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Competências linguísticas no novo negócio on-line de informação e apostas desportivas: Runningball (Aveiro)

Language competences in the new on-line sports information and betting business: Runningball (Aveiro)

Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do Grau de Mestre em Línguas e Relações Empresariais, realizada sob a orientação da Dr. Gillian Grace Owen Moreira, Professora do departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

Dissertation presented at the University of Aveiro in fulfilment of the necessary requirements for the Master's Degree in Languages and Business Relations, completed under the scientific guidance of Dr. Gillian Grace Owen Moreira, Assistant Professor at the Department of Languages and Cultures of the University of Aveiro.

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Dedicated to my loving and supportive parents who have given me hope and courage to follow my own path, my own dreams.

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Key words

international sports business, language diversity, intercultural competence, sports data, on-line sports betting

Abstract

This project evaluates the role of languages and intercultural competence in the new and growing sports business, namely one of the biggest sports events real-time data providers – Runningball. The company provides over 30 000 football games a year in more than 70 countries worldwide as well as basketball, volleyball, and ice-hockey games. The dissertation investigates how multicultural diversity is accepted and received in everyday work at this new type of sports data business and what role the languages play in helping to provide real-time data while using the second or third language to get the best instant results. Dimensions of business are explored, and data analysis made in order to realize how the company runs its business and how languages have become a crucial asset of Runningball.

The field study reflected on the role of a *lingua franca* in the multilingual society of today. Furthermore it has been revealed in a field study that not only English has taken the place of the most important language in international business, but a mixture of various languages is the key to greater success.

palavras-chave

negócio desportivo internacional, diversidade linguística, competências interculturais, dados desportivos, apostas desportivas online

resumo

O projeto apresentado para esta dissertação teve como principal objectivo analisar a influência global de várias línguas e a capacidade de mediar a comunicação intercultural num mercado desportivo on-line em ascensão. O objetivo foi alcançado em parceria com uma das maiores empresas fornecedoras de dados de eventos desportivos em tempo real - Runningball. Esta empresa oferece um enorme portefólio de eventos desportivos, sendo o futebol a modalidade com maior oferta - 30 000 jogos de futebol anualmente em mais de 70 países no mundo inteiro - seguindo-se outros eventos de várias modalidades como os de basquetebol, de voleibol, de hóquei no gelo, de snooker entre outros.

Nesta dissertação constatou-se que a diversidade linguística é aceite e bem recebida no mundo desportivo e os eventos desportivos multiculturais. Observou-se também que a comunicação através de diversas línguas exerce um papel de grande importância para obtenção rápida de dados em tempo real, ao contrário na utilização da língua nativa. Os outros aspectos foram alvo de estudo nesta dissertação tais como a avaliação da dimensão do negócio de eventos desportivos e a análise da obtenção de dados, de forma a compreender o funcionamento da empresa e como uma língua pode ser uma mais valia e determinante na Runningball.

Assim sendo, conclui-se que a *lingua franca* exerce um papel determinante na sociedade actual e que o Inglês não só deixou de ser a língua mais influente no mundo dos negócios internacionais. A chave para o sucesso de qualquer negócio multinacional está em possuir uma panóplia linguística que abrange qualquer mercado e as necessidades dos consumidores.

Atslēgas vārdi

startptautiskais sporta business, kultūru daudzveidība, sporta dati, online sporta derības

Anotācija

Maģistra darbs novērtē valodu lomu sporta biznesā, konkrētāk lielāko momenta sporta datu nodrošināšanas uzņēmumu - Runningball. Kompānija piedāvā vairāk kā 30.000 futbolspēļu gadā no vairāk nekā 70 pasaules valstīm, kā arī ievērojamu skaitu basketbola, volejbola, hokeja, kā arī biljarda spēļu rezultātus. Galvenais disertācijas darba uzdevums ir izpētīt kā multikulturālā daudzveidība tiek pieņemta un uzņemta ikdienas darbā un kādu lomu ieņem valodas, lai nodrošinātu sporta datus notiekošos tai pašā mirklī, ņemot vērā, ka izmantotā valoda ir otrā vai trešā lietotāja valoda. Kā arī darba gaitā tiek izanalizēti: biznesa apmēri, datu analīze, kas atklāj kā kompānija pārvalda savu uzņēmumu un kā valodas ieņem vienu no galvenajām lomām uzdevumu veikšanā kompānijā Runningball.

Pētījuma daļa atklāja kādu lomu ieņem *lingua franca* šīs dienas daudzvalodīgajā pasaulē. Turklāt atklājās, ka ne tikai angļu valodai ir galvenā loma starptautisko darījumu nozarē, bet gan daudzvalodīgums tiek saskatīts kā visvērtīgākais kompānijas ieguvums un galvenā veiksmes atslēga.

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Glossary

Betting - the action of gambling money on the outcome of a sports event, or any other unpredictable event.

Betting exchanges - situation when players bet against each other and the operator just participates to collect a commission from winning bets.

Bookmaker - the term refers to the business or organization that provides an odds market for sporting events, with prices available for all possible outcomes.

Cross-cultural adaptation - establishing and maintaining a relatively stable and reciprocal relationship with the host environment.

Cultural tolerance - the ability to accept the values and beliefs of others that poses dilemma.

Data mining - a process used by companies to turn raw data into useful information.

Event - this refers to a specific sporting game and actions happening at the game that *scout* is assisting and reporting.

FIBA - the International Basketball Federation.

FIFA - International Federation of Football Association.

Game fixing - a match which is played to a completely or partially pre-determined result, violating the rules of the game, integrity of the game, and often the law, typically motivated by gambling and possible profit from the fixed outcome of the match.

In-running or live betting - possibility to place bets while the match is in progress.

Intercultural awareness - an attribute of personal outlook and behaviour towards other cultures which can be developed in an individual.

Intercultural competence - ability for successful communication with people of other cultures.

Intercultural sensitivity - being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and have an effect on values, learning and behaviour.

LNB - Liga Nacional de Básquet (Argentina).

NBL - National Basketball League (Australia).

Odds - the odds of an outcome refer to the payout to be received in case of correct prediction of sports event.

PBA - Philippine Basketball Association.

PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) - each *scout* works with the PDA to report the game events that are received at the office, although the Internet connection has to be provided in order to proceed with game report.

Point-shaving - illegal practice of deliberately limiting the number of points scored by one's team in an athletic contest, as in return for a payment from gamblers to ensure winnings.

Pool or Pari-mutuel betting - situation where the operator takes out a percentage of the amount bet and the rest is divided amongst winning players.

Punter - a person who makes a bet, a person who gambles.

Rating - rating of a *scout's* performance when covering a game from 1 (very good) to 5 (very bad).

Real-time data - relates to computer systems that update information at the same rate as the event happens in real-life and allows to process it sufficiently rapidly to be able to control the source of the constantly changing data.

Scout - a person who is attending and reporting live sports events in detail by using a personalized PDA device adapted to needs of *Runningball*.

Subsidiary company - a company that is partly or completely owned by another company that holds a controlling interest in the subsidiary company.

Supporter - a person working for Game Supervision Department, supervising LIVE games and not only helps the *scout* during the games but also checks his/her performance. He/she also continues entering data in case the connection collapses. Then the *scout* reports to the *supporter* over phone.

TV Scout - scout who is reporting data of a sports event by watching it on-line or on TV.

UEFA - the Union of European Football Associations.

VTB United League - International professional basketball league which is sponsored by VTB Bank and intends to unite the leading basketball clubs of Eastern Europe and Northern Europe.

CBA - Chinese Basketball Association.

Introduction

During the last decade, sport has become a multimillion dollar business, not only for the professional athletes or sports clubs, but also for companies that provide transmissions of these sports events and companies that work with the outcomes of sports games. It is no longer seen only as a pastime or a hobby but rather as a business which has been a result of the process of commercialization. The evolution of technologies and internet possibilities has enabled millions of sports viewers all over the world to start earning or losing money via betting on sports events. For example, the biggest event of 2014 - the Football World Cup was seen as a bonanza for many businesses, including the digital sports media business Perform Group and sports bookmakers due to the large amount of people willing to bet their money in order to gain a profit as well as to gain satisfaction from predicting the outcomes of matches.

Betting markets have grown rapidly during the past decade. On-line sports betting has taken first place in on-line gaming according to Gambling Data estimates. In the UK alone, sports betting is the biggest contributor at £650m, or around 38% of the total net gaming revenue (Gambling Data, 2011). But how do these markets function and who is providing them with the data necessary to work with? How do bookmakers know what odds to offer to their clients and how do they receive the results even before the client does?

There are numerous enterprises that normally are not known to the public. The secret of the best offers that come from bookmakers hides in the fact that they are the first to know the results of sports games. Bookmakers have various sources apart from television transmissions to depend on. This dissertation intends to give an insight into the workings of the betting industry, with a focus on sports data collection and transmission, and in particular the activities of the sports data provider company - Runningball.

I believe that it is of interest to investigate how the multi-billion betting industry functions and how the major media and sports data provider Perform Group has developed over the past 6 years. The company was founded in 2007 and already has reached revenues of £187 million in 2013 (Perform Group Plc, 2014). Its rapid growth is seen as a topic of great interest in order to investigate how sports has transformed from a hobby to practice or watch into international business worth billions.

This dissertation addresses the new business of sports betting, including the collecting and distributing of sports data, and how this business involves working in a multinational and intercultural environment. The company under consideration is Runningball and its parent company, Perform Group. Both companies work internationally and offer sports data. Perform

Group is the parent company and owns some internationally best known sports media companies. Runningball is the subsidiary company that provides its clients with instant sports data from the events across the globe. In this context close attention will be given to languages and their role as the main tool of successful performance of Runningball. This derives from the *supporters'* work which directly demands the use of other languages, mainly English and Spanish, apart from the native language, which in most cases is Portuguese, or German when considering the second office of this company that is based in Graz, Austria. Unfortunately, data from the office in Graz was not available and could not supplement the field research in this dissertation as it would be of great interest to compare the viewpoints of people with different nationalities and different cultural belonging.

Comparing to the past the difference is that today the popularity of betting on sports events has grown significantly. The rapid growth of the multinational enterprise Perform Group is an example of this; it started its activity in 2007 and since then has become number one leader in sports digital media. Perform Group is mentioned in this dissertation due to the fact that it is a parent company of Runningball - the company at the centre of this study. It is justified also by the advancement of technologies, easier access to betting on-line, a bigger interest in new ways of gaining profit in an untraditional and seemingly effortless manner providing that the person has a good understanding of specific sports clubs that he/she is ready to bet on.

The topic of the dissertation emerged while working in the growing company Runningball. The actual workplace does not reveal its complex nature as multinational environment until a typical day of work starts when a possibility to speak with *scouts* (people working for the company who are watching the real-time sports event and reporting them) all across the globe arises. There is a clear division of time for employees. They already know how to adapt to time zones and the unusual working hours. The company works 24 hours per day and 7 days per week. There are no holidays for the business. As it has been said: "Money never sleeps." And neither does the on-line betting business. During the night time in Europe there are hundreds of football games in Latin America running, basketball games in the United States, ice-hockey games in Canada, the eastern end of Russia or even volleyball games in Asia are taking their course. As the world never really sleeps, neither does this business.

The dissertation presented pays close attention to the role of languages and how they help to provide a high quality instant data. Besides it takes into consideration cultural differences as a component of business due to its global scope of receiving sports data. The principal language of use in the workplace is the *lingua franca* of today – English, followed by the Spanish language and Portuguese. Furthermore other languages such as French, German, Italian, Russian, Latvian and all

the other languages that *supporters* are capable of using as a working asset are used. Realization of the amount of countries in which the sports games are covered leads to astonishment of how small the world has become via the Internet. The ability to communicate in spite of cultural differences or language differences is the key factor of success of the business. Therefore an analysis of data exchange and reception has been conducted in order to apprehend the value that can be attributed to *scouts'* and *supporters'* linguistic abilities.

An improvement of language skills among workers has been considered as a following step in continuing the company's successful progress. A suggestion of the dissertation would be to invest in the development of employees' abilities by providing either material similar to a language manual or providing training courses available to all.

Research questions and objectives

Today the world is still suffering from the economic crisis that crushed the world in 2008 and left deep consequences in the employment sector. It has been a difficult period of time for almost every economy in the world; nevertheless, it has been said that the period of crisis is the best time to start a business. And maybe exactly this thought was in Simon Denyer's mind, CEO of Perform Group, as it was right before the crisis that the company was established, in 2007. This dissertation explores a considerably new business based on sports events data - sports betting and companies working in the field and intends to demonstrate how languages have become the basic tool of international business.

Advancement in technologies has allowed creativity to emerge and new businesses to appear every day. Thus the business of on-line gambling appeared during the past two decades. The dissertation aims to demonstrate how the Internet and a love for sports have developed into new type of business, namely the sports data provider company Runningball, which is the object of study here.

Runningball and its Parent company Perform Group are one of the top sports data and media providers for bookmakers and are in the centre of this dissertation. The main focus of the dissertation is to examine how cultural identity and the diversity of languages used are recognized in the work of sports data company Runningball. The questions the author of the dissertation seeks to answer are:

How has sport taken a different course and become a profitable pastime for non-athletes, viewers, fans, or others that are interested in assisting sports events?

What connects sports data providers, sports media providers and bookmakers?

Does cultural identity influence daily communication between supporters working at the office in Portugal and scouts that report sports events from all over the world?

How can employees' capacity to speak various languages contribute to improving work quality at the company?

Organization of the dissertation

The Dissertation is divided into 5 parts. The first part consists of a literature review and a history of the betting industry. Chapter 2 presents the overview of the business at the centre of our study, scope of the considerably new type of business, a description of companies and importance of real-time data. Part 3 of the dissertation aims to assess the role of languages and consider how the components of successful communication, like the capacity to speak other languages, is the main asset of Runningball. Attention is given also to cultural relations, in particular the process of creating stereotypes and the role of cultural tolerance, due to the fact that this business requires intercultural communication between *scouts* and *supporters*. Finally Chapter 4 presents an exploratory data analysis of questionnaires distributed among employees of Runningball. Conclusions are drawn and suggestions for future research presented in Chapter 5.

The following Figure 1 visualizes how the structure of the dissertation has been developed.

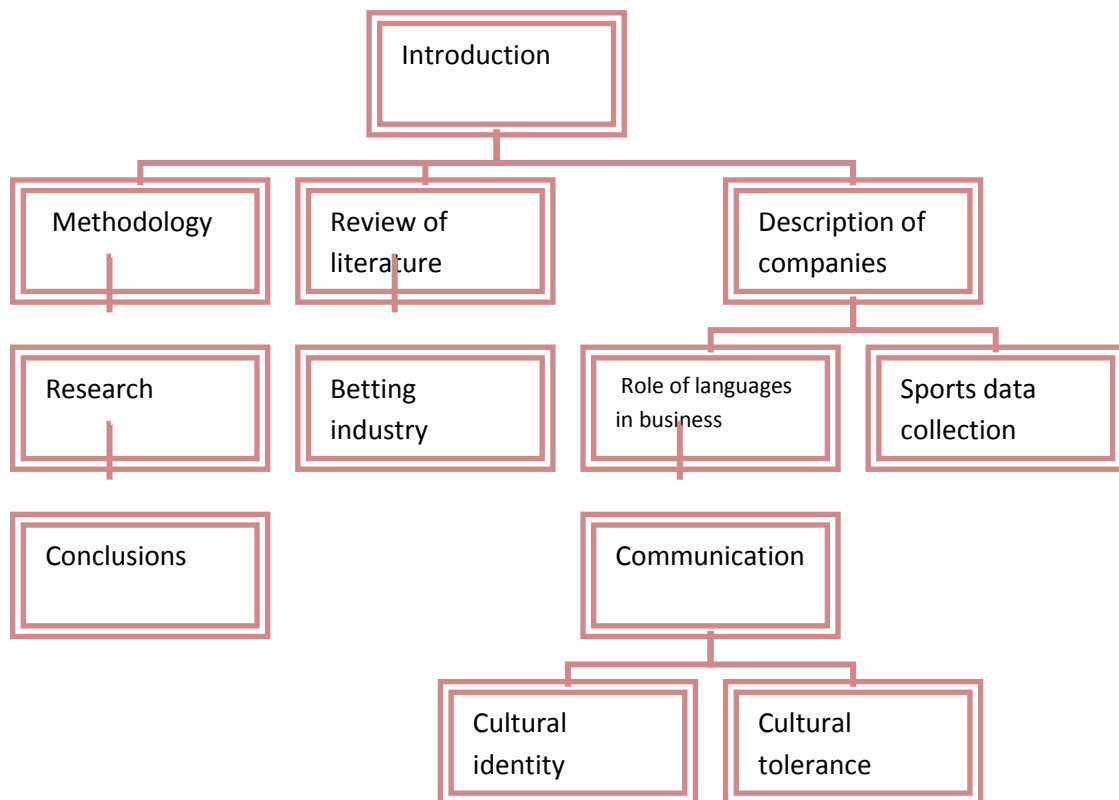


Figure 1. Outline of the dissertation

Chapter 1

The Betting Industry

1.1. Introduction to Betting

Betting systems have existed for as long as gambling. David (1998) mentions that ancient Egyptians and Greeks were the first to start playing games based on probability or luck. The author mentions Fermat, Pascal, Wallis, and Newton as the founders of the first theories of probability. Those were the first attempts to find answers to one of the most complicated processes - possibilities, and tried to learn how to predict the outcomes basing on numeric explanations. He also points out that Abraham de Moivre, author of the "Doctrine of Chances" developed in 1718, developed a theory based on the demonstration of how to calculate probabilities by using logarithms if the numbers involved are large, then a problem involving conditional probabilities with an exposition of how to sum a series by differencing the terms until constant differences are obtained (David, 1998). Moivre was the first scientist who understood the notion of standard deviation and was the first to introduce the following integral probability formula, (David, 1998. pg. 168):

$$(a + b)^n - nab^{n-1} - b^n$$

$$(a + b)^n$$

This theory has developed over years and today technologies have enabled people to compute new theories of probability. Skiena (2001) had started with a simple programming to predict an outcome of a football game, which in general might seem as a simple process as typically there are only 3 possible outcomes. His first intentions are revealed in the following formula:

$$P_x = \frac{(\text{point scored by team X}) + (\text{point allowed by team Y})}{2x(\text{games played})}$$

$$P_y = \frac{[(\text{point scored by team Y}) + (\text{point allowed by team X})]}{2x(\text{games played})}$$

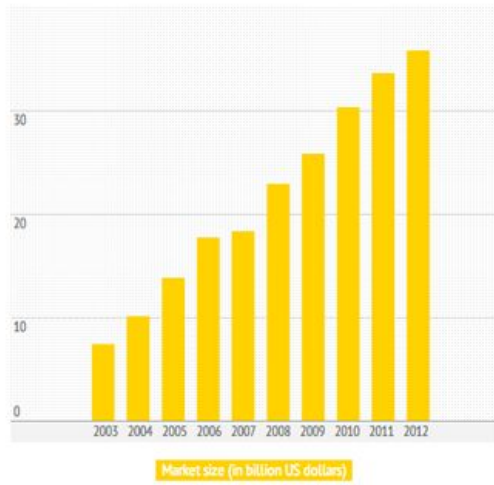
Even though this formula is quite incomplete, these were the first intentions to predict the outcomes of sports events which started in 1977, long before personal computers had registered on the public consciousness. This was the time when manual accounts and a human logic were at the centre of the complicated process of game predictions.

The world of gambling has changed greatly over the years. Traditional probability games such as roulette, cards or dice have been complemented with new types of gambling, in this case sports betting. Today predicting outcomes of sports events involves a great responsibility for people who prepare odds for bookmakers. The possibilities of actual outcomes of sports events never have a total certainty and therefore statistical analysis of teams/players/participants are used to provide probit models (statistical probability based on deviations from the mean of a normal distribution). Levitt (2003, p.2) suggests that “due to the fact that bookmakers are more skilled at predicting the outcomes of games than bettors they are able to systematically exploit bettor biases by choosing prices that deviate from the market clearing price”. As a consequence bookmakers’ success greatly depends on the successful analysis of the past data available. In contrast to casinos, lottos, or slot machines where odds are stacked in their favour as the law of large numbers dictates profits for the house, the bookmakers take a greater risk because if they set the wrong line on sporting events they can lose money in the long run. Furthermore, betting involves predicting the outcomes of events that can be analysed previously on the basis of previous data so bookmakers take a greater risk because they are offering odds for bettors whose skills allow them to achieve positive expected outcomes. According to Levitt (2003, p.3), “bookmakers, in spite of taking risks from predicting outcomes of events, will set the point-spread that would equalize the number of bets made for both teams and gain mainly from the commission charged to the bettors”.

The betting industry has developed intensely during the last decade and today we can notice the expansion of sports offered for punters. This has happened as a result of Internet advancement. In the past people used to bet mainly on horse races or cricket matches where the outcome of the event was the measure of success. Nowadays on-line bookmakers offer a wide variety of options and punters are invited to place bets not only on the result of the event, but also on in-play events, for example, the number of yellow cards in a football match, the winner of the first set in a tennis or volleyball match, and many more depending on sport chosen.

