various stressors such as the possibility of job losses or dismissals, the risk of contracting a virus, difficulties in communicating with athletes and an increase in athletes' psychological problems. The COVID-19 disease may have limited human resources, leading to a high degree of stress among employees due to their excessive workload. This burden eventually led many to consider leaving their jobs as a solution to reduce stress. The pandemic also created a strong need for operational and safety changes that equally destabilized the work environment and introduced new obstacles and challenges for employees (Hobfoll 1989; Chun et al. 2022). Another significant factor is the growing popularity of sports among the general public, which has substantially increased the growth in the number of amateur and professional sporting organisations. This trend brings, among other things, the popularity of new, hitherto little-known sports, which, combined with the popularization of sports on social networks and in virtual environments, creates an unprecedented situation. In such an environment, the competition between sports organisations for fans, funding, athletes, resources, and customers using the services of sports facilities is naturally growing. In a highly competitive environment, it is crucial for sports organisations to attract and retain skilled and reliable staff to ensure a high level of service and activity for the organisation. To this end, it is necessary for sports organisations to keep up with the competition and offer their employees conditions that will enable them to be retained in the long term. In this context, it is advisable to take into account all the internal factors of the organisation's working environment, which include, among other things, the area of interpersonal relations and the correct way of managing human resources in the organisation. In fact, a stress-reducing work atmosphere, appropriate interpersonal relationships and employee support are conducive to the achievement of set goals (Hobfoll 2002; Park et. al 2019).

The aim of this article is therefore to point out the risks associated with ensuring such working conditions that will allow for increasing the motivation, satisfaction, and performance of employees of sports organisations in Slovakia. Indeed, it is by addressing these risks that working conditions can be fundamentally improved, thus making sustainable development opportunities available to sports organisations. In this context, an adequate and functional risk management model appears to be a suitable tool, which will enable organisations to design and apply preventive and reactive measures aimed at minimising the negative impacts of risks and at the same time taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them more efficiently. In the context of sports organisations, it is necessary to recognise the entrepreneurial nature of their activities and to view risks themselves as a potential source of competitive advantage. Within the framework of applied risk management, there is scope for the implementation of early warning systems, the primary task of which is to identify possible changes as potential sources of risk in the internal and external environment of the organisation. The main objective of the implementation of such a system is to ensure sustainability for the activities of sports organisations operating within the Slovak Republic and for their future development in terms of sport and business. The ability of an organisation to become and remain financially and socially sustainable is a critical component of

management strategy. A properly set up management system is seen as a crucial component of an organisation's continued success, while it also represents one of the internal methods that allow it to respond flexibly to a rapidly changing business environment (Hutchens et al. 2020; Neck et al. 2006; Stenling et al. 2006).

Aim and methodology

Sports organisations and their activities are an integral part of modern society and fulfil a variety of important roles. In addition to sport itself being an important part of social life, organisations active in this sector play an extremely important role in the national economy, providing a significant number of jobs. The aim of this article is to analyse and discuss the risks associated with providing adequate working conditions for employees in the sports sector, as well as the importance of these conditions for the motivation and performance of these individuals. Indeed, one of the unique characteristics of the sports industry is that the success or failure of an organisation is inextricably linked to the performance of its athletes, which must, however, be stimulated by appropriate facilities created by the performance of other employees and by quality material support.

With a view to achieving the stated objective, the methods employed in this study included empirical research with the application of exploration methods using literature and results of previous research, observation, analysis of selected data and synthesis in order to formulate new findings. By applying such a methodology, it was possible to construct a comprehensive framework describing the relationships between the key components of the work environment in sports organisations and their impact on the organisation itself in order to better understand the issues of the risks arising from them and their potential impacts.

Environmental factors and their impact on working conditions

To further understand the impact of the environment on the working conditions and related performance of the employees of an organisation, it is necessary to understand the mechanism of the impact of the environment on the organisation itself and on its internal processes. It is true that the specific characteristics of the external environment are directly manifested in the internal environment, where they affect its components depending on the nature of the situation. It follows that the ability of an organisation to create appropriate working conditions is directly linked to its ability to cope with the conditions of the environment in which the organisation operates (Adámik 2020; Bugarová et al. 2021). In order to understand the mechanism of the influence of the environment on the organization, it is necessary to understand its basic specifics. The environment itself should be divided into the external environment, which primarily includes factors originating outside the organization, and the internal environment, which includes factors originating inside the organization. These components of the environment differ, among other things, in the ways in which they can be accessed by the organisation. The external environment, which is made up primarily of factors of the globalised market and national or international relations, can almost never be directly influenced by the organisation itself. In contrast, the internal environment can be changed and shaped to a large extent by the organisation according to its own needs, provided that appropriate tools are used (Bugarová et al. 2021; Robinson 2010; Varmus et al. 2019). The

