• Vincent Edwards (Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education) and Peter Lawrence (Loughborough University Business School), *The post-socialist firm: from self-management to management in Slovenia.*

• Niti Dubey-Villinger (University of Cambridge), *Revitalising organisations in east central Europe: does the injection cure the patient?*

### 1410-1700 Working Paper Track 26

**Theme:** Theoretical perspectives on change management.

**Chair:** Robert Chia (University of Stirling).

- Robert Chia (University of Stirling), *Managing complexity or complex managing?*
- David McHugh (Lancashire Business School), *Managers versus organisations?*
- Noel Siu (Hong Kong Baptist University), Linda Davies and Charles Cui-Chi (Leicester Business School), *'Calculator + experience': a view of management through Chinese eyes.*
- Roger Mansfield and Manuel Oliveria (Cardiff Business School), *Distinguishing the great from the good: a study of the world’s leading golfers.*
- Mary-Jo Hatch (Copenhagen Business School) and Gerry Johnson (Cranfield University School of Management), *Theorizing with managers.*

### 1410-1700 Working Paper Track 27

**Theme:** Change through the application of IT - I.

**Chair:** Anthony Fretwell-Downing (Sheffield University Management School).

- Robin Gale and Tom Macnamara (South Bank University), *An industry-wide strategic study of ‘common use information technology systems’ at airports.*
- Matthew Hinton and Roland Kaye (Open University School of Management), *The hidden investments in IT: the role of organisational context and system dependency.*
- Gareth Griffiths (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Paul Finlay (Loughborough University Business School), *IS benefits - beyond reasonable doubt?*

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**Location Codes:**

- LT = Lecture Theatre
- OC = Octagon Centre (Map Ref 1)
- BB = Biology Building (Map Ref 4)
- SR = Seminar Room
- UH = University House (Map Ref 2)
- AT = Arts Tower (Map Ref 5)
- MR = Meeting Room
- FC = Firth Court (Map Ref 3)
DISTINGUISHING THE GREAT FROM THE GOOD: A STUDY OF THE WORLD'S LEADING GOLFERS

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Introduction

There have been a very large number of research studies examining the relationships between motivation and a variety of other factors and levels of performance in a wide variety of different occupational settings. There have also been many studies examining the effects of changes in motivation and other factors on levels of performance. The present study attempts to extend this literature in a very specific way.

The study reported here attempts to examine what motivational and attitudinal factors are associated with becoming one of the greatest golfers in the world as opposed to being “merely” a very successful tournament professional.

There is considerable evidence that high levels of performance are achieved by those with high levels of motivation and by those who put in very large amounts of effort or hard work. There is also clear evidence that aptitude or ability may also be associated with very high levels of performance although there is a danger that this relationship may be tautological in some cases.

In the present study a sample of the world’s leading professional golfers were interviewed with a view to illuminating some of the characteristics that might distinguish the great from the good.

Method

Interviews were conducted with 75 professional golfers competing on the US PGA Tour, the European Volvo Tour, the European Senior Tour or the WPG European Tour. With one exception, the interviews were conducted on or around the course at a major event. The events at which interviews were conducted were the 1993 English Open, the 1993 Senior British Open, the 1993 Women’s British Open and the 1994 US PGA Tournament. The one exception was Nick Faldo who was interviewed in his home.

It should be noted that the latter three events were grand slam events and therefore leading players from all over the world were present, which allowed interviews to be conducted with leading players who did not normally play on those particular tours. At the time of the first set of interviews in 1993 the number one ranked player in the world in each of the three categories of men’s golf, senior men’s golf and women’s golf were included in the sample. The interviews varied in length from 15 minutes to half an hour with the exception of the interview with Faldo which lasted well over an hour. In each case, after the respondent had agreed to be interviewed, the remainder of the interview was tape recorded.
It should be noted that the sample of golfers interviewed was in no sense random. It was something between a representative sample of golfers with different levels of achievement on the tours and a convenience sample where golfers were selected according to their availability. In total 75 golfers were interviewed of whom 15 were on the senior tour, 12 on the women’s tour and 53 on the men’s tours. The numbers do not add up, due to the fact that some of the senior golfers also played on the men’s tours. All of the golfers were professionals who earned their livelihood by means of playing golf and participating in associated activities.

It is clear that there are a number of performance indicators with very clear relevance in professional golf. There is a constant computer ranking of all tournament golfers which indicates one’s world ranking according to certain criteria. In addition, each of the major tours has some order of merit or ranking list largely based on prize money winnings. Also similar rankings are criteria for selection for the Ryder Cup or other international events.

However, it seems relatively clear from an analysis of press coverage and the interviews with the golfers that the criterion which tends to set golfers apart from their peers is winning one or more grand slam events. In each category (i.e. men, women, seniors) there are four grand slam events each year. These are the Masters, the American Open Championship, the British Open Championship, and the American PGA or WPGA Championship. These tournaments have acquired a special status, not unlike the four grand slam title events in tennis. Although it would be difficult to demonstrate in any totally rigorous way, it would seem that the best single indicator that someone has moved into the world’s elite in golfing is that they have won one or more grand slam event. Certainly, the worldwide press coverage of such events is enormous and the approach to them by the professional golfers seems to suggest a unique status compared to all other sorts of tournaments.