On-line betting has also evolved greatly in the last decade. According to a study made by H2 Gambling Capital (2012), presented in figure 2, the on-line gambling market has grown a staggering 483% from 7.4 billion (US dollar) in 2003 into a market worth 35.8 billion (US dollar) in 2012.

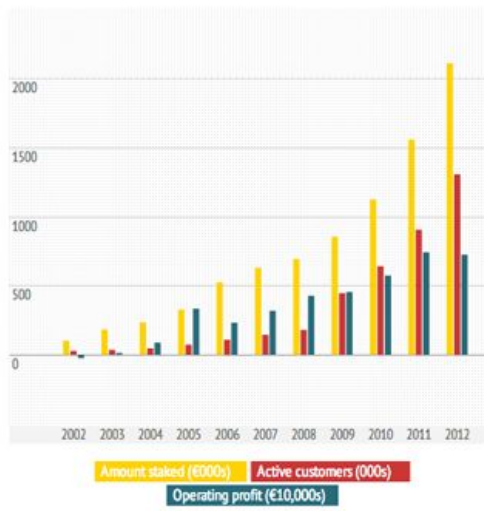
Growth of the world online gambling market



Data from H2 Gambling Capital (via Statista)
<http://tch.vc/gamblingonline>

made with infogr.am

Growth of Paddy Power online



Graph shows the dramatic growth of Paddy Power's online business in terms of total euros staked annually, the number of active customers and operating profits

made with infogr.am

Figure 2. Growth of the World On-line Gambling Market (Statistics Portal, 2012)¹

The figure clearly shows how profitable this considerably new kind of business has become in a short period of time, during which the proliferation of Internet access has made the process possible.

¹ Size of the Online Gaming Market from 2003 to 2015 (in billion U.S. dollars). Available at: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/270728/market-volume-of-online-gaming-worldwide/>, accessed on 19.07.2014.

1.2. Legislation and Gambling

Gambling has already been a question of concern for a long period of time. There are still countries that have laws against gambling. For example, the USA has strong regulations on gambling and sports betting, which is forbidden in most of the states; only in the State of Nevada is it legal to do betting and gambling. Russian legislation, enacted in 2006, prohibits on-line gambling altogether. The Israel Gambling Law has made gambling and playing games of chance prohibited in the country. In India gambling is perceived as a banned offence. Banning games of chance has a direct connection with the countries' political stance and, in many cases, with their dominant culture and religion.

However, not only are governments trying to restrict sports gambling, but sports organizations feel threatened as well and are concerned about the integrity of the game. The European Parliament (as cited in Hawkswood, 2011, p.14) comments that:

On-line gambling poses a potential threat to sports and sports bets are a form of commercial exploitation of sporting competitions therefore a sports organizers right should be established in order to provide a 'fair return' to both amateur and professional sport.

Additionally, the president of FIFA (as cited in Hawkswood, 2011, p.16) highlights that:

Modern technology, and especially the opportunities for sports betting via the Internet, represents an insidious danger to the integrity of the game.

In response to that, a Code of Ethics was developed in 2006 which forbids officials, players and players' agents to gamble on football matches with which they are connected and a sports monitoring tool was established in 2007. Since then many more cases of game fixing or point shaving have been detected and the responsible parties penalized for the fraud.

The reasons for prohibiting gambling vary from country to country. According to McKelvey (2004), the USA is concerned about the transparency of outcomes of sports events as betting might give reason to unfounded speculation of game-fixing and point-shaving as well as increasing the number of people addicted to gambling. Many cases of fraud and game-fixing have been uncovered which have earned bettors money over recent years. In Italy, for example, the highest profile Italian suspensions have been given to such players as Cristiano Doni, Giuseppe Signori, or Juventus coach - Antonio Conte, after their dishonest playing of the game by making their teams lose on purpose to win bettors' money (Reuters, 2014). Meanwhile, moreover, legalized betting and

gambling has become a source of raising revenues for states and cities in face of the budget deficit in the USA and other countries (in the separate States of the USA and mainly European countries).

Contrary to other countries that ban betting, there are European countries that embrace gambling as a new way of collecting consumers' taxes. Paton et al. (2002) affirm that governments which allow betting make choices which balance the economic benefits of this activity with the ethical and legal concerns it raises. Unlike other countries that ban betting, the UK market is a relatively liberal environment. It can be supported by the fact that when Internet began entering into daily life in 1999-2000, the turnover of the UK betting industry was approximately £7.3 Billion (Paton et al., 2002). This leaves no question about why these countries enable betting industries to develop in their countries in spite of all the ethical arguments, and a swift change in regulating on-line betting has been experienced over the past 4 years. Figure 3 (p.11) represents the change of on-line regulation between the years 2010 and 2014 (PwC's Gaming Centre, 2014). The Figure represents the change in regulations in Europe although there is evidence of change in the rest of the world likewise. There has been evidence that even the United States of America with their strict law system on betting is starting to see the benefits of betting and consumers' tax money that it can bring, therefore changing the legislation concerning gambling in other states apart from Nevada.

Figure 1: State of online regulation in June 2010 vs January 2014

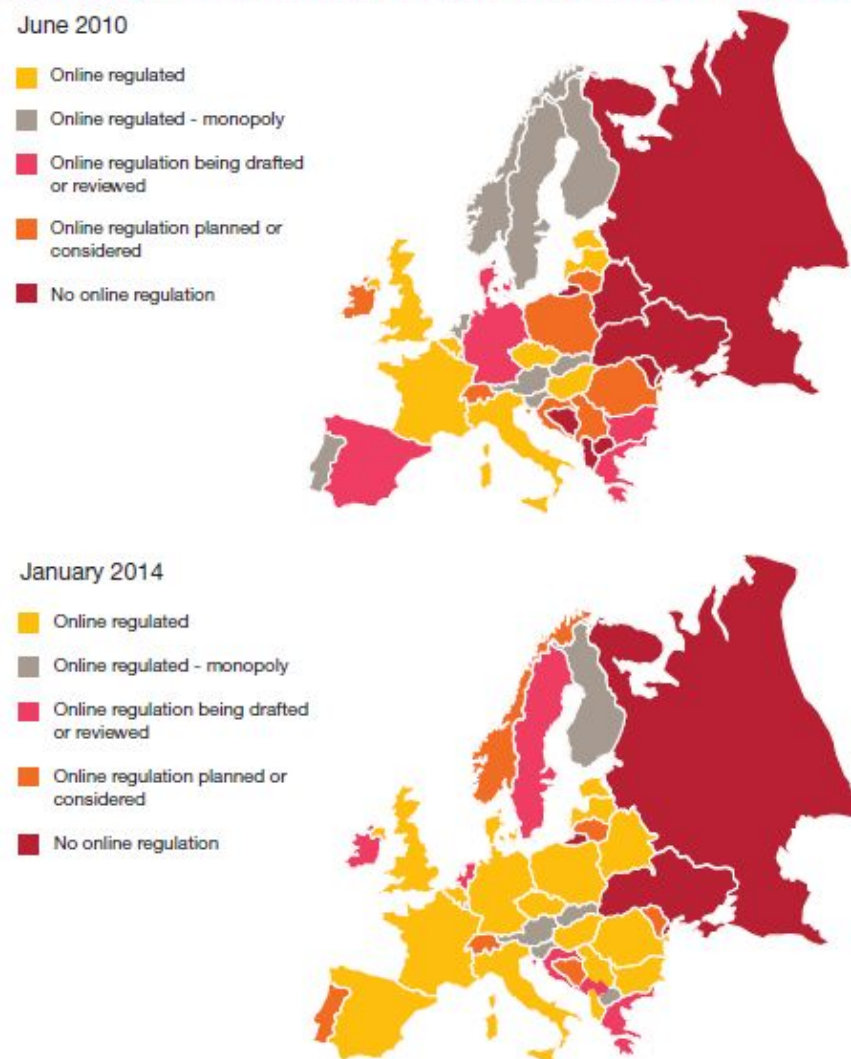


Figure 3. State of on-line regulation (PWC's Gaming Center, 2014)²

Another important factor to pay attention to is the on-line gambling and Internet accessibility as it has become the fastest way to participate in games of prediction. Figure 4 (p. 12) reveals how the appearance of the Internet has influenced local markets in a situation where gambling has been the main source of money coming from betting and gambling markets for a long period of time. The Internet has provided bettors with a wider range of possibilities and has greatly influenced national gambling markets, consequently leading to reconsidering countries' regulations and laws concerning betting. The main problem that on-line gambling creates is the easiness of access to

² PwC's Gaming Centre (2014). *Online Betting and Gaming Regulation*. PricewaterhouCoopers LLP, February, 2014. PDF

international betting sites, which compromises the national market and therefore tax money from it. In order to gamble, people do not have to dislocate themselves any more. They place their bets or play games on money right from their home desktop or smartphone/tablet from any location possible as long as there is an internet provider available.

Model of European Betting Market:



Figure 4. Model of European Betting Market (Friis, 2002)³

Laffey (2005) confirms that the year 2000 was a turning point in betting offers as the Internet became an enabling technology for new ventures that offered P-2-P (person-to-person) betting on-line. According to the author, from then on people were able to place bets against each other through websites, thus cutting out the bookmakers. Koessler et al. (2012) explain it as the situation where individuals are betting against one another and where the odds can change over the course of the betting period. These changes in odds create the necessity to receive the fastest game events information possible for this type of bettors or bookmakers.

In addition, the development of other technologies such as tablets and smart phones have made Internet access even faster than ever. People are able to place their bets and follow sports events on-line being in any place, being it a train, office, home or on a street. Furthermore, punters can place their bets not only on the local events, but on the events from any part of the world as well as on wide variety of events happening while the game is still running. The Internet coverage in most parts of the world is sufficient not to create any inconvenience to its users any more. Especially when considering developed countries where on-line presence has become an indispensable part of life.

³ Friis, J. et.al. (2002). Mobile Sports Betting - a future perspective. *Dissertation*. IT - University. Available at: [http://www.itu.dk/people/jens/speciale.pdf]. Accessed on 02.05.2014. Pp.52.

On-line betting has evolved greatly and today instead of betting only on the result of the game, on-line bookers offer to make bets on game events while the game is still running. As examples can be mentioned the number of yellow cards, the player who would score the first goal and similar. Therefore the necessity appears to have real-time data which provides an ample range of information.

1.3. The Global On-line Betting Market

The data reveals that nowadays, the on-line gaming market represents one of the fastest growing segments of the gambling industry representing about US\$30 billion gross gains globally in 2012. UK and Europe take the biggest piece of the pie by producing 54% of all the profit from on-line gambling (Garlitos, 2013). The legislation on gambling in Europe has been the major factor to influence these results. Matuszak (2013) expects a considerable growth of on-line gaming as still in many countries that are considered the biggest markets, for example, U.S., China, Japan, South Korea, on-line gambling is forbidden. As already discussed previously, many countries start to see on-line gambling and gaming as a profitable source of raising tax money. The author suggests that even countries with strong traditions should start reorganizing legislation that considers gambling in order to raise their incomes and help resolve the consequences of financial crisis of 2008.

The on-line gaming market includes various types of activities, each with its own business models and technology. They include:

- Sports betting;
- On-line poker;
- Casino games;
- On-line bingo;
- On-line lottery.

The estimated figures of the market share of different forms of remote gambling are represented in the following Figure 5, p. 15.

Market share of the different forms of gaming online in 2009



Figure 5. The popularity of wagering (VIADEN New Cooperation with Play Tech)⁴

Sports betting has become a popular means of earning some extra money, especially in Europe. For some, it has even become a daily sport to predict the outcomes of sports events. Consequently the number of on-line betting sites is increasing rapidly. In spite of the possibility of making profit from figuring out the most probable result of sports event, such activity is seen as a vicious trait that can lead to serious health problems. On-line betting can go out of control and lead to gambling addiction. Internet makes a great part of our daily life and the easiness of access it generates the problem to persist. The biggest concern of governments is the augmenting number of compulsive gamblers. The U.S. is one of the countries that is trying to ban the gambling. According to data of NCPG (National Council of Problem Gambling) in U.S. 10 387 enrolments were made to receive publicly funded professional gambling treatment in 2013⁵. But opinions vary, and on the one hand, gambling is seen to cause health damage, such as addiction problems, while, on the other hand it is seen as a good way to raise the country's tax money. The National Council on Problem Gambling was founded to increase public awareness of pathological gambling, to ensure the widespread availability of treatment for problem gamblers and their families, and to encourage research and programs for prevention and education.

⁴ VIADEN New Corporation with Play Tech, IGaming Market Tendencies, <http://www.viaden.com/products/gambling-industry-facts.html> , accessed on 02.04.2014.

⁵ National Council of Problem Gambling. <http://www.ncpgambling.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageID=1>, accessed on 02.04.2014.

Following on-line sports events takes an important place in Internet users' consumption time. According to Global Sports Media data, sports fans consuming sports on-line range from 65% of the adult population in France and up to 97% of the urban internet connected adult population in China (see Figure 6). This leads us to think that people in fact enjoy following sports events and most probably are more tempted to bet on-line in order to reward their sports consumption time. The difference from on-line betting and watching sports on television is that being on-line allows people to multi-task. They are able not only to watch a game, but to watch several games at the same time and even place bets on the supposed happenings of events or outcomes of games.



Figure 6. Global Sports Media Consumption Report (Global Sports Media, 2013)⁶

All in all sports betting still remains a polemic question to be considered. Its legalization might be seen as a threat to health because of the addiction it might create and on the other hand, it might become a profitable way of collecting tax money. Either way, the sports industry still gains as, if betting is forbidden in the country, the question of the integrity of the game might not be raised. On the other hand, if betting is allowed the sports clubs can gain financial help by publicity, and bigger viewer interest in assisting the sports events.

The following chapter introduces the companies under study - Perform Group and Runningball and will explore the business that has grown from sports and sports betting industry.

⁶ Global Sports Media Consumption Report (2013). Available at: [<http://www.sportbusiness.com/tv-sports-markets/global-sports-media-consumption-report>], accessed on 04.04.2014.

Chapter 2

Perform Group and Runningball

2.1. PERFORM GROUP

Although Runningball is the company of main interest, it is of great importance to consider its parent company - Perform Group in order to apprehend the dimension and complexity of the sports media and sports data business. The company named *Perform Group* was established in 2007 through the merger of *Premium TV Ltd* and *Inform Ltd*⁷ and is head-quartered in Feltham, United Kingdom. The Group provides live sports events (Watch&Bet, Watch&Trade, ePlayer, Soccerway.com, livesport.tv, livebasketball.tv), sports news (OMNISPORT, Goal.com, Sporting News, Macholik.com, Sahadan.com, Spox.com, Voetbalzone), sports data (Runningball, Sportal.de, Sportal.com.au), and sports statistics to its customers that include on-line bookmakers, global media companies, mobile operators, telecommunications companies and broadcasters as demonstrated in Figure 7. The company is in constant growth. According to data of Perform Group yearly reports

Key Financial Metrics	FY 2013	FY 2012	Change
Statutory measures:			
Revenue (£'000)	208,135	151,607	+37%
Statutory profit before tax (£'000)	4,058	16,290	-75%
Adjusted measures:			
Adjusted EBITDA (£'000)*	36,402	37,502	-3%
Adjusted basic earnings per share (pence)*	10.4	11.2	-7%

Table 1. Perform Group yearly report⁸ (Perform Group Ltd, 2013)

⁷ Parker, K. (2007). Premium TV and Inform Group to Merge. *Access Industries*. available at: [http://www.accessindustries.com/n_090407.html], accessed on 16.05.2014.

⁸ Perform Group Yearly Reports (2013). http://otp.investis.com/clients/uk/performgroup/rns/regulatory-story.aspx?cid=431&newsid=396018

the company has increased its revenues by 37% only in one years time (see Table 1). Each year it acquires new companies which provide denser coverage of sports events across the globe. The latest companies to be added to the pool of *Perform Group* were the leading Dutch football site *Voetbalzone.nl*, a venture with *American Business City Journals Inc.* to create a new company *Sporting News*, *Opta*, and *Ad Networks KK* (Japan) all acquired in 2013. According to Perform Group’s annual report, its revenues during 2013 grew by 37% and reached £208million⁹. And during the first quarter of 2014 it has continued its successful work by reaching year on year growth of 32% to £56.9m in comparison to £43.0m at the first quarter of 2013¹⁰.



Figure 7. Business at a Glance (Perform Group Plc, 2014)¹¹

The Group expects to secure future growth by enhancing its rights portfolio, expanding geographically, increasing its audience, pursuing complementary acquisitions and launching on new platforms. The company is based on on-line presence. The expectations of growth can be supported by the fact that the number of internet users worldwide is still growing. According to the World Internet penetration rates (Figure 8), the world’s biggest countries such as Russia, China, and India are still in the process of providing Internet coverage to a wider range of the population

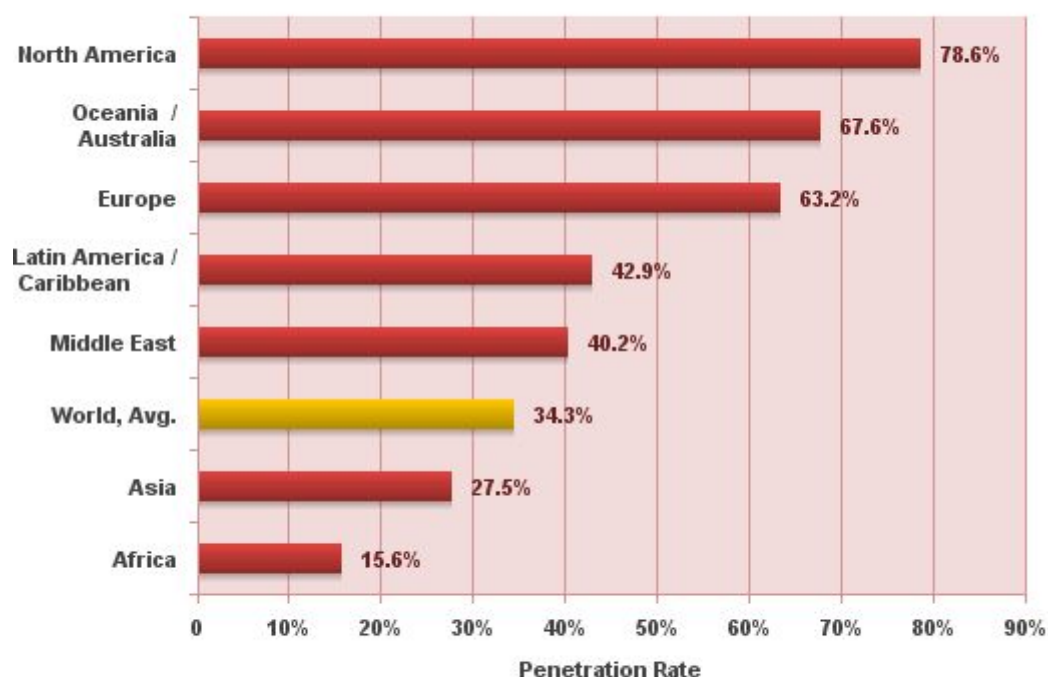
⁹ Perform Group plc, (2014). Full Year Results for the year to 31 December 2013. Available at: [http://investors.performgroup.com/~media/Files/P/Perform-Group-IR/reports-and-presentations/PERFORM%202013%20Annual%20Report.pdf], accessed on 19.04.2014.

¹⁰ Perform Group Plc, (2014). Perform Group plc Q1 Interim Management Statement. Available at: [http://investors.performgroup.com/regulatory-news.aspx], accessed on 17.05.2014.

¹¹ Perform Group Plc, (2012). *Annual Report and Accounts of 2012. Successful Execution of Growth Strategy*. PDF

as the rates reveal that these countries (along with Africa) have the lowest Internet coverage in a world scale. And even in the US there is still a room for augmenting the number of internet users (79%). As Figure 8 reveals, *Perform Group* might expect growth even in such developed regions as Oceania and Australia and Europe due to the fact that generations change and soon nearly every person may become a regular internet user.

World Internet Penetration Rates by Geographic Regions - 2012 Q2



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm
 Penetration Rates are based on a world population of 7,017,846,922 and 2,405,518,376 estimated Internet users on June 30, 2012.
 Copyright © 2012, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Figure 8. World Internet Penetration Rates (Internet World Statistics, 2012)¹²

Therefore Perform Group might expect an augmentation in number of users from these previously mentioned countries. In addition, Clarke (2011) suggests, in the report for the global sports market, that the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries and the Middle East are the new commercial opportunities for sports events internationally and locally. However, an important success factor in these cases depends on the flexibility of legislation since these are the countries where gambling

¹² Internet World Stats, (2013). World Internet Penetration Rates. Available at: [<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>], accessed on 07.06.2014.

and betting are not so well received as they are in European countries. As well as the economic growth, the well being of people should come first. Nevertheless, the biggest part of the world's population (approximately two thirds) have not yet become internet users due to bad living conditions or any other possible reasons. The process of providing Internet access and devices for using the Internet in less developed regions is still advancing. According to ITU World Communication and ICT Indicators database, the international internet bandwidth is a key factor in providing high-speed internet access to growing numbers of users and has grown exponentially over the last five years (from 11000 GBit/s in 2006 to 80 000 GBit/s in 2011). Disparities between regions of available internet bandwidth per Internet user still remain and are represented in Figure 9.