impact of environmental factors varies greatly based on the nature of the organisation itself. Some factors affect almost all organisations in a general way, others have a greater or lesser impact only on organisations in a particular sector or with a particular focus. The impact of these environments in their specific conditions determines the satisfaction and performance of the employees working in the organisation, but the individual factors and their effects are also potential sources of risk. In the case of sports organisations, there are several specificities that in turn determine the way in which environmental factors affect them (Fig. 1).

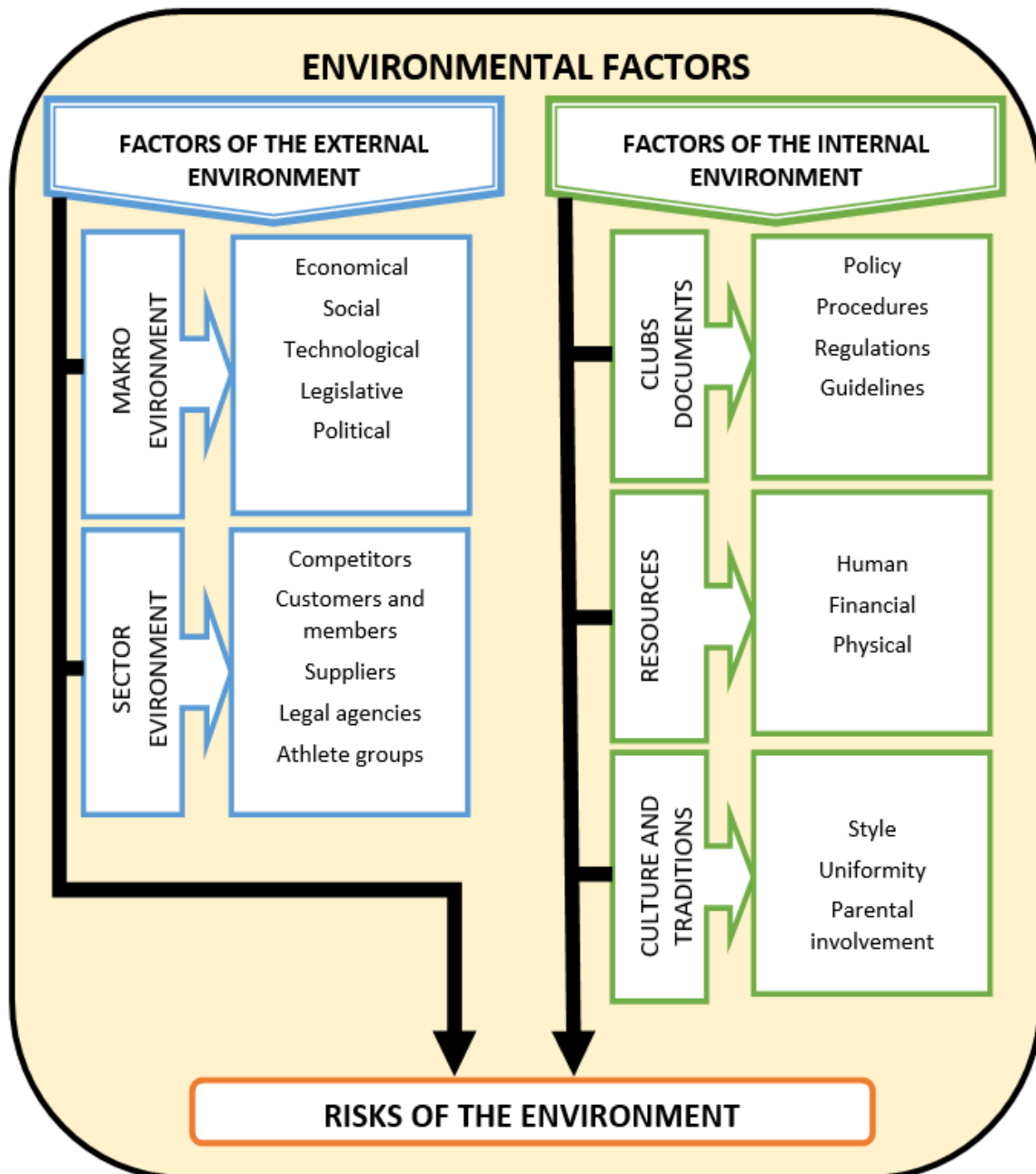


Figure 1 - External and internal environmental factors influencing sports organizations
Adapted from: Bugarová et al. 2021, Robinson 2010, Varmus et al. 2019
Source: Manažment rizík v športových organizáciách, Sport club management, Manažment športových organizácií

Buganová et al. further divide internal and external environmental factors into three categories based on their origin and the way in which they affect the organization itself. In this context, it is possible to define based on the categories of environmental influences for sports organizations:

- Macro-environmental factors, whose main influence is directed towards the activities and decision-making of the managers of the sports organisation, while they may not, however, directly affect in a fundamental way the activities or areas related to its functioning. One of the most significant macro-environmental factors in the sector of sports organisations in Slovakia is the legislation that regulates mainly the area of their financing.
- Sectoral factors that have a direct impact on the very functioning and activities of sports organisations, and as a result also have an impact on the achievement of their set objectives. These factors are, as a rule, dynamic and change variably over time. They may include the influence of competition, the interests of athletes, the interests of other members of the organisation and so on.
- Internal environmental factors that directly affect the organisation itself and determine its direction and character. Other sub-categories of factors fall into this category, such as internal documents, resources, and club traditions. In particular, club traditions and values also influence the external environment of sports organisations to some extent, as they are very closely intertwined with their fan base (Buganová et al. 2021).

When asked how environmental factors affect the employee of the organization itself, it is clear that internal environmental factors appear to be the most significant. These factors are most often encountered by the employee directly in the workplace, and therefore in most cases, these are the primary factors that influence performance and satisfaction. Kravčíková (2014) lists the most frequently occurring factors, which in the environment of sports organizations can primarily include the level of technical equipment of the workplace or sports ground, the organization of the work itself, the remuneration system, interpersonal relations at the workplace, the safety of employees and athletes, the spatial arrangement and working conditions at the workplace, the level of management and the attitude of the employees' superiors (Bednárík 2013; Kravčáková et al. 2020). External environmental factors primarily affect the entire sports organisation and thus the employees themselves may not directly feel their impact. However, they still affect the work environment itself primarily in the way that it determines the extent to which organisations are able to provide employees with satisfactory working conditions. In the case of sports organisations, external factors have a significant impact on their funding and hence on sporting success and popularity itself. On the other hand, it should be noted that the employees themselves are able, through the level of their performance and quality, to have a major impact on the success of the organisation itself. In the sector of sports organisations, for which sporting success and good results are the key objectives, the influence of the quality of employees is even more multiplied. In the Slovak Republic, the funding of sports organisations is strongly linked to the results they achieve in the field of sports. For this reason, it is desirable that sports organisations take a proactive approach to creating appropriate working conditions for their employees and invest the

necessary amount of resources in this endeavour. It is in the interest of every sports organisation to ensure that its employees perform adequately, and it is therefore highly appropriate to create a stimulating environment for this purpose. In this context, human resource management is used as a tool designed precisely to ensure and implement appropriate management of employees in the internal environment of the organization and is a response and a means to create appropriate internal conditions to stimulate employee performance (Diamantidis et al. 2018; Park et al. 2019).

Risks related to the working environment in the business of sports organisations in Slovakia

The sports business sector, operated through sports organisations, is currently a dynamically developing sector of the national economy and is an increasingly important component within it. At present, according to the register of the Slovak Sports Portal, there are a total of 7233 entities operating within the Slovak Republic that can be considered sports organisations. These entities may have a different form and structure, the condition being that their declared activities must be devoted to sporting activities at the amateur or professional level. However, it is true that a single entity can be registered under several categories of sports organisations, hence the real number of active entities is probably somewhat lower (Buganová et al. 2022). An overview of the different types of sports organisations registered in Slovakia is presented in Table 1.