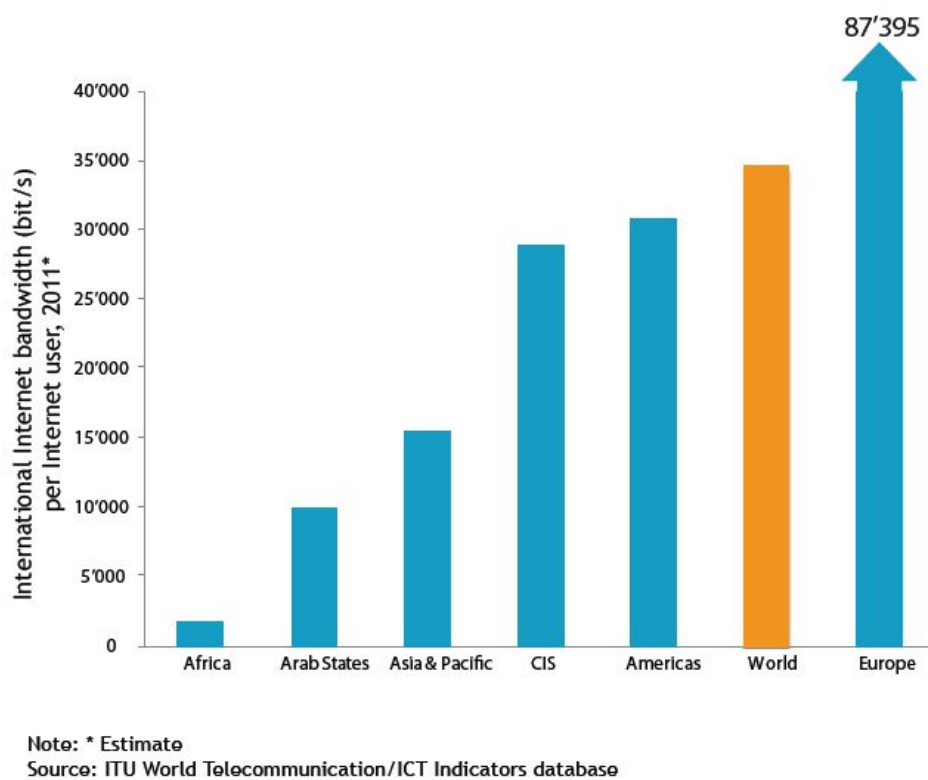


Figure 9. Available Internet bandwidth per Internet user (International Telecommunication Union, 2011)¹³

¹³ International Telecommunication Union (2011). ICT Facts and Figures, World in 2011. *International Telecommunication Union, ICT Data and Statistics*. Available at: [<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/facts/2011/>], accessed on 16.05.2014

This data can be complemented by the rising number of mobile Internet users (see Figure 10). The difference between the users from developed and developing countries is the availability of devices that provide broadband connection. People in developed countries usually have a tendency to use mobile-broadband networks in addition to fixed-broadband connections, while for people in developing countries mobile-broadband is often the only access method available. In Africa, for example, mobile-broadband penetration has reached 4% in comparison to less than 1% for fixed-broadband penetration (ITU World Communication/ICT Indicators Database). The price difference between mobile phones and personal computers, economic factors and quality of life are the main reasons for these differences.

Global fixed broadband and mobile Internet penetration (%) 2008-2017

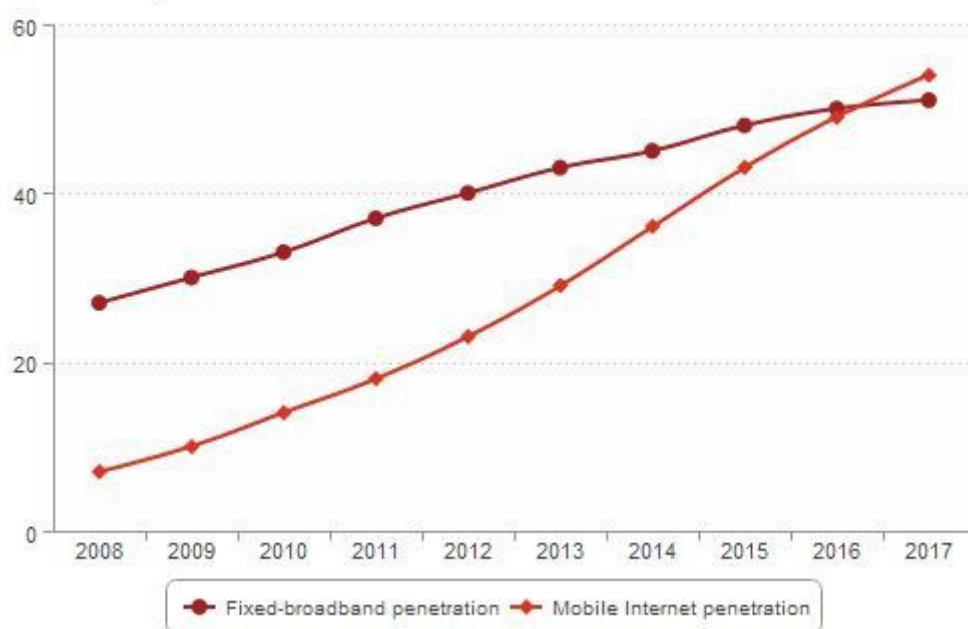


Figure 10. Broadband and Mobile Internet Penetration (DSA.com, 2014)¹⁴.

Figure 10 reveals the latest tendencies in technology usage. Internet users prefer to use their mobile smartphones to access the internet, especially in developing countries, as, in many cases, it is the only connection means available. Considering Perform, the company pays close attention to this trend and offers phone applications to its clients to facilitate their access to information and betting possibilities. In the vision of the company, India, Africa and China are the future markets, that will enable a further revenue growth also for

¹⁴ DSA.com, (2014). Global Fixed Broadband and Mobile Internet Penetration (%) 2008-2017. Available at: [<http://developmentalsenseagain.weebly.com/internet-access.html>], accessed on 9.10.2014.

the betting industry. This opinion is based on the fact that the legislation, technologies, economy and culture are changing in the world of today making us see the future with high hopes of a better life for each and every one.

During the year 2013, the company invested great amounts of money in technologies and software development. It still keeps looking forward to improving its business. Constant innovations and software updates are part of the plans of Perform Group to grow and provide its clients with the best quality products.

2.2. Sports Data providers - Companies Working for the Group

Perform Group is the parent company for numerous enterprises and has grown into one of the biggest companies in the field of betting across the globe. The assortment of Perform Group's offers has been mentioned previously in Figure 7. Next we will look at the various companies that are part of Perform Group's portfolio.

Perform Group acquired Runningball in 2012 for €120m (\$153m)¹⁵, OPTA (£40m)¹⁶ in July 2013 and Perform Sporting News (top 7 in US) in 2013. Watch&Bet, ePlayer, Goal, Omnisport, GSM (Global Sports Media), WatchandTrade, livesport.tv, Voetbalzone were also acquired by Perform Group and are the companies that contribute to the success of the business by providing dense coverage of the most important sports leagues all over the world.

One of the first companies that Perform Group integrated into its portfolio was Dutch company GSM (Global Sports Media), one of the leading on-line publishers of global sports information. The acquisition led to the development of *Soccerway.com* in 2009. Today Soccerway is one of the leading football websites covering over 1000 football leagues and cups from more than 134 countries. It is the world's largest football database owned and powered by Perform Group¹⁷.

ePlayer is Perform Group's leading VOD (video on demand) sports platform and was launched in 2008. ePlayer was taken over by Perform Group in 2010. It works with the largest sports rights holders and leading on-line content publishers in order to reach millions of sports fans around the world. It has been recognized as number one in video content distribution in the UK, France, Italy, Germany and US and is operating in 26 countries around the world¹⁸.

The year 2011 was marked by the acquisition of the largest football website in the world, Goal.com, for \$30m. The acquisition gave Perform Group a major brand and major worldwide coverage¹⁹.

¹⁵ Bradshaw, T. (2012). Perform Buys Runningball for €120m. www.ft.com. *Companies. Media*. Available at: [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/f024bed6-9f78-11e1-a255-00144feabdc0.html#axzz30MltrHsI].

¹⁶ Jones, A. , Cookson, R. (2013). Perform Group to Buy Opta Sports Data for £ 40m. www.ft.com. *Companies. Media*. Available at: [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e20a0da2-e3aa-11e2-91a3-00144feabdc0.html#axzz30MltrHsI].

¹⁷ Perform Group, (2009). Perform Acquires majority share in Soccerway football portal. Available at: [http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/2241538], accessed on 13.04.2014.

¹⁸ ePlayer Progressive VOD. About the company. Available at: [http://eplayer.performgroup.com/about-us/], accessed on 13.04.2014.

¹⁹ Perform News (2011). PERFORM takes major step into direct-to-consumer market with acquisition of Goal.com. Available at: [http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/2299230], accessed on 13.04.2014.

Goal offers news, live scores, match previews, and editorials from 32 country editions from more than 50 countries around the world. It has reached over 32 million football fans that trust its content.

About the same time, two leading German companies in the distribution and commercialisation of sports data across connected digital platforms were acquired by the Perform Group: Spox Media GmbH and Media Sports Digital GmbH.

Being the market-leading international sports news agency, Omnisport is working under Perform Group's name and offers global sports videos, editorials, audios and sports content data. The agency combines video, editorial, images and data across multiple platforms (television, on-line, smart-phones and tablets) and is available in 11 languages. The company provides data for Italian *Serie A* games, Brazilian *Serie A*, Portugal's *Liga Sagres* and Australian Hyundai A-League. The feeds of Omnisport allow its clients to micro-manage individual social media strategies and offer access to the viral videos which can improve the penetration into wider markets. It offers regional feed options in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Dutch, Turkish, and Polish²⁰.

Another on-line sports data provider working for Perform Group is Watch&Bet. It was launched in 2005 in UK and works with 44 leading global sports-books. It streams over 17.000 fully produced live events every year, which include various sports starting from football, tennis, basketball, badminton, squash, volleyball, snooker, darts, ice hockey, cricket, golf, rugby and ending with beach soccer²¹.

In 2012, Perform Group expanded its coverage to Turkey through the acquisition of Mackolik. It owns and operates a number of Turkey's leading independent sports websites, including mackolik.com and sahadan.com. Mackolik's websites contain a mix of original sports editorial content, live scores and social features including forums and moderated chat²². In addition the same year was marked by adding *Sportal.de* to the Perform Group's list of companies. The German

²⁰ Omnisport. Unrivalled Video, Editorial, Data and Audio for all Platforms. Available at: [<http://omnisport.performgroup.com/>]. Accessed on 13.04.2014.

²¹ Watch&Bet. Progressive Sportsbook Broadcasting. Available at: [<http://watchandbet.performgroup.com/>], accessed on 13.04.2014.

²² Perform Group News (2012). Perform acquires leading Turkish digital sports mcompany & update ahead of closed period. Available at: [<http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/2825687>], accessed on 13.04.2014.

sports media company, Sportal GmbH, ensured *Perform Group's* presence in the German market as it is seen as one of the greatest opportunities by being the largest digital economies in Europe²³.

During the past year, the company made one of its biggest investments and acquired the sports data supplier Opta for £40m²⁴. Opta specialises in providing statistical information and player performance data from soccer leagues in Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands to media clients and clubs themselves. It expertises in collecting, tagging and distributing the best sports data available. Figure 11 represents a visualization of the product offered by Opta. Opta offers prevision of fully timestamped meta-data, unique graphical content, and compelling editorial insight. Figure 11 helps visualize the content of sports data as well as representing one type of statistical data provided by one of the companies that are owned and controlled by Perform Group.



Figure 11. Statistical game data about players offered by Opta (Optasports.com, 2014)²⁵

During the past year, Perform Group acquired 4 businesses: Voetbalzone, the number one independent Dutch football site, OPTA, leading player in the provision of sports content to the media sector, Sporting News, US sports media, and finally Perform Group acquired the assets of Ad Networks KK which had been the Japanese advertising sales agent for the group in Japan (Perform Annual Report 2013). Since its foundation, Perform Group has grown rapidly and still maintains future plans for growth.

²³ Perform Group News (2012). Perform Acquires Sportal GmbH. Available at: [<http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/2911230>] accessed on 13.04.2014.

²⁴ Opta News (2013). Opta Acquired by Perform Group. Available at: [<http://www.optasports.com/news-area/news-opta-acquired-by-perform-group.aspx>], accessed on 13.04.2014.

²⁵ Optasports.com, (2014). On-screen Broadcast Examples. Available at: [<http://www.optasports.com/services/broadcast/data-graphics/on-screen.aspx>], accessed on 9.10.2014.

The most recent product powered by Perform Group is the digital live platform *livebasketball.tv* launched in June, 2013. It offers coverage from the Turkish Airlines Euroleague, every major FIBA (the International Basketball Federation) tournament and a selection of the best leagues around the globe including CBA (China), NBL (Australia), PBA (Philippines), LNB (Argentina), and VTB (Eastern Europe). The platform is English language only and it is a pay service. The unique features that it offers are the possibility to watch up to four games at once, pause, rewind or fast forward in the live coverage, extra features such as game commentaries as well as game highlights are also offered by *livebasketball.tv*²⁶.

The company has a clear vision of how trends change over time. Social media takes an important place in everyday life. It has already been proved that everything can be sold today on social networks and so the social media has also been a game changer in sports. A good example of presence on social networks is the Perform Group's initiated on-line strategy to develop 3x3 street basketball players community. More directly, social networking facilitates a truly border-less sports landscape in which fans can interact regardless of geography. A community based activity allows street basketball fans to communicate on-line, match games, share videos and photos.

Perform Group's strategy is to develop products and deliver solutions for all digital platforms including smart-phones (see Figure 12, p.27, visualization of the sports data information application)²⁷, tablets, gaming consoles and connected TVs. The main objective remains to optimize exposure while optimizing revenues. For example, today audiences multi-task so the company pays close attention to multi-screen consumption and is trying to offer second-screen platforms that empower consumers to have truly shareable experiences that can drive volume. The key to success is also seen in detail. The company pays close attention to variations from region to region as there is no one effective approach to all, but the secret lies in diversity and adaptation to local trends.

²⁶ Livebasketball.tv. Available at: [http://www.livebasketball.tv/home?ICID_ABO_FOT_0]. Accessed on 13.04.2014.

²⁷ Figure 1. Example of Interactive Mobile App. Retrieved from: [<http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/2260921>]. Accessed on 19.05.2014.

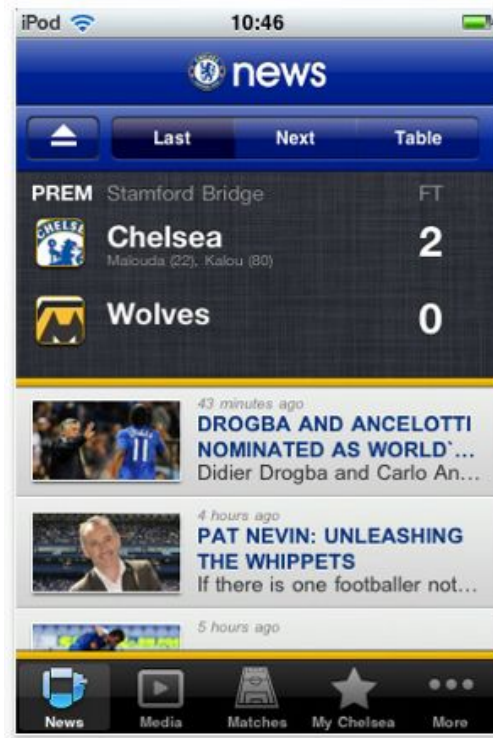


Figure 12. Example of Interactive Mobile Application (Perform Group, 2010)²⁸

The companies mentioned previously help Perform Group to have a dense global coverage of sports events and therefore allows it to be present in the major sports leagues that are of greatest interest to its consumers. The companies mentioned above were focused on the local markets and the entrance of Perform Group allows them to expand globally by attracting more clients to their products offered. For these smaller companies and the parent company, it has been a win-win situation on the grounds that being a part of a bigger group enables them to have access to more products, the range of clients grows, and external help is provided if necessary.

Altogether the chapter reveals how Perform Group has been growing and becoming the number one provider of sports media. It shows the tendency that together companies are more powerful and successful than when standing alone. It is also proved by the example of Runningball which has expanded greatly since its acquisition in 2012. Becoming a part of Perform Group allowed Runningball to enter new markets, to have a larger game coverage and more leagues were offered to be added in its portfolio.

²⁸ Perform Group, 2010. News, Premier League Champions partner with Perform to launch interactive mobile app. Available at:[<http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/2260921>], accessed on 07.06.2014.

2.3. Runningball

The company Runningball was founded in 2006 by Hans Thomas Gross. Its CEO of the Aveiro office is Diogo Cardoso. It employs around 80 people though this number is still growing and in the future Runningball is looking for constant growth not only business-wise but also in human resources. Runningball has two main offices - one in Aveiro, Portugal and the other in Graz, Austria. The company operates on an international scale and its main business is to collect and distribute real-time sports data. On-line sports is the second most popular way of sports fans following the events making it a profitable market for the company in question.

Runningball has experienced its biggest growth since 2012 when it was acquired by Perform Group for €120m. According to the yearly results of Perform Group after the acquisition process, the company raised the amount of events delivered by 40% at the end of 2012. Furthermore, its services delivered have grown from 15 470 events delivered in the last quarter of 2012 to 25 086 events delivered to its clients in the last quarter of 2013 (see Table 2).

Key Operational Metrics	FY 2013	FY 2012	Change
Watch&Bet licencees	46	40	+6
Watch&Bet events streamed	16,543	14,729	+12%
RunningBall customers	53	46	+7
RunningBall events delivered	78,012	49,866	+56%
Average annual unique users (own portals) (millions)	90	54	+66%
ePlayer total video on demand streams viewed (millions)	5,043	4,483	+13%
ePlayer average sell-through-rate (%)	48	39	+9pp

Table 2. Runningball (Perform Groups yearly report, 2013)²⁹

At the end of 2013 it had raised the amount of events delivered by 56%. These positive results have led to development and growth of the company.

²⁹ Perform, (2013). Annual Report of the Results of 2013. *Perform, Progressive Sports Media*. Available at: [<http://www.performgroup.co.uk/article/id/3696174>]. Accessed on 02.03.2014.

In 2013, the company went through many changes. First of all new sports were offered by Runningball to its clients. These new sports include volleyball, beach volleyball and handball. In spite of being new offers of the company, not all the leagues were successful and in some cases the return of investment did not lead to expected outcomes by not repaying the investment. However, the company is looking for future growth and is ready to undertake new experiences by adding new sports to its offer. By the end of 2014 the company has planned to introduce 2 new sports to its portfolio - American football and baseball.

In the beginning of 2014 the company launched a new offer - snooker. It is still in an initial phase and cannot yet be analysed by revenue data. Nevertheless the company expects high profits from snooker and is looking forward to adapting new sports. The company's goal is to provide its clients with an ample variety of sports events data. Future growth is expected as Perform Group is expanding its coverage territories and consequently leading to easier entrance into new leagues for Runningball.

The company offers a unique opportunity to follow sports events in real-time. Clients receive complete information of in-play game events and can therefore make their bets based on instant data received. In consonance with the Global Sports Media report (2013), in-play betting continues to be a key focus area of a number of major multi-territory and local on-line betting platforms. It represents the fastest growing part of sports betting, contributes to a majority of on-line sports-book (non-horse racing) turnover and is the major driver of growth for the big on-line players. Consequently it assures a better market position for Runningball as it offers real-time sports events data.

According to PWC's report, the annual revenues from the global sports industry have risen from \$107.516m in 2006 to \$121.4m in 2010 greatly due to the World Cup. In 2014, a jump is expected in the revenues due to the same major global event, though this time in Brazil.

Global sports market by region* (US\$ Millions)											
Component	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010p	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	CAGR 2011-15
Global revenues	107,516	111,934	120,760	112,489	121,391	118,690	129,929	130,164	146,469	145,341	
% Change	12.1	4.1	7.9	(6.8)	7.9	(2.2)	9.5	0.2	12.5	(0.8)	3.7

* At 2010 average exchange rates
 p = provisional
 Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Wilkofsky Grant Associates

Table 3. Global sports market revenues, PwC's Gaming Centre (2014)³⁰.

³⁰ PwC's Gaming Centre (2014). *Online Betting and Gaming Regulation*. PricewaterhouCoopers LLP, February, 2014. PDF

All in all this fact is promising to Runningball as it greatly depends on the viewers interest in sports. The following chapter introduces the method of data mining which will provide an insight of how the business of sports data works and how the sports information attain its clients.

2.4. Data Mining

When talking about sports and companies working with sports events it is important to understand how these games are represented in cases of no visual data available, as for example, there is no video transmission of the event available. The most common way to represent these sports data is to have a pattern of mining this data into understandable information. Solieman (2006) suggests that data mining is all about finding patterns and relationships within data that can possibly result in new knowledge and can be applied wherever there is an abundance of data available and in need of analysis. It is not only sports that has adopted this way of extracting the information from the bigger context. Other sciences employs this way of representing information for much longer time than it has been done in sports, for example, chemistry, medicine, or retail businesses.