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	REPRESENTATION IN THE SR
	Quantity
National sports organizations	4
National sports associations	74
Sports associations	208
Other sports organizations	447
Other sports organizations	832
Sports clubs	5678

Table 1 - Representation of individual types of sports organizations within the Slovak Republic
Source: Register fyzických osôb v športe

The sports organisation sector brings together or directly employs a significant number of people. According to the information of the Slovak Sports Portal, 349 358 natural persons are currently active in the field of sport, having registered affiliation to one or more sports organisations or operating independently of them. This group includes not only athletes but also various officials, coaches, therapists, and others. In this case, again, a single natural person may have registered affiliations with several sports organisations. A large proportion of these individuals may be directly regarded as employees of the sports organisations. A special group consists of referees who, for reasons of objectivity, should be independent of interest groups in sport and their involvement in sports organisations therefore has certain

limitations. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic reports that for the second quarter of 2022, the national economy employed a total of 2 409 199 natural persons. Based on the register of natural persons in sports, it can be stated that sports organisations employ almost 13% of all employed persons in the Slovak Republic (Anonym1 2022, Anonym3 2022, Anonym4 2022). An overview of natural persons active in the sports sector in Slovakia is given in Table 2.

TYPE OF ACTIVITY OF A NATURAL PERSON	REPRESENTATION IN THE SR
	Quantity
Amateur athlete	324399
Professional athlete	1468
Trainer	13695
Instructor	2776
Sports massage therapist	1832
Organizer	6588
Main organizer	7397
Security Manager	298
Union delegate	707
Sports referee	7365
Another sports expert	20989
Controller	566
Functionary	9035
Doping Commissioner	1

Table 2 - Representation of individual types of sports activities of natural persons in sport

Source: Increasing the competitiveness and sustainability of sports organizations through risk management

The field of sports business carries certain characteristics that are almost identical to business in other sectors of the national economy. Sports club officials and managers must bear in mind that in an increasingly competitive environment, sports organisations must also use the entrepreneurial approaches and techniques necessary for organisational development. Nowadays, sports are increasingly becoming a global phenomenon and attracting more and more attention not only from fans but also from potential investors. This trend has led to a steady increase in the number of sports organisations, which brings with it new challenges and an increasing interconnectedness and dependence of sport on the economic situation of the whole economy. However, the sports business also has a large number of specific features that distinguish it from businesses in other sectors in a fundamental way. One of these is a large number of interest groups and their requirements. These stakeholders include, first and

foremost, the athletes themselves, as well as fan communities, club sponsors, club owners, NGOs, public authorities, and customers using the services of sports facilities. Each of these groups has its own specific requirements for a sports organisation and each of them represents an important element that is of great importance for the survival and prosperity of the organisation (Escamilla-Fajardo et al. 2020; Pellegrini et al. 2020; Tükel 2020). On the basis of these specifics, it can be concluded that sports entrepreneurship combines two fundamental aspects: the sport aspect and the business aspect. Each of them brings its own requirements to the organisation which managers have to take into account. Based on this, two main pursued goals of sports business can be defined in the field of sports business: making a profit and achieving sports results. These two objectives are cyclically intertwined so that one depends on the other. By achieving good results, a sports organisation is able to attract more sponsors, obtain higher financial rewards and receive more support from the state budget, thus making more profit. By using these available funds to improve facilities for its athletes and improve its services, it can secure better results, which are a prerequisite for future financial gain and popularity with fans. For this reason, it is essential that the managers of an organisation keep both these aspects in mind and combine them into a single objective: **to make a profit and achieve sporting results**. Indeed, the fulfilment of this goal is a fundamental prerequisite for the success of a sports organisation (Fig. 2) (Varmus et al. 2019).



Figure 2 - Specific objectives of sports organisations
Source: Manažment športových organizácií

Like all entrepreneurial activities, sports entrepreneurship carries a risk factor for organisations and their owners. In the sports business, these risks are fundamentally influenced by the characteristics of the environment in which the activity takes place. The risks of sports business are taken by a number of interest groups involved in sports business. In addition to the owners of the organisations themselves, the risks are mainly taken by sponsors, groups of athletes, event organisers, officials and, of course, groups of employees

such as coaches or support staff (physiotherapists, assistants, club doctors, etc.). From the objectives of sports organisations described above, it is clear that the funding system plays a key role in the survival and functioning of a sports organisation. This can be addressed in a number of ways, whether through government subsidies, sponsorship donations or profits generated from own activities. Profits from own activities can be generated through the achievement of good results or by providing services to customers outside the sports organisation, for example by operating sports venues. In all these cases, the funding of a sports organisation depends on three main factors: quality, quantity, and popularity (Fig. 3). These factors are mainly taken into account in the public subsidy scheme for sports organisations. However, sponsorship donations from corporate and individual sponsors are governed by a similar mechanism. The interest of investors or sponsors is to associate their name with a club that achieves the desired results and whose athletes are of high quality, that has sufficient personnel and material facilities, and that is sufficiently well-known and popular in the fan community. It is the area of funding that is crucial for the sustainability of an organisation, which implies that it carries a number of risks affecting, among other things, the working environment in the organisation (Varmus et al. 2019, Čáslavová 2020).