When considering sports the easiest way to explain why data mining appears is the necessity to have game statistics. These game statistics initially were used to help the teams understand their own strong and weak points as well as being used to analyze adversary teams. Solieman (2006) indicates that assessments of teams and players need to be based on strong data analysis and not on the traditional approach of using intuition. Furthermore, sports data analysis has even taken a scientific nature as various authors have conducted analytic research based on the sports data available.

Data analysis has helped sports teams to analyze their players, to help in decision making when contracting new players, to analyze adversaries and to analyze teams' strong and weak points that consequently helps to have better results in competitions. Nowadays these compiled data can help also in other businesses, in this case, sports betting. Bookmakers highly depend on game statistics as according to them they are making predictions of the possible outcomes of sports events and offer odds for punters according to their analysis.

The best way to describe sports data mining is shown in Table 4 (p.31) where on the right side of the table is the standardized form of dataset. It reveals how large amount of information can be represented in a short way and how it helps to analyze sports data in an easy and quick manner at the same time.

Event Type	Description
Starter	Represents a starter player included in the initial lineup. For each match there are 22 events of this type, 11 for each team, occurring in the minute 0 of the match.
Substitute	Represents a substitute player for the match. For each match there are 14 events of this type, occurring in the minute 0 of the match.
In	Represents the exiting of a player during a substitution.
Out	Represents the entering of a player during a substitution.
Yellow	Represents the showing of an yellow card to a player.
Second Yellow	Represents the showing of the second yellow card to a player.
Red	Represents the showing of a direct red card to a player.
Goal	Represents the scoring of a standard goal.
Penalty	Represents the scoring of a penalty.
AutoGoal	Represents the scoring of an auto goal.

Table 4. Dataset on football game (Nunes & Sousa, 2006)³¹

Similar datasets have been developed for different sports. Each sport has its own specific features to be taken into account. For example, Figure 13 (p.32) represents the data of volleyball games, where the dataset is other than in the football game. Volleyball has its own specific features and instead of corners or shots on goal as is in football games, it pays closer attention to kills, attacks, errors, aces of services, blocks and so forth. There are other examples to be mentioned though the aim of the chapter is to reveal the complexity and diversity of data mining as the *supporters* have to adapt to their own specific sports terminology and have to be able to recognize any incorrect steps of game reports in order to help *scouts* solve any kind of game incidents.

³¹ Nunes, S., Sousa, M., 2006. *Applying Data Mining Techniques to Football Data from European Championships*. Universidade de Porto, Faculdade de Engenharia.



Figure 13. Volleyball statistics (AppAnnie.com, 2011)³²

All in all Solieman (2006) suggests that data mining should not be seen as a determinant of team and player accomplishment but rather as a building blocks upon which a useful and real knowledge can be used.

This Chapter reveals how sports event can be turned into a valuable data which is afterwards used by various clients. Those clients include teams, bookmakers, media and also regular sports fans. Further work will examine how this data is processed in the daily work at the company of consideration - Runningball.

³² App Annie.com (2011). Volleyball statistics. Retrieved from: [<http://www.appannie.com/apps/ios/app/426210733/>]. Accessed on 20.09.2014.

2.5. Sports Data Collection

This dissertation takes a close look at a company whose main business is working with sports data - Runningball. The company was founded in 2006 and it employs more than 1100 *scouts* all around the world although this number is not stable, considering the fact that the company is in a process of growing and new *scouts* are constantly joining the team. It has developed its own unique software package to collect, review, enhance, store and distribute large volumes of data pertaining to various sports (www.rball.com). Its main focal sport is soccer or European football although the company covers also other big sports such as basketball, ice-hockey, volleyball, snooker, handball among other sports and in future it intends to add new sports to its pool namely, baseball and american football. Runningball covers the games in real-time, meaning that the data reaches clients within a second, unlike TV broadcasts which usually have a delay of about 5-12 seconds or sometimes even more.

First of all it is important to define what the product of this enterprise is. Runningball works with sports data reception, namely real-time information of the sports events, and confirmation of these data in order to pass it further to clients who rely on trustful and qualitative data in order to make their bets on sports events on-line or off-line. Runningball pays close attention to offering the quickest and the most precise data to its clients in order to gain the status of leader in providing instant real-time sports data. The majority of the company's clients are bookmakers that rely on real-time results in order to control their betting businesses.

The company's core business is the business-to-business sector as it enables customers to extensively improve their live betting offers whilst helping them to reduce costs and avoid mistakes in their live betting management.

As already mentioned the company works with the real time data and provides instant information of the sports events to its clients. Sports events refer to any happenings in a specific sports game, as for example, a point in a volleyball rally, goal in a soccer match, or three point throw in a basketball game. The growing popularity of on-line betting and the point spreads system determines the necessity to provide clients with real time data. The betting markets offer pari-mutuel odds, odds or point spreads for their clients to participate in the game of predictions and each new item of information consequently leads to change in the price/odds offered. Therefore the work of Runningball can be seen as crucial not only for sport bookmakers but also for regular clients who are following the events and patiently waiting for a chance to win.

Instant sports data is made available by having an actual presence at the sports event and providing qualitative data via *scout's* activity at the venue. The company has trained people who are ready to place themselves whenever and wherever necessary in order to provide instant results of the game. These people are called *scouts* and they are trained either on-line, or at the office when the company is present at the specific country. In many cases *scouts* are trained on-line and on their own by learning from the *scout's* manual. These situations occur due to distance and the size of the sports leagues that the company covers. Despite widespread coverage of sports leagues, the company is not technically present with an office in each and every country where the games are covered. Runningball has its representatives in all continents and they are managed by the Scout Management offices in Aveiro (Portugal) and Graz (Austria) and departments spread all around the globe.

How does the information reach a client? First of all the company has a pool of leagues that it covers in more than 70 countries (70 countries refer to football leagues though the number of countries grows when adding leagues of other sports). These include: Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, USA, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Vietnam. The list of countries shows the range of diversity that the company works with. It covers events of sports leagues in all the inhabited continents.

There are trained *scouts* in each of these countries (or there are cases when they move to other countries). They are trained to report sports events using PDA and the software developed by Runningball. *Scouts* are always asked to arrive half an hour before the game starts in order to provide valid and in time data. Each *scout* is contacted by a supervisor or *supporter* from the office at Aveiro or Graz to provide help in case it is necessary or when the internet connection fails. Most common reasons to contact scouts are to find out about the game details, to verify if the score is correct, or to check any possible mistake in reporting the game. The *scouts* are technically alone at the event although they are accompanied by a *supporter* from the office who helps if a problem arises either when the internet connection fails or when any confusing situation occurs. For

example, the *scout* may face problems in sending correct results or may send a wrong command by mistake. The *scout* reports game events by sending fixed commands that are created in the software to facilitate *scouts'* job. The Trader Client system which was developed by Runningball displays the following data during a game:

- Basic scoring information;
- In-depth in-running team/player statistics (e.g. shots and attacks in soccer);
- Precise timing of the game;
- Pre game information, like attendance status;
- Additional messages, e.g . the reason for suspending a game;
- Odds suggestions;
- Supervisor view for simultaneous multiple-game monitoring;
- League tables, statistical filter options. (www.rball.com).

During each game, around 1.000 of those events mentioned previously are sent by a *scout*, then accepted and revised by a *supporter* and shared with clients. An important factor is the interactivity of the company. Clients are in touch with the company and are able to share their doubts or question the quality of the game reports. The client is immediately heard, after which a *scout* is contacted to confirm the events and the information is confirmed to the client usually via Skype or by phone in order to provide the best quality of real-time data to the client.

The process of receiving the sports data is as follows. First of all the company decides on what leagues need to be covered, which are the most important games that would be easy to sell, and as the company already has a quite dense amount of *scouts* across the globe it decides which events they are able to cover and are sent to report the sports event. As already mentioned before the *scouts* are previously trained and familiar with the sport that they cover.

What happens during the game is that the *scout* first of all arrives early at the event and starts reporting the situation at the venue by sending the attendance of the event, the quality of the field (in soccer), or the weather conditions. This helps the *supporter* who helps *scout* from the office to prevent a surprise if something goes wrong in the game due to these conditions, for example, the game gets suspended due to storm coming, or due to rain the pitch is not in conditions to continue the game and it is suspended. After that the *scout* has for about half an hour to report the rest of

pre-game events such as - players are warming up, coin flipping, jersey colours, confirming the home team and away team, players introduction, national anthem singing and similar. The *scout* is responsible for reporting all the details that are happening at the sports event. That includes also unexpected occurrences, for example the game might be suspended due to fans intrusion in a field, there is a delay of the game start, the start of the game is delayed because of the commercial break and similar.

After the pre-game events have been sent it is clear whether the *scout* is ready to start the game on his own or not. This depends greatly on the Internet connection available at the venue. If there are no problems and connection is stable the *scout* is able to start to report the game on his own, but if the contrary happens he stays on the phone with the *supporter* who introduces all the commands in the system for *scout* as he keeps reporting all the events just the way he would do it in his PDA (personal digital assistant). Each sport has a specific data mining system, for example, volleyball counts various events starting from the service, rallies, the points scored, the manner of the point scored, errors, blocks, outs, kills, suspensions, time outs, and many more as discussed in the previous Chapter. Each point is confirmed and the *supporters* task is to verify that the event in the game really happened. The best scenario for *supporter* is to have a live stream from the event to compare the results that the *scout* is sending to prevent any possible mistakes. When this happens the software system has been developed to correct these mistakes. Usually it is the *supporter's* duty to amend the error. Therefore he/she calls *scout* who has to report the mistake and explain why it had occurred. This consequently affects the rating that each *scout* has. There are some cases when these mistakes cannot be detected easily as other sources apart from *scout* are not available.

All in all the company receives a detailed information from the game which happens in real time. Therefore it is the fastest way to get the instant data that is sold right at the moment. The system deals with mined data. McCullagh (2010) defines sports data mining as a technique of reporting data by using mathematical or statistical tools and techniques for extracting knowledge from large amounts of data. Therefore the work done at Runningball implies deeper knowledge in the sport and good understanding of software system in order to understand this mined data.

There are three main languages used in the process (at the Aveiro office): English, Portuguese and Spanish. English is the main language of communication as the software system is in English, although it is not seen as the only dominating language. Spanish is widely used due to the quantity of Latin football leagues, and Portuguese due to the size of the Brazilian sports offer. German is one of the widely used languages as there are many European sports games covered in German speaking countries. English is used in the most European countries, Asia, North America, Australia and Africa.

Internally the company uses English to communicate between the offices and the parent company - Perform Group. Office internal communication takes place in the native language between co-workers. On a daily basis *supporters* tend to speak at least two languages per day. It takes a lot of concentration and attention to the variety of countries where the games are covered, as *supporters* need to adapt quickly to the change of language from one moment to another.

2.6. Constraints of Providing Instant Data

This dissertation looks into the work of Runningball international sports data provider, and its staff that are in direct contact with cultural diversity every day. Being an international company the quality of data primarily depends on a fast Internet connection and efficient communication between *scouts* and *supporters*. It is of great importance for the company to be the first one in providing data of sports events to its clients. In general the data provided by Runningball is faster than TV transmissions, news or other means of follow-up of sports games.

During the past year, 2013, the company delivered 78 012 events to its clients. These events include different type of sports. Football corresponds to up to 65% of all events delivered. In order to continue the company's growth the quality of data provided must be maintained and constantly improved.

Restraints to providing quality data can be categorized as follows:

- Connection problems (these problems vary greatly as in some cases *scouts* are not reachable via internet communication and in the worst cases are not reachable on their mobile phones leaving a game on hold with no data available);
- Reporting errors (mistakes have been seen as a good way of learning, though in the business of Runningball, the mistakes made by *scouts* are penalized according to decisions made by quality department. A system of penalty points for *scouts* has been developed and each one of them has a rating of the quality of their work. The rating usually varies from 1-5, where 1 refers to an excellent quality of games supervised and 5 refers to a low quality of job executed);
- Communication problems (instant data is the key product of the company but it might happen that the quality of communication is disturbed either by environmental disturbances at the venue or lack of language knowledge in order to transmit the information immediately);
- System/technology problems (technologies are not always reliable as they also tend to fail. A personalized system for company's needs has been developed -Runningball Trader System, although it still requires maintenance procedures from time to time as problems tend to appear and improvements are required);
- Cancellation of events due to broadcasting problems (there is a small amount of sports events that occasionally are cancelled. The clients are warned immediately about the problem that has caused the cancellation of game or data providing).

The most severe problem that can be solved internally is the communication problem. In this dissertation a method is considered that would intervene and improve the language capacities of *supporters* and *scouts* in the future. The language barrier should not be an obstacle for an international business in today's world. Instead languages should act as a bridge between peoples and transmit the concept of unity of nations and availability of information.

Nevertheless other data on the topic should be taken into account. According to the ELAN Study, numerous businesses from the study group (approximately 200 enterprises) that have lost potential contracts for lack of knowledge of foreign languages (European Commission, *The Language Guide for European Business*, 2011). This dissertation suggests that a bigger investment should be made in developing employees' language skills and attention should be paid to the possibility of varying even more the languages that *supporters* are able to use at their workplace.

Daily communication depends on fast interaction between *scouts* and *supporters*. Language has become the main tool of the company as it works and communicates across borders and so the flexibility of understanding each other by using a second or third language should not become an obstacle. It would also be possible to create material which would consider the most important language items, forms, phrases that would help in the everyday job at Runningball. A proposition for a future investigation would be to explore what are the basic linguistic needs that *scouts* and *supporters* are in need of and to develop a manual that would help them improve their skills.

Chapter 3

Languages and Communication

3.1. Languages - Border-Breaking Tools

The business of Runningball is based in a cross-border environment. *Supporters* are in contact with *scouts* from all over the globe every day. The intercultural environment and variation of language use are key components that make the business run successfully. According to Czinkota et al. (2010), cultural differences are the biggest barrier to straightforward communication. The authors suggest that miscommunication among people from different cultures arises routinely in international business due to diverse cultural heritage of participants. Culture affects even simple greetings and partings (Czinkota, et al., 2010). In the following chapter we will address how even a short intercultural conversation can be affected by cultural diversity among interlocutors. Although it is of importance to discuss the topic of communication first.

A typical conversation between *scout* and *supporter* does not have a great amplitude of topics. In a limited time, the *supporter's* task is to receive the more precise and exact information about a sports event. The language used by *scouts* and *supporters* could even be considered as a fixed set of phrases and composed of the most commonly used vocabulary regarding a specific sport. A conversation includes general terms of a specific sport, for example, information about periods of the game, yellow and red cards, penalties and expulsions, score, goals, sets and faults. Accordingly it leaves small possibility to differentiate *scouts* according to their cultural belonging, but nevertheless assumptions are created and generalizations of how people work in specific countries emerge. The field research (Chapter 4.5, Table 9) revealed that even if the job at Runningball does not require ample conversation and the information transmitted is considerably pre-determined, the results of the questionnaire showed that *supporters* do feel differences and the majority consider that the culture the *scout* represents is a factor that influences the communication between both.

According to Keyton (2011), communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. Graphically Cheney (2011) represents it in the following Figure 14 (p.41). Figure 14 encloses the complexity of the communication where it becomes modified in the process. The sender of the information encodes the information he/she wants to transmit in the best way possible and 'sends' or tells it to the receiver. Although the message suffers some changes on its way as the receiver of the information has to deal with the medium in which the transaction of information is conducted, noises, the

language and vocabulary used to transmit the information and many other obstacles that might affect the information interpreted.

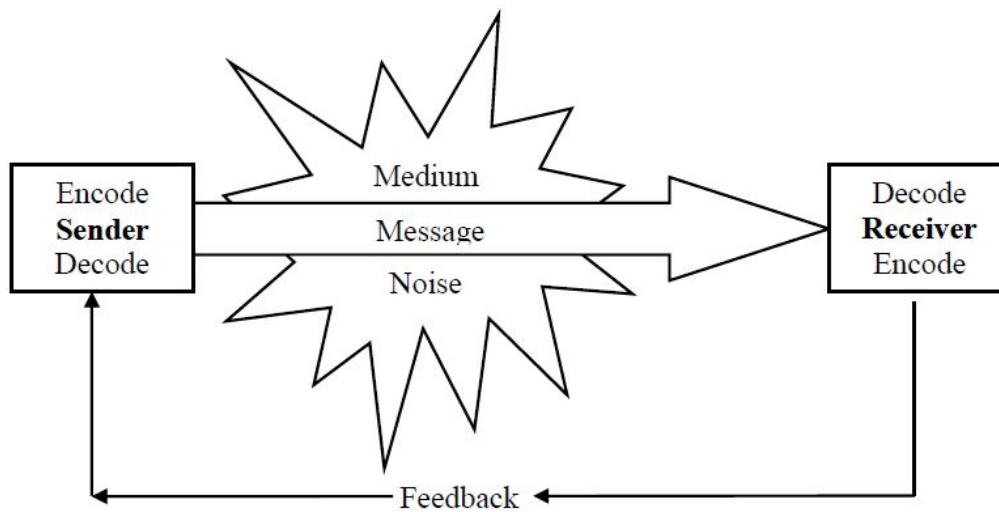


Figure 14. The Communication Process (Cheney, 2011)³³

Lunenburg (2010) concludes that communication is a complex, give-and-take process, in which breakdowns anywhere in the cycle can block the transfer of understanding. Eisenberg (2010) mentions four main categories as barriers to effective communication, namely, process barriers, physical barriers, semantic barriers and psychosocial barriers.

Process barriers include all the moments of the communication starting from sender's errors, encoding problems, effects of medium, decoding inefficiency or a feedback barrier. Making mistakes make part of our lives and it is expected that also at work people would make mistakes. Communication at Runningball occurs almost at every game so the *supporters* are ready to interact with *scouts* whenever necessary although from time to time mistakes are made because *scouts* are not able to transmit the correct information as they sometimes mix-up the teams or make any other encoding error without realizing it. It is comprehensible that there is a lot of pressure that *scouts* have to deal with as the medium where they are situated typically is crowded and full of noises that difficult their work. The medium usually distracts also the *supporter* as the noise disturbs also the the decoding process which might lead to occurring errors.

³³ Cheney, G. (2011). *Organizational Communication in an Age of Globalization: Issues, Reflections, Practices*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

The effect of external elements is another important factor that influences the communication should and be discussed. Physical barriers refer to all possible communication interruptions, such as distance, bad connections, other people, physical space and similar. Internet access across countries and connection problems have been discussed previously in Chapter 3.1. (Figure 8); therefore these are justified as in many cases *scouts* are not able to do the work on their own and depend on the help of *supporters* to send the commands instead of them.

The semantic barriers (choice of words, usage of the words, meaning attached to words) are considered the most problematic communication barriers between *supporters* and *scouts* in the business of Runningball. First of all in most cases, both parties in the communication use a second or third language as the means of transmitting and receiving information. The choice of words, the way of applying them in a context and the idea that the sender or receiver wants to transmit become even more complicated due to the fact that in most cases it is the second or third language that has to be used. Therefore the process of encoding and decoding greatly depends on the capacity to use a language other than the native tongue.

Psychosocial barriers refer to fields of experience, filtering and psychological distance (Antos & Ventola, 2008). These can include people's backgrounds, perceptions, values, biases, needs, and expectations. Filtering refers to the tendency to understand information in our own way depending on what we want to see or hear emotionally. Our own needs and emotions are seen as a strong component of communication which interferes with the communication and transforms it according to these barriers. It sometimes occurs that *supporters* try to decode the information according to their expectations and from their own viewpoint. The noise can sometimes become a major distraction and therefore *supporters* try to withdraw meaning out of chunks of speech that they have heard.

Another important factor of successful communication is defining its purpose. When the goal is clear the transmission of the information can be a more efficient process, starting from encoding the information and ending with decoding it. Gopal (2009) mentions a set of communication purposes in Figure 15 (p. 43). Considering Runningball, communication has an informing function as the *scout's* task is to report events at the sports games. The software system is predefined and helps *scouts* by guiding them as to what the main events to be reported are. It is of great importance for *scouts* to know how to 'code' this specific missing information so that a *supporter* would easily understand him/her and be able to help in difficult situations. It is suggested in this dissertation that easy usable linguistic material should be created for the workers of Runningball which would include various ways of transmitting the game information in the most effective way and which would help to develop language skills for both parties (*scouts* and *supporters*).

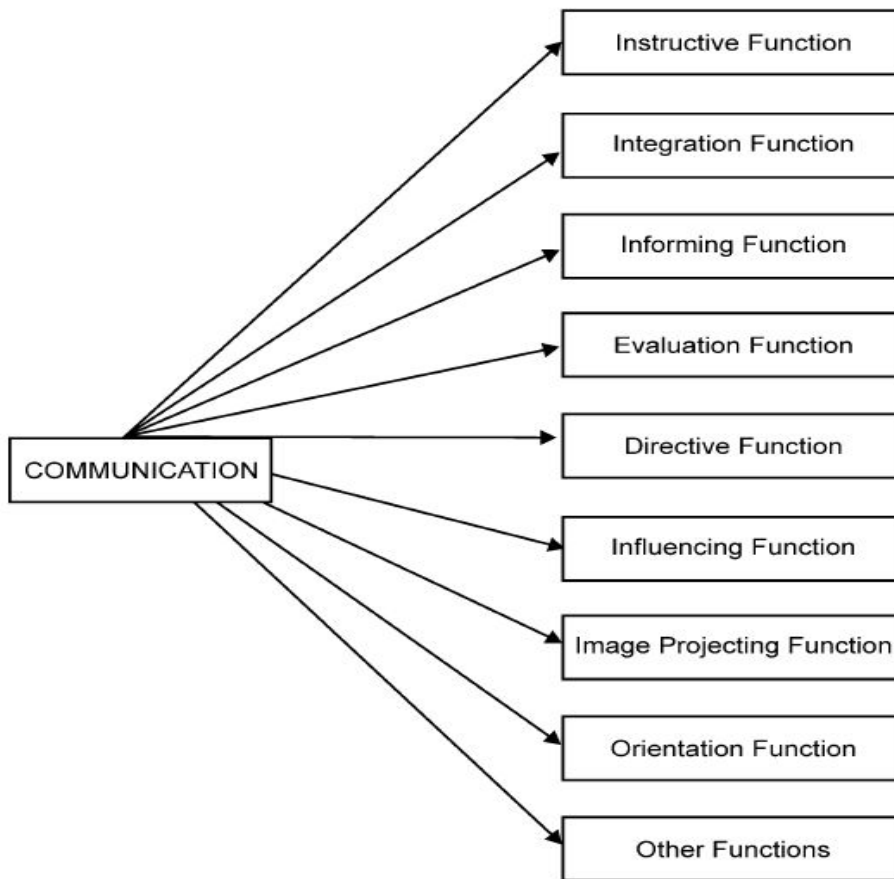


Figure 15. Purposes of Communication (Gopal, 2009)³⁴

Telecommunications and the Internet are unique technologies that have enabled new international businesses to develop, as was the case of Runningball. Most of *supporters* working at Runningball have an opinion about intercultural communication, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.5 (p. 63). Even if speaking with *scouts* from different cultures does not seem to provide a great possibility to interact with another culture and to get acquainted with that specific culture, there are still moments when cultural differences emerge, for example, greetings or partings. During short conversations, *supporters* are able to experience how cultures and customs differ. How to greet and address each other are good examples of showing these differences. In general, Arabic countries have a very formal way of addressing *supporters* and show a very formal style in addressing people by using words like *Sir* or *Madam*. On the other hand, people from Latin countries are more informal in their speech and much more talkative during communication events. *Scouts* from Eastern and Northern

³⁴ Gopal, N. (2009). *Business Communication*. New Age International Publishers.

Europe are considered more professional and concise in their communication: they rarely express emotional distress and reveal a high professionalism in their work. *Supporters* have recognized the communication with people from this part of the world as the easiest and most successful (see Chapter 4.5, Table 9). These are the most general conclusions that supporters have ascertained at their workplace, though not in all cases can these assumptions be applied as they might be ambiguous in specific cases.

Czinkota et al. (2010) define intercultural risk as a situation where a cultural miscommunication puts some human value at stake and is exacerbated by ethnocentric orientation which means that one culture is used as a standard for judging other cultures. Kim and Mattila (2011) suggest that language is not only a medium of communication, but is directly linked to an individual's identity therefore creating a barrier that influences the interaction of both parts. It can be concluded that, despite us trying to embrace and accept differences, everybody makes assumptions about other cultures consciously or unconsciously in order to organize and facilitate the expected communication. The outcomes of these generalizations might become a distraction and create fallacies about a person with whom we interact. However in many cases it can be seen as a guide to understanding the features of another culture and create tolerance towards people from specific cultures. It might help in reducing stress when the communication is not working as previous assumptions and generalizations have already alerted the mind that, according to previous experiences, communication with a person from a specific country might create problems due to cultural features. This might include, for example, being introverted or extroverted, more formal, or very informal, focused on professionalism or leisure, and similar, lacking in language knowledge, poor stress managing ability, and other aspects. Instant data is necessary to provide a quality job in the case of Runningball therefore *supporters* are expected to react immediately and solve cultural or language barriers at any cost. Consequently when speaking about intercultural communication, it will be of great importance to address the question of English as a *lingua franca* in this type of communication.

3.2. Dealing with Cultural Diversity

Today we are living in a multicultural society. It can be observed every day how different and diverse the world has become. International enterprises are not the only ones that have to deal with varied society. Mixture of nationalities, migration, and acceptance of cultural differences are issues everybody has to deal with. Therefore during the past decade a lot of attention has been paid to cultural tolerance, the processes of cultural adjustment and adaptation, cultural bereavement, and cultural identity.

Employees of Runningball deal with cultural diversity on a daily basis. It has been mentioned before that *supporters'* duties include speaking and helping *scouts* from different parts of the world. Although there is no personal confrontation between both parties, there is a verbal communication required between both as has been discussed previously. The question under consideration is whether the language used can be applied to all cases equally or should *supporters* be aware of the *scout's* nationality as an important factor in conducting a successful communication and whether the conversations between *scouts* and *supporters* can reveal cultural features of the speakers.

The ability to communicate with 'others' has been defined as intercultural competence. Fantini (2006) describes it as a complex set of abilities necessary to be performed effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. Furthermore, it should include the ability to accept the fact of somebody being different and that the person(s) being communicated with also brings with them a set of knowledge and attitudes, which might be contradictory, although unique and valuable in its own way. All in all the goal of all communication is to have the best possible outcome where both interacting parties are satisfied and receive all the information necessary in spite of all the differences that might affect negatively the communication. These differences are usually seen as barriers and therefore the necessity to speak about various topics such as intercultural awareness, cultural tolerance, intercultural competence, intercultural adaptation, and intercultural sensitivity that all are connected in order to achieve the same goal - to step beyond one's own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Ruben (1976) determined seven dimensions of intercultural competence which can be recognized as necessary in day-to-day communication at the company under study. More recent theoreticians Byram (1997) and Risager (2007), among others, have described and extended the theory of intercultural competence and represented it in a multidimensional framework. Ruben (1976) confirms that these competences include:

1) *display of respect* expresses the ability to treat people from other cultures with courtesy and positive regard. The ability to respect other individuals leads to a successful and effective communication which is the Runningball's target in order to provide instant data. A capacity to have positive and respectful attitude leads people to understand each other with an ease without creating unnecessary conflicts but instead cooperating.

2) *Interaction posture* refers to an individual's ability to respond to others in a descriptive, non-evaluative, and non-judgemental way. This point would suggest that even if it is inevitable to have judgements, stereotypes or previously fixed concepts about the other person of communication it is of great importance to suppress them in order to maintain neutral, non-judgemental interaction posture. This factor might become an obstacle to *supporters* or *scouts* as their previous experience with a specific *scout* or *supporter* already warns them about a possible miscommunication, difficulty to understand each other, or about a possible danger due to lack of professionalism, patience or any other characteristic necessary in successful communication from one or another part.

3) *Orientation to knowledge* includes a capacity to recognize the extent to which knowledge is individual in nature. *Supporters* of the Runningball every day speak to *scouts* from different parts of the world and often they have to adapt to slight differences in the sense of information transmission. Therefore orientation to knowledge describes an ability to recognize and acknowledge that people explain things in different ways with differing views.

4) *Empathy* refers to one's ability to feel compassion and strong consideration of how the other person feels in the specific situation. In the case of Runningball it is important that *supporters* would try to help *scouts* as much as possible and empathy is one of the necessary components in helping to resolve difficult situations at sports events.

5) *Self-oriented role behaviour* determines an individual's ability to be flexible and to function in initiating and harmonizing roles which refers to requesting information, asking for clarification and evaluating ideas for problem solving. In other words *supporters* have to be confident enough to adapt to their role of 'problem solvers' at difficult game situations and maintain the situation under control in order to solve the problem as fast as possible.

6) *Interaction management* is specified as an individual's ability to take turns in discussion and initiate and terminate interaction based on a reasonably accurate assessment of the needs and desires of others. The *supporter's* task is to maintain the control of a situation when the interaction with *scouts* occurs. *Supporters* are required to be good leaders and be able to keep the control of

the situation in order to help *scouts* to feel security and trust that they are there to help to solve any problem.

7) *Tolerance for ambiguity* describes a discrete manner of reacting to new and ambiguous situations in which emotions are not revealed. Not always it is possible to maintain calm when a difficult situation occurs at work, especially when the cultural differences, or specific personal characteristics seem to be distracting in effective problem solving. Although both interlocutors need to have a peaceful and calm posture which definitely is the main attribute that helps to solve incidents.

Typical conversations rarely reveal features of one's culture or national belonging, although there are cases when it is clearly evident that the *scout* has a specific way of speaking due to his/her cultural background. As an example, Muslim *scouts* can be mentioned as their way of addressing *supporters* involve a high level of respect and courtesy.

3.3. English as a *Lingua Franca* in Intercultural Communication

Nowadays communication has expanded from communication among members of only one society to communication on a global scale. Borders are no longer a limitation to interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the Internet has allowed not only verbal communication, but also other forms of communication. This can include verbal communication, reading, images, videos or any other information content used to transmit data. Society has become part of the deterritorialized global community with specific features. And as globalization has become a phenomenon of the 21st century, so the question arises about the importance of languages in communication, and, in particular, the use of a *lingua franca*. The use of a *lingua franca* is one of the ways in which communication among the members of this new technological generation can be facilitated.

English as a language has evolved and today is recognized as the *lingua franca* of modern society, economic integration and also the technological world. Many international businesses rely on English as a mean of communication between people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most internet sites use English as the main language. When considering the sports media business, it provides information in English as well as translations in other languages.

First of all it should be identified what advantage English represents and how it is incorporated into the new intercultural society. The main function of a *lingua franca* is to provide efficient communication among non-native speakers of the language. Various authors have paid close attention to English as the *lingua franca* which is used by speakers of different native languages. The literature consulted recognizes the basic function of a *lingua franca* is to transmit the idea; thus the meaning and context of the utterance becomes the centre of the communication, rather than norms and rules, as it is of greater importance to transmit the information rather than the form of transmitting it.

During the literature review the context of a new term considering *lingua franca* was recognized as a key to the topic of this dissertation. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen (2013) introduced a new way of looking at the English language by coining the term BELF (English as Business *Lingua Franca*). The authors suggest that, even though much of attention has been paid to ELF (English as *Lingua Franca*), the actual purpose of communication in a business context is to get a job done, of course, by using today's language of business, that is English. Based on their research, they concluded that BELF has been widely used between non-native speakers while cooperating internationally and that it clearly reflects the presence of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of interlocutors. Furthermore, the authors (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013) have suggested

that native speakers should learn to comprehend non-native speakers' English due to the presence of other factors that influence the second language use, including cultural features that are an important component in the transmission of information. BELF competence involves knowledge and skills, meanwhile it is perceived as a dynamic construction highly dependent on the context of its use and user, being heavily affected by the interlocutors' linguistic skills and cultural background.

Furthermore, Näsi & Neilimo (2006) (cited in Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013: 26) suggest that “professionals need to know *why, what, how* and *when* to communicate when they are sharing knowledge and building networks, which have been identified as integral practices to such elements of business knowhow as innovations, business processes and management strategy.”

Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen (2013) further suggested that attention be paid to another term - global communicative competence. The society of today has changed greatly, and businesses give preference to multilingual staff. Today it is not enough to be good in one area, but it is important to have various competences which are often not connected with the profession, but with communication and intercultural communication as presented in Figure 16.

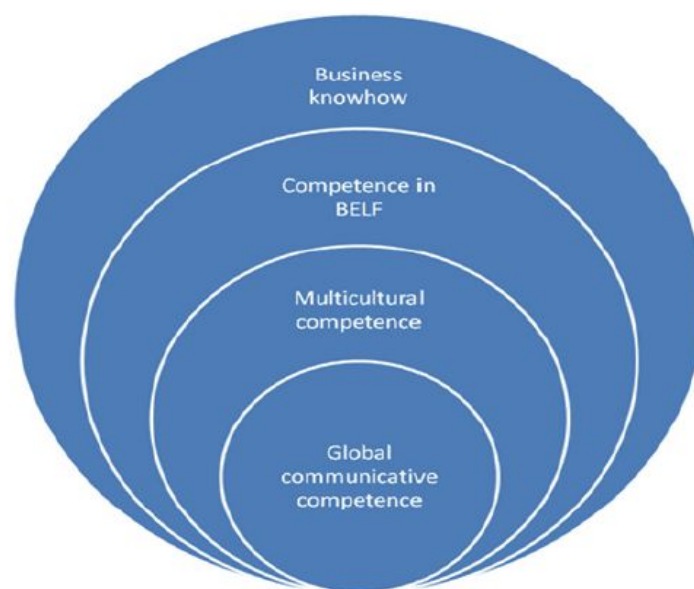


Figure 16. Model of Global Communicative Competence (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2011:258)

The user of the language is expected to be skilled in communicative and comprehension strategies rather than accurate in grammar. The model of global communicative competence suggests that the

knowledge and skills in managing communicative situations with representatives of different national, organizational, and professional cultures must be present (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). In the case of Runningball, its employees are multilingual as the majority of them are able to speak other languages apart from English or Portuguese. Non-native speakers are using English learned as a second or third language making it sometimes difficult to solve problem situations at work at a fast pace (discussed in Chapter 2.6.). Therefore intercultural competences are one of the important components. The knowledge of various languages can provide a wider spectrum for seeing situations and can help in problem solving as the framework of one language can be applied into the use of another language. All in all our main goal in the global society today is to be an 'English-knowing bilingual' in order to become a successful participant of the global market.

The second layer of the Figure 16 mentions the new term - BELF (English as Business *Lingua Franca*). The authors have described it as:

a competence that requires knowledge in the English “core”, business specific genres and communication strategies focusing on clarity, brevity, directness and politeness. BELF is highly situation specific, dynamic, idiosyncratic and consequently, inherently tolerant of different varieties. (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013: 28)

The outermost layer of the GCC represents the knowledge of a specific business comprising information concerning the goals, objectives and functions of the job.

It is of great importance to mention that the future of English might be different than expected. It has already been discussed that there are various types of English and it is often the case that people no longer concentrate so much on learning to understand solely the native speech, but also try to apprehend the importance of variations of English spoken around the world and English used by non-native speakers. The language has already suffered many transformations and today in order to interact with people from other cultures we are expected to adapt to different accents, different vocabulary usage, different way of constructing sentences and different ways of encoding the information.

3.4. Stereotyping - advantage or disadvantage

Intercultural communication arises as *supporters* of Portuguese origin (mainly) interact every day with *scouts* from different parts of the world. Each day *supporters* help to report games from such distant places as Uruguay, the USA, Philippines, Australia, or any other place in the world. I have paid close attention to how people tend to be categorized depending on their nationality which appears to be a common practice in the international workplaces. According to Claussen et al. (2008), personal characteristics are the basis of demographic data which are the starting point in understanding diversity that can lead to a better understanding of deep-level characteristics of a specific cultural group, such as values, attitudes and cultural differences. Furthermore, the authors suggest that diversity in cultural characteristics is a challenge that needs to be faced and understood by the organizations or other parties interested in successful communication.

Preconceptions arise when people encounter ‘otherness’ and as encounters with people from specific places tend to repeat themselves, *supporters* can base their opinion on previous experiences. In this study, stereotyping is associated with making assumptions about people from specific parts of the world. Typically these assumptions turn to stereotyping and making false or true identifications in order to facilitate the upcoming communication with *scouts*.

The first person to coin the term ‘*stereotyping*’ was Lippmann in 1922 by describing the process as “pictures in our heads”. According to Samovar et al. (2010), a stereotype is defined as a complex form of categorization, a cognitive organization of the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, experiences and expectations about a person from another social group. Zikargae (2013) describes stereotypes as broad cultural practices and processes that carry definite ideological views and values which have a function of storing social knowledge. They help people create associative mind maps that give additional knowledge in communication when little information is available about the person, situation, topic, or other aspects of encounter. However, applying stereotypes might cause the persons involved to fail to recognize individual differences as the assumptions are made on information that is assumed and not tested in real life or not tested in more cases of encounter.

The *supporters*’ work includes contact with different nationalities and therefore leaves space to create preconceptions or stereotypes based on previous communication experiences as well as previous knowledge about the specific culture. In fact, stereotypes can have a longer history than our intercultural working experience. Yano (2006) affirms that stereotypes are created during second language learning when at the centre of attention is not only the linguistic characteristics of a specific language, but also a great emphasis is put on culture in discourse, assuming that learners of the language should recognize and adopt the discursive behaviour of the native speaker.

Therefore a conclusion can be drawn that involuntarily our minds save the information about other cultures throughout all our lives and stereotyping is an automatic process that can affect the intercultural communication in positive or negative ways. Access to a wide range of information leads us to characterize social groups in a specific manner. People learn to recognize the differences as general truths about others and tend to apply these assumptions on the following encounters with individuals from specific social or cultural groups.

Several studies have revealed that stereotypes exist in ourselves and reflect a variety of cognitive and motivational processes with the aim of helping to understand difference. Stereotypes typically have a negative association within our perception although it has been suggested that stereotyping can have a positive influence on our attitudes towards 'others'. Hilton & Hippiel (1996) in their study describe stereotypes as a "way of making information processing easier by allowing the perceiver to rely on previously stored knowledge in place of incoming information" (Hilton & Hippiel, 1996: 238).

In many cases, previous knowledge can help to prevent unpleasant situations, for example, when the cultural differences are significant and have to be recognized. Especially the encounters with individuals who belong to specific cultures can use the application of previously learned contexts in order to avoid miscommunication as some rituals or traditions might have to be respected.

Detailed examination of stereotypes has been carried out and described by Hilton & Hippiel (1996), mentioned above. The author suggests five distinct representational models of stereotypes. First of all stereotyping is described as a *prototype* model where the perceiver bases his/her reactions to individual group members on a comparison between abstracted representations of a group's typical features and the individual. In daily work at Runningball this model might be present when *supporters* mentally imagine that a *scout* from a specific culture would represent the personal qualities just the way the *supporter* has experienced it previously with the same *scout* or any other *scout* who represents the same culture.

The second model suggested by the author is an *exemplar* model, in which the logic is the opposite to *prototype* model. In this model the perceiver does not build the knowledge based on a group's features but rather on particular, concrete exemplars of the group members. This model suggests that a stereotype is in constant change provided that the perceiver encounters various individuals from the same group and can suffer alterations in his/her perception about the group members. This model would not create a wrong preconception about *scouts* with whom the *supporter* has not worked previously, but would base his/her opinion on the experience if the name of the *scout* reminds of a previous experience while collaborating with him/her.

A third representation model is *associative networks* (Hilton & Hippel, 1996). This model suggests that the associations can be activated automatically without the notion of perceiver. The model is based on the complexity of the previously stored knowledge which makes the stereotype maintain strong and difficult to be changed. Associative networks model suggests that an opinion greatly depends on previously learned and stored knowledge which we have accepted in our conscience as a general truth.

A fourth model suggests that stereotypes can be represented as *schemas*, where they are seen as generalized, abstract beliefs about groups and their members. In this model the information is the most abstract and the potential for assimilation should be high (Hilton & Hippel, 1996). This model suggests that we tend to generalize and create schematic notions about the others. It shows how our minds need to have an organized perception of the world around us.

Finally the fifth model suggests that stereotypes can be viewed as *base rates*, where the idea is to pay close attention to how the mind processes the stereotype. Hilton & Hippel (1996) refer to Gigerenzer's et.al. (1988) suggestion that: "stereotypes should often be ignored when individuating information is available and that the greater experience with the stereotype should lead to more appropriate integration of the individuating information and the base rate".

It is evident that stereotypes make up part of our interaction in intercultural communication. It has been discussed how stereotypes are connected with our cognitive processes and in what way they appear. In the context of Runningball stereotyping has been mentioned to prove that even if the communication is done over the phone, there is still evidence that people tend to group and characterize other people basing their opinion on knowledge about other cultures and previous experience when contacting with people from specific parts of the world. My attention was focused not only on describing various types of stereotypes, but also on finding the background reasons for application of stereotypes in daily work. First of all the necessity to lead a successful conversation is seen as the main reason. The *supporters* are provided with a small amount of information about the interlocutor; the only information available is the *scout's* nationality, name, sex, and the *scout's* rating. Nevertheless it can be sufficient to envision the difficulty or easiness of the upcoming conversation between both. Previous knowledge has been stored in our minds about general cultural features of various nationalities. During their work, *supporters* have already complemented this generalized knowledge with their own experience derived from their experience of intercultural communication. And therefore it becomes an absolutely regular process to generalize about the *scouts'* capacities basing the conclusions on their nationalities. This process plays an important role in daily work because *supporters* should be able to recognize and respect these differences from

country to country as well as being aware that their idea of the other party in the communication does not always fall into the expected category.