Figure 3 - Factors of financing a sports organisation

Source: Manažment športových organizácií, Management a marketing sportu 21. stololetí

Sports organisations are currently exposed to a range of risks that have a greater or lesser impact on the stability of their internal environment. The sources of these risks are varied and can come from both internal and external to the organisation. In general, however, all risks are characterised by a high degree of variability and dynamic occurrence. The most significant sources of risks from the external environment are:

- destabilization due to changes in the external environment,
- the impact of a pandemic on the sports business sector,
- Russian military aggression in Ukraine,
- the energy crisis,
- political instability and associated political obstacles (Buganová et al. 2022, Buganová et al. 2022, Hudáková et al. 2022, Anonym2 2022).

The aforementioned sources bring various risks to sports organisations, the effects of which change and oscillate over time. The most significant risks from the external environment include:

- event cancellations, closure of sports venues and limited access to training due to the COVID-19 pandemic,
- threats to international events and participation of some athletes due to Russian aggression in Ukraine,
- funding cuts and funding gaps due to changes in the external environment,
- the complication of the process of acquiring athletes from abroad due to political obstacles,
- the almost unsustainable operation of sports venues due to the energy crisis and the economic situation (Bukanová et al. 2021, Hrabek et al. 2020, Hudáková et al. 2022, Zajíčková et al. 2020).

Another category is risks whose sources come from the internal environment of the organisation itself, either as a result of its changes or from the nature of the setting itself and the processes in place. However, many of these are also closely linked to external sources of risk. The most significant internal sources of risk include:

- cultural and interpersonal dynamics,
- uncertainty in the working environment,
- inappropriate working conditions,
- inappropriate internal processes (Bukanová et al. 2022, Bukanová et al. 2021, Hrabek et al. 2020).

These internal sources of risk in turn give rise to the internal risks of the organization, which include in particular:

- Lack of opportunities for career progression, lack of recognition for employees,
- inappropriate ways of managing the organisation,
- poor sporting performance,
- injuries to athletes,
- low number of sports venues, inadequate condition of sports venues,
- physical risks - a specific group of risks that arise from the effects of a pandemic on the health of employees, but which manifest themselves in the internal environment of the business (Bukanová et al. 2022, Hudáková et al. 2022, Anonym2 2022, Zajíčková et al. 2020).

A specific group, in this case, are **business risks**, which come from both the internal and external environment of the sports organisation. These occur in every type of business but are specifically influenced by the business sector in which the organisation operates. Business risks are most often taken by the owners of organisations, sponsors, investors, or event organisers. These include, in particular, the rising costs of renovating sports venues, deficiencies in strategic and financial planning and loss of competitive positioning. Event organisers often have to deal with adverse weather conditions affecting their actions or with conflicting and socially unacceptable fan behaviour, riots, and crime at events (Kedar-Levy et al. 2008, Oliver 2006, Poczta et al. 2020).

Conclusion

One of the main tasks of organisations operating in the dynamic environment of sports business is to ensure an optimal degree of stability in terms of the conditions of their internal and external environment. Different risks have a greater or lesser impact on the functioning of sports organisations and on the conditions that are further created within them. In this way, they also directly affect the employees of these organisations by determining the nature and dynamics of the internal working environment. One way to provide them with a stable working environment is to implement a risk management system. There are a number of ways to ensure this, for example by using the ISO 31000:2019 Risk Management - Guidelines standard, which can be applied to all types of organisations. Employee performance is one of the key issues in the sports organisation sector that determines the success of the organisation itself. This is because the latter is largely based on the ability to achieve satisfactory sporting results, which are, however, contingent on the appropriate conditions within the organisation. For this reason, it is essential that employers are aware of the importance of a stable working environment that, in its specific conditions, allows for the personal development and growth of employees as a key condition for future success. It is therefore essential to take note of the importance of specific risks in this area and their impact on employee motivation and satisfaction. It is satisfied and highly motivated employees who are able to perform better at work, which can give a sporting organisation a competitive advantage and, ultimately, fundamentally help to overcome the crisis situations that naturally occur in any business.

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