3.5. Cultural Identity

When considering culture, we tend to question whether we are all the same. Emotionally we start to separate ‘ourselves’ from ‘others’. It has been a common practice to make divisions and generalize about each other depending on nationality, religion, ethnic belonging, gender, political belonging, the place person comes from and similar, as cultural identities, first and foremost, are seen to have local roots. Agar (2006) suggests that our way of thinking about each other represents labels that work inside a society as well as across diverse ones. The questionnaire developed in the framework of this dissertation proves that we tend to facilitate our work, in this case communication, by labelling and generalizing the working capacities of *scouts* depending on their nationalities. Consequently it is of great importance to consider how our cultural identity can affect the execution of our daily work.

Clarke (2011) defines cultural identity as the notion of identity shaped not just in relation to some other, but *to* the other, to another culture. Identity is formed through the socialization process and the influence of social institutions like the family, education system and the mass media (Browne, 2013). The concept of identity involves establishing our own identities and learning about the identities of other individuals in order to understand what makes us different or similar to other people.

Today the globalization process has made us pay close attention to our ‘national identities’ and our cultural belonging as there is a growing concern that we are losing it in the world of today. On the other hand, Hall (1996) suggests that identity and self identification is a never ending process which continues to grow and develop not denying that identity has its past. Therefore our identities are still growing and changing. The new technologies are a factor that definitely influence these changes although it can be argued that cultural identities cannot change significantly in their basis no matter the influence of outer impact. Self identity and sense of belonging to a specific culture cannot be simply substituted or dismissed. No matter the effort to change or to take up other cultural features, the process of recognizing oneself as belonging to one group always leads us to analyse and make comparisons between the existing culture to which the person belongs and another culture that the person is trying to adopt to or get acquainted with.

On one hand it can be seen as an advantage that the communication between *supporters* and *scouts* is done over the phone, therefore excluding the biases we make based on appearances, age, ethnicity, etc. The only cultural barrier that has to be faced is the nationality of the *scout* and concepts of that specific work culture. Hooker (2008) confirms that the variety of communication styles contribute to a staggering variety of the outcomes of the communication. The statement helps

us to understand that even if the conversations necessary to achieve the data reception from *scouts* are simple and specific enough they can suffer modification due to the fact that we are all different and our style to communicate varies greatly as well. My experience shows how cultural identity can be seen as a strong component of the conversation executed at the workplace at Runningball. The conversation can vary from very formal and restricted to highly familiar and sociable and in most cases it proves to be the effect of cultural features that distinguishes the conversation.

Chapter 4

Field Research

4.1. Research Aim and Objectives

The decision to choose the topic relating international sports business and intercultural communication within it emerged while working at the company - Runningball. Facing different assumptions about the world and different attitudes towards 'otherness' were the main turning points in advancing with the topic.

The aim of this study is to investigate how languages are connected to an international business and how cultural features may influence an intercultural communication within the specific business discussed throughout the dissertation. Particular attention is paid to communication, ways of transmitting information and cultural features which might influence the interaction between participants of varied cultural groups. In the following pages, I will try to explain why cultural features are important and how knowledge, or previous experience about these differences can help to improve the communication at working place, namely Runningball.

In developing questionnaire (Appendix 1) and gathering data, language was taken to be the main asset of successful international sports business and a tool to provide instant data from any part of the world. At the same time, it was understood that no matter the length of the conversation, cultural features can be revealed and cultural characteristics inevitably become stereotypes and a mean of classifying people by their national belonging.

In order to fulfil the objectives of the dissertation, the following research objectives were set:

- To recognize what is the contingent of workers employed at the company Runningball;
- To find out the employees' opinion about the language use at the workplace;
- To identify the importance of culture in the context of language use from the viewpoint of *supporters*;
- To examine whether *supporters* consider it possible to evaluate the upcoming communication;
- To find out whether the cultural features have any influence on communication between *supporters* and *scouts*;

- To evaluate the role of languages in daily work and recognize *supporters'* needs considering their linguistic abilities.

As described in the literature review, the research suggests that the language or, in this case, languages are what help the business to expand geographically and cover more and more sports leagues across the globe. In my opinion, the cultural identity should be discussed and included in consideration of the topic when speaking about international business and intercultural communication. Language is a tool that we use to transmit information either in low context or high context. Nevertheless it also implies the presence of attitudes, opinions, ideologies, beliefs among other things, which are discussed in previous chapters. The findings presented in the following chapter demonstrate the potential for merging theory and practice.

4.2. Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research method adopted in this study. A survey was developed and implemented considering the impact of cultural features and use of languages in an intercultural workplace. Nesbary (2000) defines survey as “the process of collecting representative sample data from a larger population and using the sample to infer attributes of larger population” (p. 10). Mentioning that the intent to represent an overall opinion of *supporters* as participants of a bigger group has been made. The purpose of the study was to recognize how language skills affect the job executed at Runningball taking into account that for most of the employees the languages used are not their mother tongue. Quantitative methodology was employed to relate to the aims of the study. Following Sampson (2012) the dissertation applies the main characteristics of a quantitative research, namely, questionnaires with predominantly fixed response items, data analysis of the responses as a measurement to assess the performance of variables that are included in research questions and hypotheses.

The choice to apply a questionnaire was based on the main characteristics of surveys proposed by Milne (1998): the responses are gathered in a standardized way, so questionnaires are considered more objective than other research methods; it is relatively quick to gather the data (in this case it took 25 days); and the information can be collected from a large portion of a group (all (60) *supporters* working at Aveiro office were asked to respond to the questionnaire). Nevertheless the following disadvantages were faced during the process: as questionnaires are standardized therefore it was not possible to explain any points to respondents in cases when they had some doubts or when they were completing them at home; closed questions generated a specific amount of information thus leaving out the possibility of variations; some of questionnaires were filled in superficially or left blank, which was the case of 10 questionnaires that were recognized as invalid and could not be used in data analysis.

The questionnaire was developed to survey a specific group of people who are in contact with intercultural communication daily - *supporters*. The choice to apply questionnaires was also influenced by the number of employees working at the office which would provide a wider range of answers and opinions in a way that would not be possible using other research methods. The questionnaire consists of mainly closed ended and fixed choice questions as the respondents typically are expected to have little motivation to complete surveys. To combat this factor, Likert Scale and modes of attitude scales were used in various questions. The choice was justified by the fact that the only open ended question was mainly left blank as it also was offered as a ‘skip

method', where the respondents were allowed to skip the question if they previously answered 'no' to Question 4 (Appendix 1).

The questionnaire consisted of six sections. The first part aimed to recognize the contingent of respondents, namely their age and sex. The second section explored the *supporters'* opinions on interconnectedness between culture and language. Further on, the questionnaire aimed to find out whether *supporters* consider it possible to envisage the upcoming communication by knowing the nationality of the *scout*. The fourth section of the questionnaire used the classification method and intended to group nationalities of *scouts* according to easiness or difficulty in communication. In section five, the questionnaire explored the main communication constraints and used a Likert Scale to analyze the responses. Both scaling modes were used because it was easy to construct them and they could be easily understood by the respondents. And finally the questionnaire aimed to pay close attention to the language skills necessary in the workplace and a willingness to improve these skills.

The questionnaire was self-administered. Detailed instructions on how to fill in the questionnaire were given at the beginning as well as personal responses given when the respondents asked for clarifications. The survey was conducted in respondents' mother tongue - Portuguese.

The research adopted a mixed approach and utilized different forms of methods; thus some characteristics of qualitative research might be present in representing the data analysis, namely, to describe experiences and interpret cultural behaviour. Both methods, quantitative and qualitative, view people as complex beings with various reasons that might explain their behaviour. The group of study included only the opinion of participants from one cultural group, which may imply that opinions are quite similar in their character. The following Chapter will introduce the field research conducted, the setting of the research as well as the results which were proved to be in consonance with the literature review discussed previously.

4.3. The setting

The office of Runningball was chosen for several reasons. First of all, it is an excellent example of today's technological advancement. More importantly, it serves as an illustration of multinational business with the diversity of languages at its core. In order to explore *supporters'* attitudes towards cultural differences and language usage in their workplace, a questionnaire was chosen as the research instrument. The *scouts'* nationalities were used as an important factor to explain how stereotyping or making presuppositions affect communication or reveal the presence of differences in the quality of communication.

The setting of this study was the Runningball office at Aveiro, Portugal. First of all, a pilot testing of the questionnaire was conducted in order to verify the validity of the questions proposed and to prevent potential errors. It was distributed among 5 colleagues working at Runningball from different kind of sports (2 respondents from the section of volleyball, 1 respondent from football, 1 respondent from the section of basketball and 1 from the section of ice hockey). Testing the questionnaire led to improvements in some questions, specifically in specifying the division of countries that *scouts* represent as feedback on questionnaires was received. Suggestions from colleagues were considered as valuable help in improving the survey. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed among 60 *supporters* and the responses are analyzed in the following paragraphs.

The questionnaire was created for respondents whose mother tongue is Portuguese, therefore the questionnaire was made in Portuguese rather than in English (Annex 1).

The process of questionnaire distribution and the collection of answers took place from 1st May, 2014 to 25th May 2014. A number of responses were received during this period of time; due to the changes in employees' timetables, some respondents chose to answer the questionnaire later at home and brought back filled questionnaires, or some of the questionnaires were never returned (10).

4.4.Target Group

As with most quantitative research cases probability sampling methods were used to represent the research data of this specific case. According to Leeuv et al. (2008) there are four characteristics of a survey considering sampling that must be met: 1) every individual in the group of interest can be included in the sample; 2) results can be generalized according to the population of interest; 3) quantities of respondents can be estimated accurately and cost-effectively; 4) survey is flexible for some unanticipated uses. The main objective of the study is to create a representative sample of the population, in this case to show the opinion of all *supporters* working at the office of Runningball in Aveiro. It is also important to mention that all respondents are directly involved in communication with *scouts*, and the employees that are working in the office as TV *scouts* were not included in the case study due to the fact that they are mainly using their mother tongue in the workplace. The case study represents 60 cases in the sampling frame, although the number of workers is growing rapidly and since the moment of questionnaire distribution, the company has added more *supporters* to its team.

The Aveiro office was chosen for this study due to its proximity and easy access to respondents and data. The first intention was to collect data from different groups, including also data from the second office that is based in Graz, Austria, although this data unfortunately could not be accessed.

The research might reproduce a sampling bias as only one cultural group is represented in the research; that is, people of Portuguese origin have been used as the population of reference and therefore the data collected reflects this specific group's viewpoint. It can be assumed that the results of the research might differ if changing the sample population although this assumption would need to be proved in further research. The limitations of the data are recognized due to the fact that the type of the business is quite new and only some companies are working in the field. The case of Runningball employs mainly two nationalities - Portuguese and Austrian, therefore limiting the viewpoint to two possible subgroups.

The questionnaire is reported in its entirety in the Appendices to this document.

4.5. Data Analysis of Questionnaires

In this chapter the results of the data analysis are presented. First of all it was of importance to characterize the contingent of employees working at Runningball in Aveiro. Therefore 60 questionnaires were distributed among *supporters* at the office of Runningball in Aveiro. However, not all the questionnaires were recognized as valid or returned, resulting in 50 questionnaires recognized as legitimate for this research, and a 83% response rate. The questionnaires were distributed among employees whose direct work involves communication with *scouts*. TV *scouts* were not included in the category of respondents that might participate in the data analysis as their work does not include any kind of communication with *scouts*, but only with *supporters* with whom the communication is conducted in their mother tongue.

The scope of the questionnaire primarily covers the following issues:

- recognizing the contingent employed at the company;
- identifying the significance of language use at an international business;
- analysing how cultural stereotypes can affect inter-cultural communication;
- recognizing the difficulties that occur while communicating using second or third language.

The first step of data analysis involved retrieving and displaying the responses received from the questionnaires. Firstly, the respondents' sex was determined in order to reveal the specialization of the business. Sports is considered mainly a male occupation which also is revealed in the following Table 5. From all the workers at the company, only 3 are female and would even diminish if compared to all the workers of the company (as already mentioned before there was a reason not to include all the employees in the respondents' group). Since ancient times, women have been discriminated against as considering sports' participation. And still today there seems to be clear preferences with regard to employees when considering the sports business.

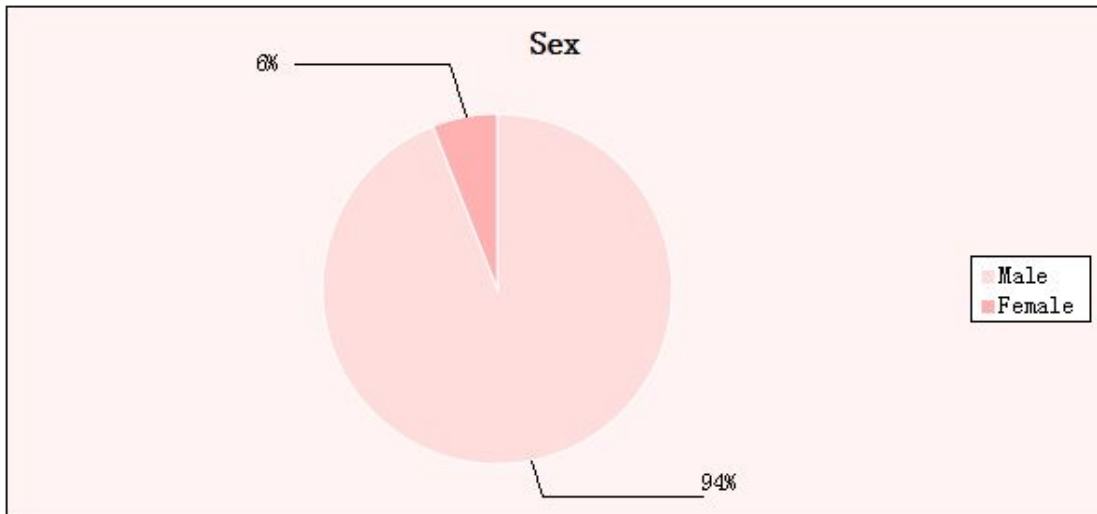


Table 5. Respondents' Sex

The age distribution of respondents working at Runningball (Aveiro) is represented in Table 6. It can be seen that the age group ranged from 22-34 years old, making the biggest part of the group consisting of people with 27, 28, 29, and 30 years. The fact that the company is very recent might be one of the reasons why the employees' contingent consists of quite young people. The business in itself requires the capacity to use second language, the ability to use the computer and Runningball's programme as well as being good at a specific sport. These characteristics apply best to younger employees.

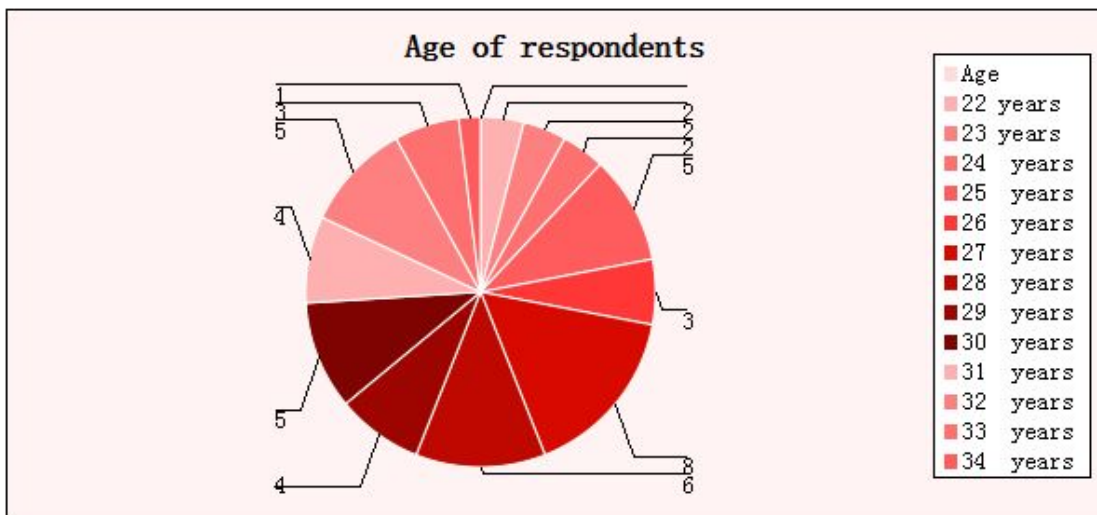


Table 6. Respondents' Age

On the question about the frequency of second language usage the majority of respondents (70%) affirmed that they speak languages other than their mother tongue every day, leaving 30% of

employees who affirmed that they use it a few times per week or time to time. The company works 24 hours per day and never closes for any holidays. Therefore the 70% of affirmations were that employees use a second language every day in their professional lives. None of the respondents answered that they would use second language rarely or almost never. This proves the fact that the company works internationally and even in spite of evidence that there are games covered in Portuguese speaking countries, none of the *supporters* is allowed to work only with specific countries depending on their language skills. Every *supporter* must be able to conduct a conversation with a person from any part of the world completing the requirement of the company to speak English as the main language of communication. Though it is preferable that *supporters* would be able to speak other languages as well. As the second most used language in the office is Spanish. Employees are expected to dominate this language as well, due to the large amount of sports games covered in Latin America and Spain.

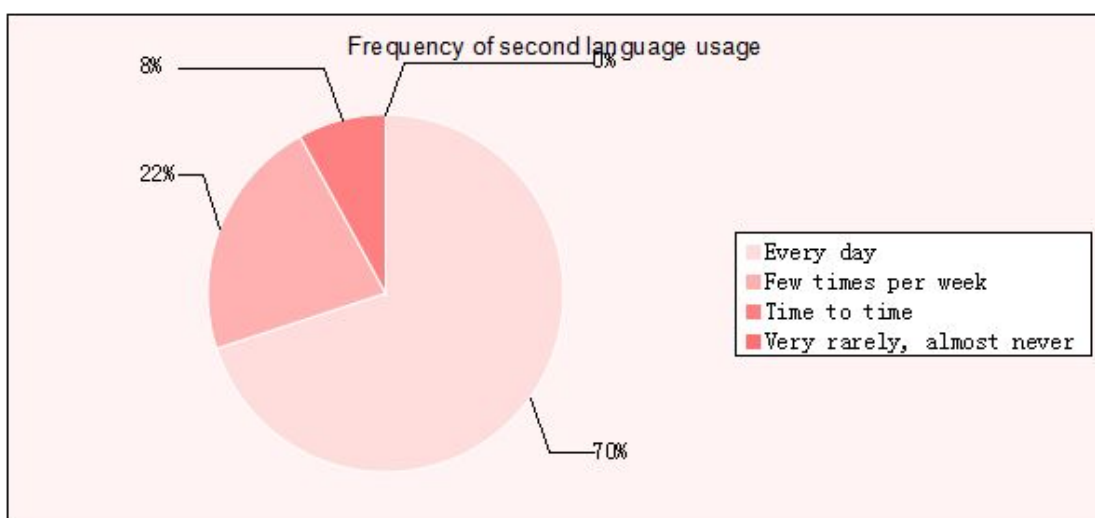


Table 7. Usage of second language in respondents' professional life

The topic of research suggests the examination of how we understand each other and how cultural factors influence our daily work, especially when regarding intercultural communication. Runningball works with people from more than 83 countries daily, which definitely includes communication with different cultures and the use of different languages. The cultural aspect was seen as different for the majority of respondents. Table 8 shows that 64% of respondents think that we are all different. The responses were divided between the statements that the variety of languages is a sign that proves these differences and that language can be used as a tool to overcome these differences.

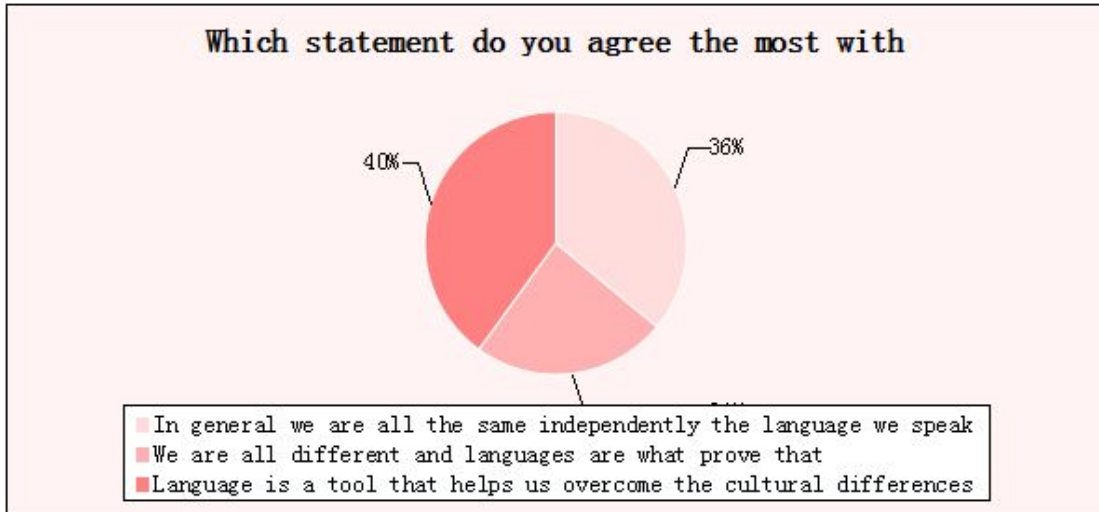


Table 8. Language in the context of culture

A surprising revelation struck me that after some period of time we start to generalize and make concepts about *scouts* from other cultures. And just on basis of their cultural belonging we would start to predict what the communication would be like. The following Table 9 represents the fact that the majority of *supporters* working at the company think similarly and 84% agreed that they are predicting the easiness or difficulty in communication with *scouts*.

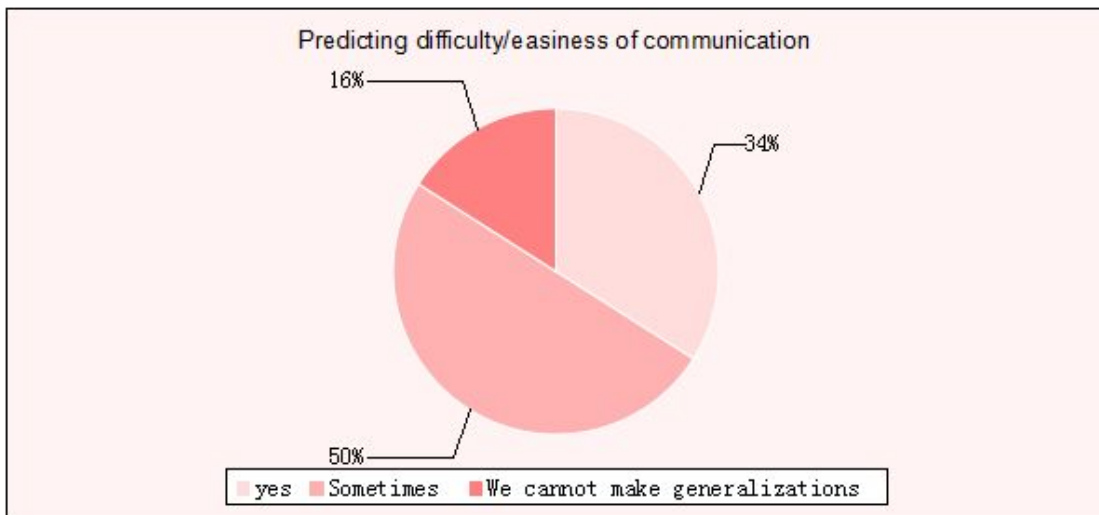


Table 9. Predictions about the communication with *scouts*

The following question was set in order to find out whether *supporters* agree with the statement that we can characterize a *scout* just by taking into account his/her nationality. And the majority of responses were in agreement with the statement and consider it possible.

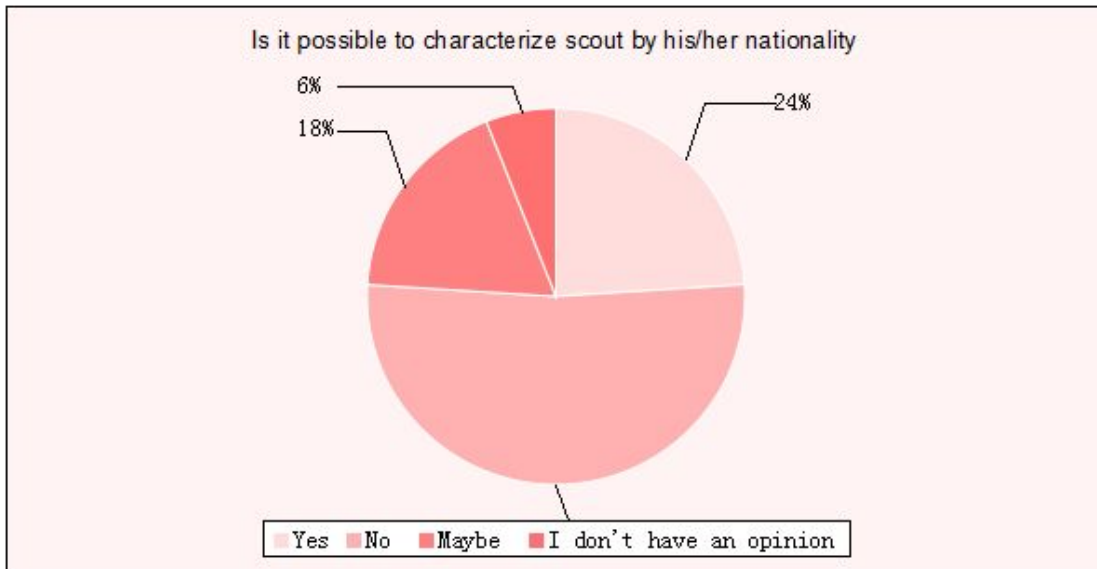


Table 10. Characterizing *scouts*

Consequently the following question asked *supporters* to evaluate *scouts* from different parts of the world (Table 11). The division of countries intends to include major areas where the games are covered and divided by cultural proximity. Although Europe has been divided into 4 groups due to the cultural differences from country to country. The division can be justified also by a linguistic closeness of the countries that helps to classify them and divide them into groups, for example, Romance languages are seen to be a unifying component for Spain, Italy, Portugal, Romania and France. *Supporters* were asked to evaluate *scouts* on the scale from 1-5 where 5 is equivalent to a very easy communication and 1 refers to very difficult communication. The best evaluation results were given to Brazil, North America, Australia and Oceania, and Northern Europe. The conclusion might be drawn that the same language use was the principal factor of easiness in communication with Brazilian *scouts*. North America and Australia might have a similar explanation as only one part of the interlocutors uses second language (in these cases *supporters*). The lowest evaluation was given to *scouts* from Asia and Africa. It can be suggested that the cultural and language differences might be the influential factors why *supporters* consider the communication with the *scouts* from these parts of the world as the most difficult ones. The division of countries intends to include major areas where the games are covered and divided by approximate cultural and linguistic closeness.

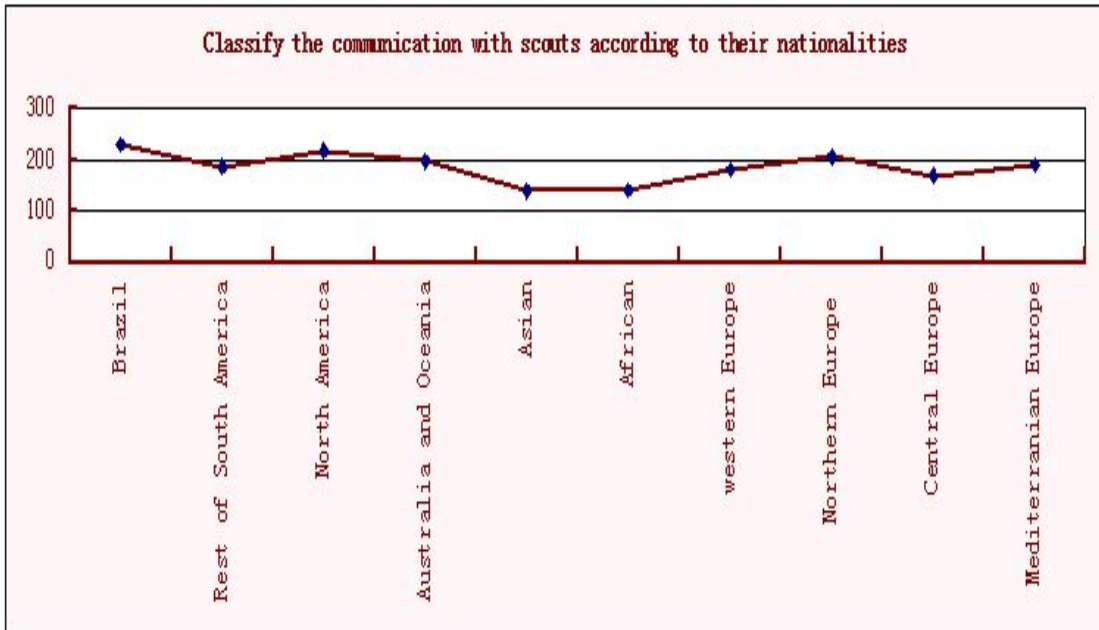


Table 11. *Supporters rating scouts*

Chapter 2.5. represents a list of possible constraints and difficulties that *supporters* face in the communication with *scouts*. Therefore the questionnaire asked respondents which problems they consider as most important and distracting in their daily work (Table 12). As the biggest constraints were recognized *scouts'* accents and a second language usage as it is always more difficult to express ourselves in a language other than our mother tongue. Other factors such as the noise at the venue, cultural characteristics and, finally, bad English knowledge were recognized as barriers to successful communication.

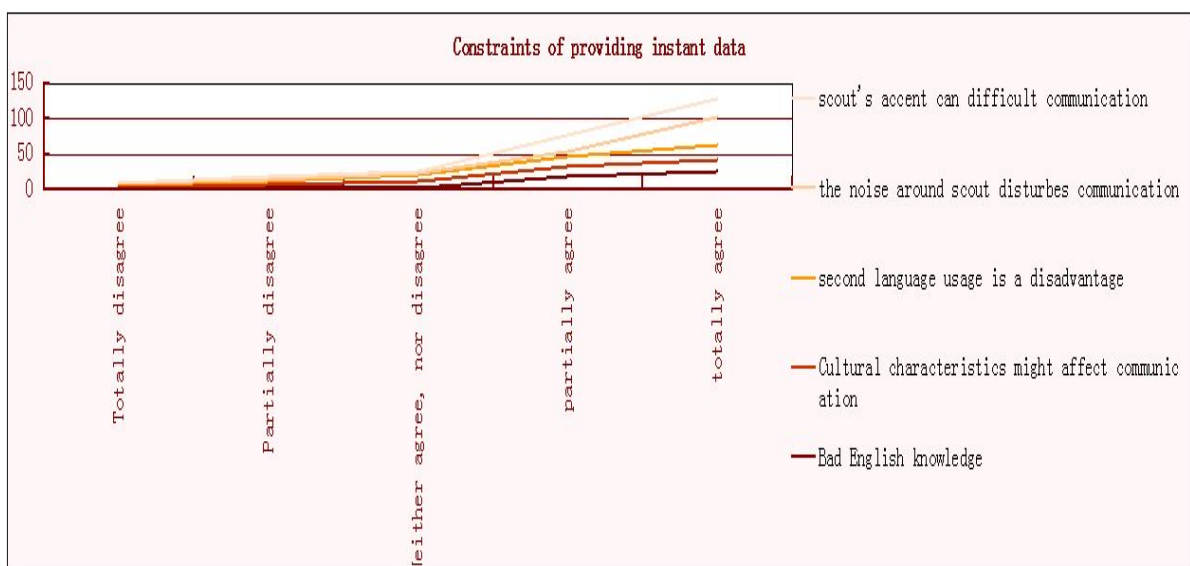


Table 12. Constraints of providing instant data

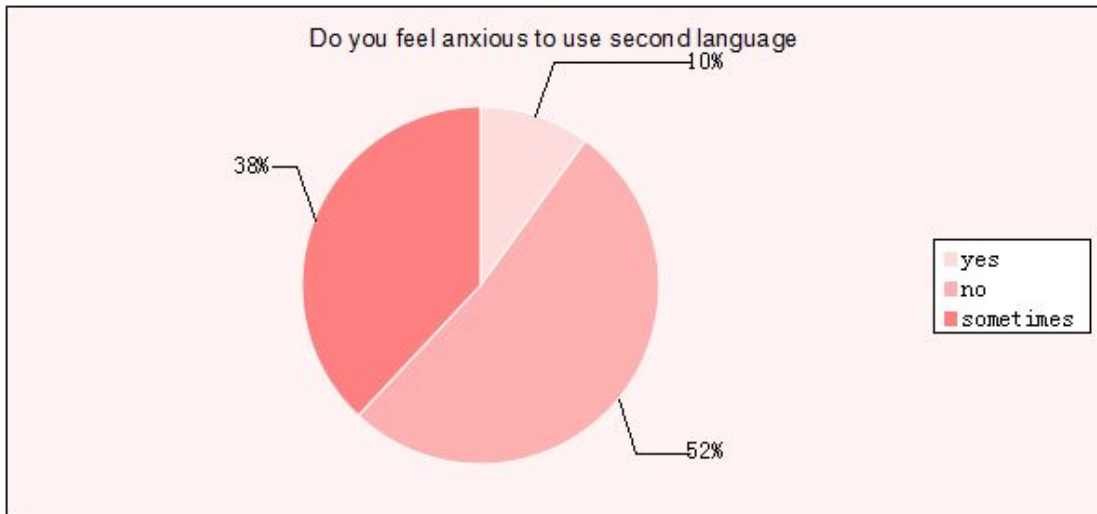


Table 13. Anxiety at work

The respondents were asked whether they feel anxious before starting a day of work at Runningball. The reason to propose the question was to find out whether employees feel well and relaxed using a second language. Surprisingly only 10% of all the respondents said that they feel anxious and 38% suggested that sometimes they do. Therefore the conclusion was made that in general *supporters* are used to second language use in their professional life and only time to time get concerned about it. That might be explained by the fact that in some cases the communication can get complicated if a *scout* is new to the business or not so familiar with the second language. Then the communication can take a much longer time and problem solving may not happen as smoothly as it should.

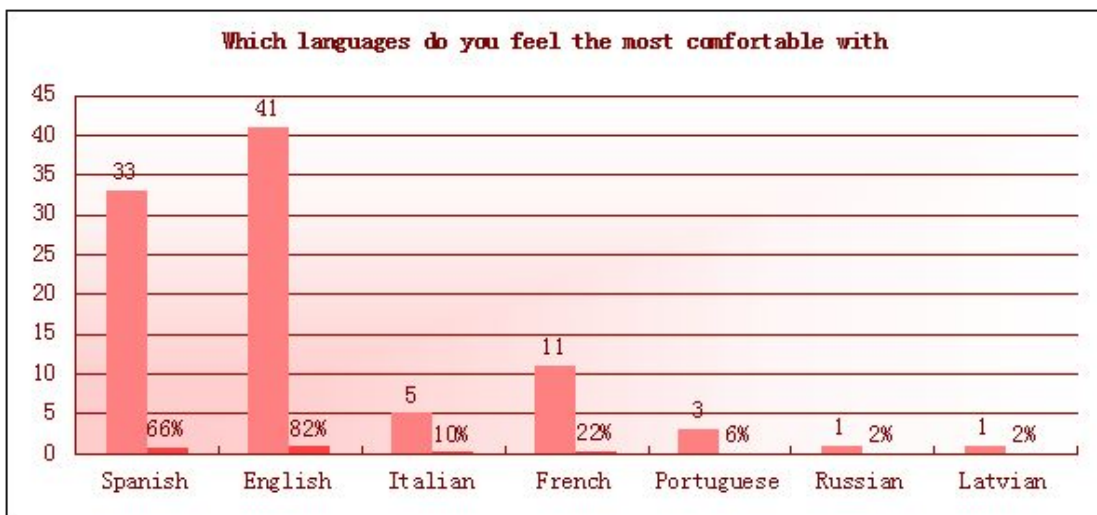


Table 14. The languages *supporters* feel the most comfortable with

Afterwards the *supporters* were asked to identify languages they feel the most comfortable with. The majority responded that they feel most confident in using English (82%) and Spanish (66%). Some of the respondents suggested they feel comfortable using French (22%) and Italian (10%). A free option to add another language was offered in the questionnaire and only some of the respondents added their mother tongue to the list, though it is obvious that the number should be 100% as it is the mother tongue of 98% of respondents. Two other languages appeared in the list due to a fact that there are 2 persons at the company who have other nationalities than Portuguese.

One of the most important parts of the questionnaire was set to find out what *supporters* consider as more difficult in carrying out their work when speaking with *scouts*. The majority of respondents mentioned *scouts'* accent and the choice of vocabulary used in communication. Miscommunication is easy when you are speaking with someone who is not talking as you are used to hearing. The company works with people from more than 83 countries. It is impossible to have one pattern for all the cases, even though the conversation is limited enough and specific enough to the sport. All in all understanding is recognized as the biggest obstacle for successful and fast communication. The author of the dissertation suggests that understanding is not difficult only from the *supporters'* part, but also from *scouts'* part as they also can find it difficult to adapt to the Portuguese accent when they are speaking English or Spanish. This topic has been discussed previously in Chapter 3.4 which explains how the language varies between its users across the countries. It has also been discussed previously why the adaptation to different accents is crucial in effective communication.

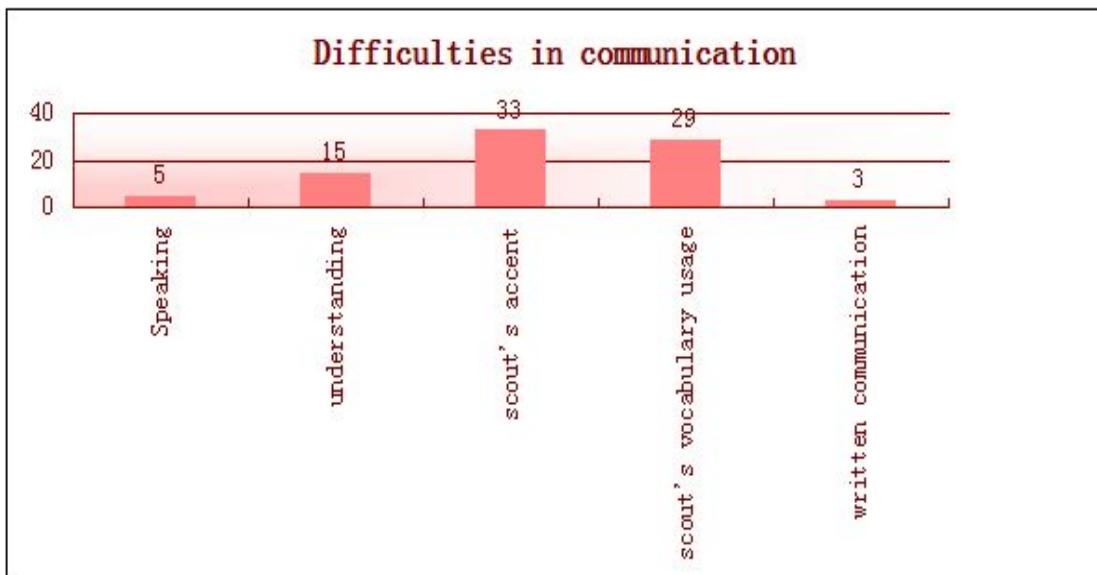


Table 15. Communication difficulties

Finally the respondents were asked whether they would be interested in developing their language skills and in what way (Table 16). 96% of respondents agreed and would be responsive to learning possibilities. Considering the way of learning, the majority would prefer language courses and individual classes (68%). Self-centred learning was not the most popular way of improving their language skills (Table 17).

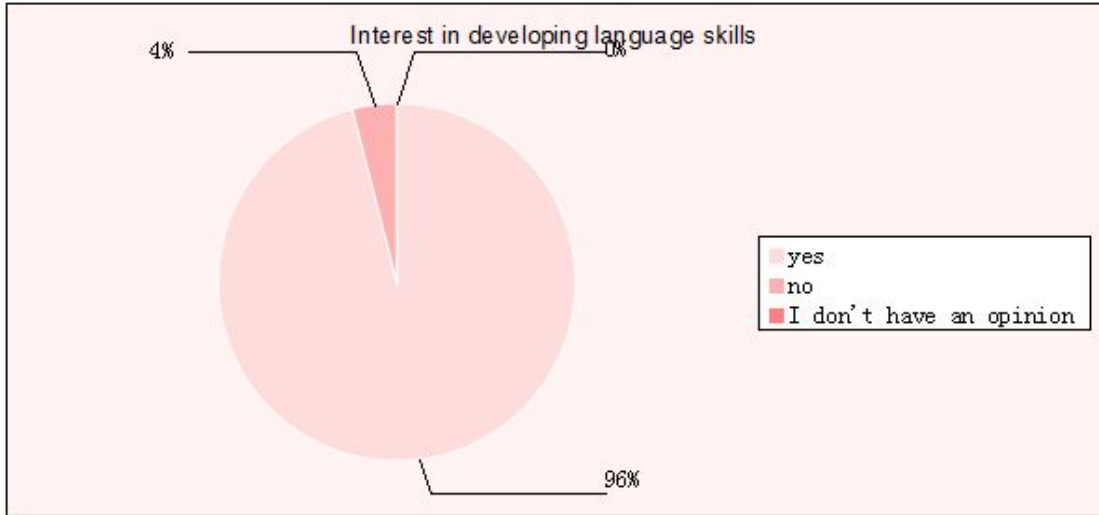


Table 16. Interest in developing language skills

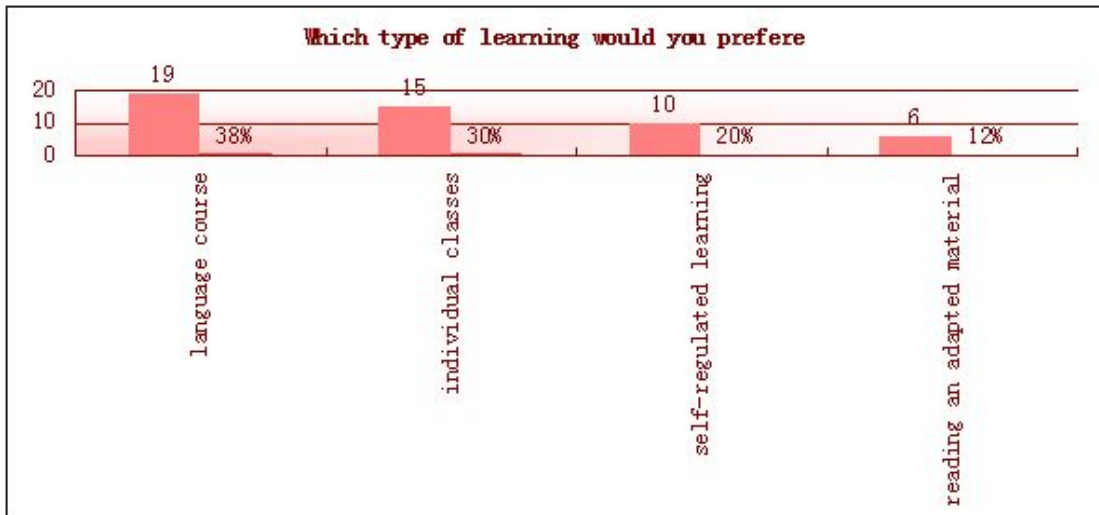


Table 17. Learning preferences

4.6. Discussion

This dissertation addresses the topics of sports betting, sports data, sports media and the sports information business based in an intercultural environment. The literature study reveals how in a short period of time, the biggest sports media enterprise Perform Group has become the leader not only on the local scale, but also on a global scale. It has helped many local enterprises to increase their audiences and expand globally, as has been the case of Runningball. Since the acquisition by Perform Group, during the last 2 years Runningball has raised its revenues significantly and now covers sports events from more than 83 countries around the world. Nevertheless, this would not be possible without the advancement of technologies. This is a clear demonstration of how the internet has helped to unite the world and has made intercultural communication possible and even necessary in today's world.

Issues related to languages in business and development of the *lingua franca* of today, English, has changed over years have been addressed. Today the important feature is not to be a proficient user of English which is close to the native tongue, but rather to be a proficient user of the language thus being ready to interact with people for whom English is their second or third language as well. The aim of using the language is to transmit the idea, and this way the international businesses give preference to multilingual staff, still maintaining the requirement to be proficient in English, apart from other languages. The case of Runningball is a great example of how multilingualism is accepted and valued in the business as its staff speak various languages: English, Portuguese, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian and Latvian.

Runningball works with a variety of cultures, precisely with about 83 nationalities. This also raised the question of whether cultural features can affect the work done. The literature review tried to take a closer look at the theoretical concept and the field study was developed to address the objectives of the dissertation. Both approaches revealed that culture is a coexisting component in communication no matter the length or sophistication of the conversation. Cultural features must be respected and tolerated when dealing with intercultural communication.

The following paragraphs summarize the information obtained from the study and also answer the research questions proposed previously.

Firstly the contingent of the workers employed at the office was determined which is mainly male gender and in the age range of 22-34 years old. This fact does not evoke any surprise as the business is closely related to sports and data collection via software systems, which are considered typically male focused vocations. Apart from that, the age range also reveals that it can be

considered as a good opportunity for young people who usually face difficulties in finding jobs due to lack of experience. Runningball also employs many undergraduates or people who have recently graduated from the University, which shows how the company tolerates and appreciates the educational background of its employees.

The questionnaire tested various prior assumptions proposed and the answers to the questionnaire mainly appeared to be in agreement and allowed to draw out general conclusions.

The assumption that independently of the length of the conversation, cultural features can be revealed in the shortest period of time and cultural characteristics inevitably become stereotypes and a means of classifying people by their national belonging proved to be justified, visible by the answers received from the questions that are represented in tables 8, 9, and 10. *Supporters* have already enough experience in working with *scouts* from different parts of the world and therefore inevitably there are already assumptions made about specific nationalities and difficulty level of communication when working with *scouts*. Besides, a typical day at work includes conversations between co-workers, sharing experiences and opinions about the upcoming communications. My personal experience also confirmed this hypothesis as it has become a daily routine to predict the communication according to nationality and its cultural features are a very strong component that affects the conversation. An example of that would be a comparison between *scouts* from Ukraine and Jordan. The cultures differ a lot and so will the communication. The *scout* from Ukraine would be as concise and abrupt as possible, though the *scout* from Jordan would show high level of courtesy and respect and would only finish the conversation with showing courtesy even when parting and would never hang up the call without showing gratitude first.

Table 11 reveals how *supporters* evaluate the communication with people from specific parts of the world. The most difficult communication has been recognized as the communication with *scouts* of Asian and African origin *scouts*. I would suggest that the cultural differences might be one of the main factors why it is so difficult to conduct a successful and easy communication with *scouts* from these parts of the world, and that linguistic background should also be considered as an important factor that influences the communication.

Europe was divided into four regions to find out whether *supporters* consider it important from which part of Europe the *scout* is from. And the answers revealed that even in Europe there are differences in communication. Table 11 represents that it is considered much easier to conduct a conversation with *scouts* from Northern Europe than with *scouts* from Central Europe.

The questionnaire revealed that *supporters* are used to second or third language use in their daily life as it occurs almost every day. They feel most comfortable using English although Spanish was

also recognized as a language that is easy to use in their work. This can be supported also by the fact that *supporters* find it easy to communicate with people from North America and Australia and Oceania where English is the native language (see Table 11). The easiest communication is recognized as being with *scouts* from Brazil, where the mother tongue is shared between both parties.

The linguistic abilities were recognized as the biggest obstacle in conducting successful communication with *scouts* (Tables 12, 15). The accent and vocabulary usage were the most common distractions chosen by respondents, whereas the external side effects, such as noise or bad connections, were recognized as distracting, although not as distracting as the *scouts'* accent.

The questionnaire included questions on the *supporters'* opinions about developing their language skills. The majority agreed that they would be interested in improving their language skills. The most popular way of doing so was through language courses or individual language classes, and only some of *supporters* would be interested in self-regulated learning.

All in all the questionnaire was used to reflect on the viewpoints of people working at the enterprise and to incorporate the answers to support the literature study. The results were recognized as valid and in general corresponding to the expectancies of the author of the dissertation with some exceptions. It was a great surprise that *supporters* feel more at ease to use English rather than Spanish which is closer in similarity to employees' mother tongue, Portuguese. Another revelation was that *supporters* would prefer to attend language courses or individual classes where they would have to relocate themselves and would have to spend a certain amount of hours by being present, in a contrast to self-guided studies or learning from a language manual which would not restrict their personal time and could be left on their own responsibility.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

This dissertation had as an objective to investigate how relevantly new business has evolved and to describe the type of business, while paying closer attention to one specific company that works with sports data, namely Runningball. All the data collected considering the parent company Perform Group and its subsidiary company Runningball reveals a surprising fact that in a short period of time, the parent company has become a leader in providing sports data and media and the subsidiary company has become the provider of the fastest in-game information, as well as it has helped its subsidiary to rise and cover more sports events than it had ever done before.

Innovations and technologies are tools that both companies use to provide sports data, although language should also be recognized as a very important component of all these actions, which in most cases was not the speaker's mother tongue. A multilingual environment has become part of the daily life of workers at Runningball offices, and the field study has revealed that not only has English taken the place of the most important language in international business, but a mixture of various languages is the key to greater success. Moreover there are other competencies that are necessary in international business apart from language skills. These are intercultural competence, personal competences, linguistic communication competence, social competence, interaction competence and similar. To conclude, IBMS has given a precise definition of competency to be applied in international business:

The ability to combine knowledge, skills and attitude to show expected behaviour when performing a professional task in an inter-cultural business. IBMS (2011).

Limitations

Throughout the process of writing the dissertation, I faced various obstacles to providing the information necessary to give a better perception to the reader of how the company works. First of all it has to be mentioned that I am grateful for the permission to reveal the nature of the business in my dissertation work. However, there were times when the information was scarce and not sufficient to provide some numerical data that would explain the growth of the company or future plans for investments.

Another limitation was faced when a possibility to compare questionnaire answers from two nationalities, regarding Austrian and Portuguese, was not made possible due to changes in the office staff in Austria. It would have been of great interest to compare whether the cultural belonging affects the answers and viewpoint on evaluating *scouts*' work.

Additionally the literature on the subject was based more on Internet materials due to the fact that the on-line business is seemingly a new topic and not much literature has been printed considering this matter. Although it was surprising how much statistical material is available on-line on gambling profits, including sports betting, expansion of on-line gambling, legislation and more.

Future Suggestions

This dissertation has demonstrated how new types of on-line business have evolved since personal computers and the internet have become a part of our daily life. It demonstrates how a small company, namely, Runningball has grown and how it implies a worldwide coverage of sports games in order to sell this specific data to its clients.

The importance of this study was to reveal how the technological world has brought any place in the world accessible to the viewer. It shows how international communication goes beyond borders, cultural differences, and language differences. All this would not be possible without the technology and software, which has been developed to meet the needs of the company. The last decade has brought many changes in economics; however, Runningball has managed to survive and grow greatly as today it employs more than 90 *supporters* at the office in Aveiro and more than a thousand *scouts* around the world.

This final chapter of the dissertation begins with a brief description of major insights from the new type of on-line business and the contributions that it gives to the new order of multicultural communication which no longer has to be a face-to-face communication. It concludes with questions raised by the study, implications for improvement, and suggestions for future research.

I would suggest that it is important to continue to explore this new type of highly profitable business and make a comparison with similar companies working in the field. Furthermore it is of great interest to explore how multicultural business can be well managed and organized as it has been discussed throughout the dissertation that Runningball employs people in approximately 80 countries (referring to *scouts*). And lastly it is of great importance to investigate what roles languages will take in future, whether the focus will be put on developing a bilingual capacities, maintaining English as the *lingua franca*, or whether the stress will be put on developing a multilingual society in which people are able to apply a large number of languages in their daily work.

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Annexus 1

Questionário

Obrigada por dedicar parte do seu tempo para responder a este questionário. As suas respostas sobre a comunicação no seu contexto de trabalho contribuirá para a melhor compreensão da gestão das diferenças culturais num negócio internacional, tema central da minha dissertação de Mestrado em Línguas e Relações Interculturais, a realizar sob a orientação da Prof^a Gillian Moreira, na Universidade de Aveiro (Valentina Maksimova).

O questionário deverá ocupar aproximadamente 7 minutos do seu tempo. As suas respostas ficarão totalmente anónimas.

Idade: _____

Sexo:

Feminino

Masculino

1) Com que frequência utiliza outras línguas além da língua materna na sua vida profissional?

Todos os dias

Algumas vezes por semana

De vez em quando

Muito raramente, quase nunca

2) Indica qual das afirmações concorda mais

Em geral todos somos iguais independentemente da língua que falamos

Somos todos diferentes e as línguas são um sinal que comprova isso

A língua é uma ferramenta que nos ajuda a superar as diferenças culturais

3) Quando recebe a lista dos jogos, costuma a prever a dificuldade ou facilidade que vai ter em comunicar com o *scout* do país específico?

Sim

Às vezes isso é difícil de prever, outras vezes é óbvio que a comunicação com o *scout* vai ser difícil

Não podemos generalizar e tirar conclusões hipotéticas

4) Considera possível caracterizar o *scout* apenas considerando a nacionalidade dele/dela?

- Sim
- Não
- Talvez
- Não tenho opinião

5) Se respondeu que *sim* na pergunta anterior mencione 3 características inerentes à comunicação, hábitos de trabalho, profissionalismo, relacionamento interpessoal dos *scouts* das seguintes nacionalidades:

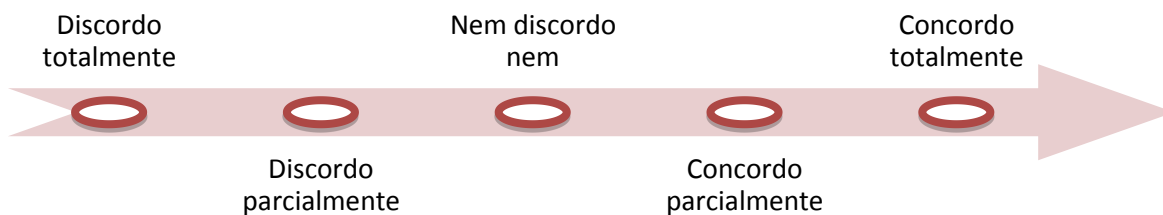
- espanhol: _____
- egípcio: _____
- alemão: _____
- americano: _____

6) Classifique de acordo com a nacionalidade de cada scout numa escala de 1-5 em que 1 é que corresponde a uma comunicação muito difícil e 5 que corresponde a uma comunicação muito fácil de lidar.

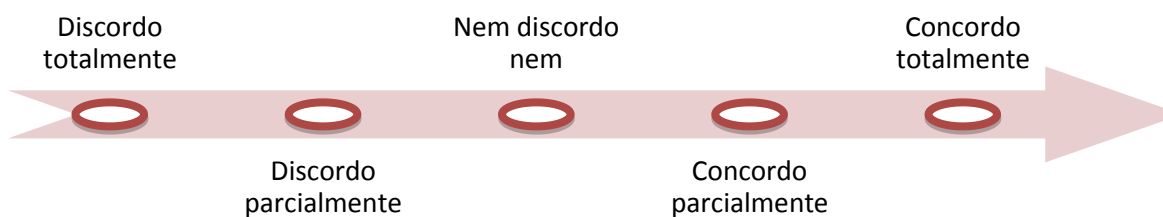
- Brasil
- Restantes Sul Americanos/ falantes de Espanhol
- Norte Americanos
- Australianos
- Asiáticos (Países do Golfo Pérsico, República da Coreia, Japão, Indonésia, Taiwan, Filipinas, Indonésia Hong Kong China, Vietnam, Tailândia, Kazakistão, Rússia entre outros)
- Africanos (Argélia, Egipto, Marrocos, África do Sul)
- Europa Ocidental (Reino Unido, Irlanda, França, Holanda, Bélgica, Alemanha, Áustria, Suíça, Luxemburgo, Liechtenstein)
- Europa Setentrional (Noruega, Suécia, Finlândia, Islândia, Dinamarca, Estónia, Letónia, Lituânia)
- Europa Centro-Oriental (Polónia, República Checa, Eslováquia, Hungria, Roménia, Bulgária, Albânia, Sérvia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Eslovénia Croácia, Bósnia e Herzegovina, Macedónia, Bielorrússia, Ucrânia, Moldávia, Geórgia, Arménia, Azerbaijão e Rússia Europeia)
- Europa Meridional (Portugal, Espanha, Itália, Grécia, Turquia, Vaticano, San Marino, Mónaco, Malta e Andorra)

7) Escolhe dentro dos 5 graus de intensidade de dificuldade na comunicação o que melhor se adapta a cada um dos seguintes problemas.

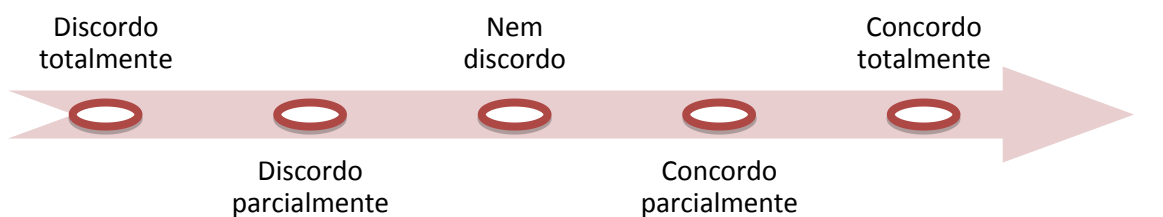
- ✧ Mau Inglês/Espanhol do *scout* interfere a rapidez da recessão dos dados.



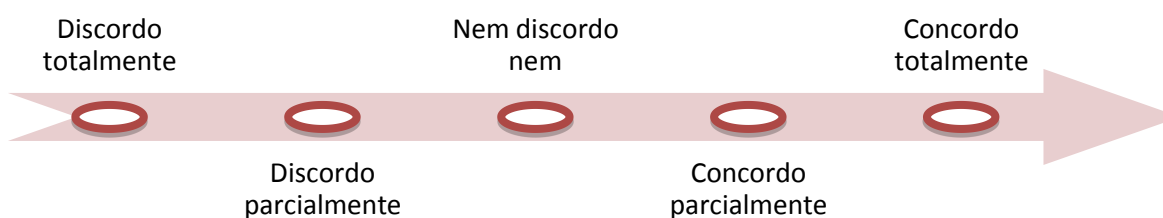
- ✧ As características culturais estando implícitas em cada indivíduo podem criar mal entendidos numa conversação.



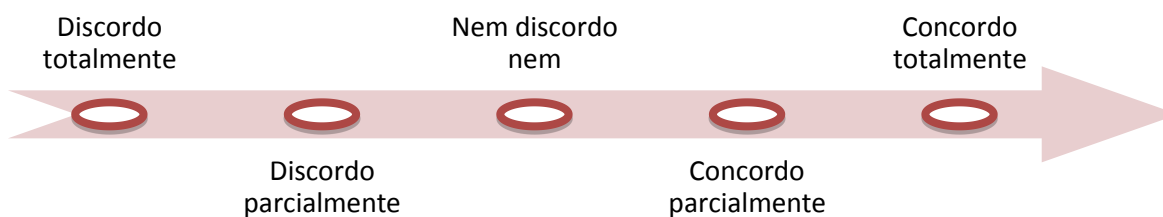
- ✧ Utilização da segunda língua ao invés da língua materna é uma desvantagem tanto da parte do *scout* como do *supporter*.



- ✧ O barulho existente a volta do *scout* constitui um problema no entendimento da informação.



- ✧ O sotaque do *scout* pode prejudicar a percepção da informação.



8) Sente-se ansioso quando usa uma língua diferente à sua língua materna no exercício do seu trabalho:

- Não
- Sim
- Por vezes

9) Com que línguas se sente mais à vontade para comunicar no exercício da sua actividade:

- Espanhol
- Inglês
- Italiano
- Francês
- outras _____

10) Dos seguintes componentes da comunicação assinale aqueles em que considera ter mais dificuldades:

- falar;
- compreender:
 - o sotaque do *scout*
 - a linguagem utilizada pelo *scout*
 - a comunicação escrita (por exemplo: nos comentários)

11) Concorda com a seguinte afirmação: *a facilidade em utilizar a segunda língua melhora a rapidez de resolução dos problemas:*

- Sim
- Não
- Não tenho opinião

12) Estaria interessado em desenvolver as suas competências linguísticas:

- Sim
- Não
- Não tenho opinião

13) Se respondeu que sim na pergunta anterior, escolhe qual a solução que melhor adaptaria ao seu caso:

- curso linguístico
- aulas/explicações individuais
- aprendendo por si próprio
- Lendo um material linguístico apropriado para as necessidades do supporter.

Annexus 2

Questionnaire Results

Gender	Nb. Of respondents
Male	47
Female	3

Table 16. Respondents' gender

Age	Nb. Of respondents
22 years	2
23 years	2
24 years	2
25 years	5
26 years	3
27 years	8
28 years	6
29 years	4
30 years	5
31 years	4
32 years	5
33 years	3
34 years	1

Table 17. Respondents' Age

	How often do you speak other languages apart from your mother tongue?
Every day	35
Few times per week	11
Time to time	4
Very rarely, almost never	0

Table 18. Usage of second language in respondents' professional life

■	Which statement do you agree the most with?
In general we are all the same independently the language we speak	18
We are all different and languages are what prove that	12
Language is a tool that helps us overcome the cultural differences	20

Table 19. Language in the context of culture

	Predicting how difficult or easy the communication will be
yes	17
Sometimes	25
We cannot make generalizations	8

Table 20. Predictions about the communication with *scouts*

	Do you consider it possible to characterize <i>scout</i> only by taking into consideration hes/her nationality?
Yes	12
No	26
Maybe	9
I don't have an opinion	3

Table 21. Characterizing *scouts*

	Classify scouts from these countries
Brazil	230
Rest of South America	188
North America	219
Australia and Oceania	198
Asian	139
African	141
western Europe	181

Northern Europe	207
Central Europe	170
Mediterranean Europe	190

Table 22. *Supporters rating scouts*

	Totally disagree	Partially disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	partially agree	totally agree
Bad English knowledge	1	2	3	20	27
Cultural characteristics might affect communication	5	6	10	13	16
second language usage is a disadvantage	1	5	9	15	21
the noise around <i>scout</i> disturbs communication	2	2	2	7	39
<i>scout's</i> accent can difficult communication	1	3	3	22	25

Table 23. Constraints of providing instant data

	do you feel anxious to use second language
yes	5
no	26
sometimes	19

Table 24. Anxiety at work

	Which languages do you feel the most comfortable with	%
Spanish	33	66%
English	41	82%
Italian	5	10%
French	11	22%
Portuguese	3	6%
Russian	1	2%
Latvian	1	2%

Table 25. The languages *supporters* feel the most comfortable with

	Difficulties in communication
Speaking	5
understanding	15
<i>scout's</i> accent	33
<i>scout's</i> vocabulary usage	29
written communication	3

Table 26. Communication difficulties

	interested in developing language skills
yes	48
no	2

I don't have an opinion	0
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Table 27. Interest in developing language skills

	Which type of learning would you prefer	%
language course	19	38%
individual classes	15	30%
self-regulated learning	10	20%
reading an adapted material	6	12%

Table 28. Learning preferences