In total, in the sample, there were 11 players who had won men’s grand slam events. These were Charles, Faldo, Graham, Jacklin, Langer, Lyle, Mize, Palmer, Player, Simpson, and Stadler. In addition to Charles, Jacklin, Palmer and Player, who have also won senior grand slam events, the sample included Fourie and Laoretti who have won senior grand slam events. Amongst the women there were six who had won grand slam events - Alfredsson, Davies, Lunn, Neumann, Nicholas and Sheehan. This group of nineteen grand slam winners, who had between them won 62 grand slam events in their careers, was treated as the great players of today’s golf. The remainder of the sample could be divided into a second group which consisted of 40 players who had won at least one tour event, and a third group of 16 players who had not won a tour event but were regular professional players on one of the tours.

Results

Each of the respondents was asked about the need areas which motivated them most, in terms of Maslow’s (1954) need hierarchy using wording adopted from Porter’s (1961) questionnaire. Their responses are summarised in Table 1. Perhaps surprisingly, given the wealth of many of the respondents which they had gained as a consequence of their success in golf, the need ranked as most important, most frequently amongst the sample was the need for security. This was rated as most important by 26 of the 75 respondents. As can be seen from Table 1 there was a slight tendency for security to be rated most important less often by the great players than by the rest. Less surprisingly, the need for self actualisation was the need rated as most important second most frequently (by 22 of the golfers). In this case the bias was slightly in the other direction with 7 of the 19 greats rating it as most important as against
15 of the 56 good players. It can also be seen that there was a slight bias towards the great players rating self-esteem as most important less frequently than the rest. Surprisingly, given the apparent independence characterising the life of professional golfers, very few rated autonomy as most important.

All of the respondents were asked which they regarded as the most important factor in differentiating the great players from successful players between motivation, natural talent, and coaching facilities. Their answers to this question are summarised in Table 2. As can be seen from that table, the majority regarded motivation as the most important ingredient for success as compared to natural talent. The greats were particularly likely to regard motivation as the key element in success (17 out of 19) compared to the other two groups (27 out of 40 and 3 out of 16). Those who answered that they thought motivation was the most important factor were also asked whether or not they thought that the characteristic was innate. Of the 47 who regarded motivation as most important 17 thought that it was an innate characteristic. It is very noteworthy that amongst the greats there was a much stronger tendency to see motivation in this way (12 out of 17 compared to 5 out of 30 for the other two groups). This suggests that for these leading golfers, the question of motivation was in some senses seen as non-problematic. In other words they regard themselves as having very high levels of motivation, which they were born with and which they exploit to be successful.

It is also noteworthy that amongst those who had not won a tournament, the large majority (13 out of 16) believe that natural talent was the most important ingredient which differentiated the great from the rest. This might be seen as a psychological defense mechanism, in that one can not be blamed for one’s lack of natural talent whereas a lack of motivation might be seen as more blame worthy.

A significant majority (43) of the golfers had a coach who assisted them with the development of their play as is shown in Table 3. Ordinary tournament winners were slightly more likely to fall into this category (27 out of 40) than either the great (11 out of 19) or non winners (5 out of 16). It is quite clear that the use of coaches has become more common in professional golf but not to the extent that is usual in most other professional sports. It is also worth noting that in golf it is relatively common for players to share a coach unlike in tennis where it is very unusual.

Each of the respondents was asked about the extent to which they planned their development and set targets for achievements. In fact, it was clear from their responses that relatively few planned in any detailed way, although most indicated that they set some form of targets for themselves. However, only 23 of the 75 indicated that they had any form of written plan or target setting. Interestingly, the greats were least likely to have any form of written plan (4 out of 19) as compared to other tournament winners (13 out of 40) or non winners (6 out of 16).

**Achieving Greatness**

Generally, the responses from all groups of players suggested that the key ingredients for achieving greatness were motivation and single mindedness. Indeed there seemed to be a suggestion that the greatest players were almost obsessional about their single-mindedness. Many players, both within the elite group and outside it, used the word selfish to describe the approach of many of the great players, including themselves in some cases. As one relatively
successful player who had never won a grand slam event put it - "they don't give a shit for anyone else". There was, in fact, evidence that although the leading players were not seen as unfriendly or unhelpful, they were seen as distant. One of the middle group suggested that although he occasioned had lunch or dinner with one of the elite, this was not something he particularly sought out. He suggested that they were "too wrapped up in themselves".

It was, however, clear that most golf professionals, including the very best, would try to be deliberately helpful to their colleagues on tour. Many indicated that they would unhesitatingly give advice to colleagues who sought it, and that this advice would be completely genuine. It was suggested by more than one of the players, that the reason it was possible to be helpful to one's colleagues and competitors was that in golf the nature of stroke play meant that one player doing better than another did not eliminate the lesser player, but only move them down one position. This is obviously different from many competitive sports, where the nature of tournaments is that players are eliminated if they lose to an opponent. However, one of the elite group suggested that although he was friendly with golfing colleagues, his close friendships were outside the profession, and he found it difficult to be very close to people with whom he was in competition week after week. This lack of close friendships, particularly amongst the world's leading players, is an additional factor which clearly makes the life of many professional golfers a very lonely one. It is worth noting that many of the players in the elite group had a very strong view that with enough single-mindedness and motivation nothing was impossible. As one of the great said, there are plenty of talented people walking the streets looking for jobs - it's the level of motivation that makes the difference.

Discussion

At the end of the day, many of the golfers suggested that their profession was ultimately all about winning. Although many of them indicated that the financial rewards for high placings in tournaments were considerable and that such results made them feel better, this was very clearly differentiated as being significantly different from winning.

However, the point was made by Nick Faldo, that even if you are the world's number one you will lose many more tournaments in a year than you will win. It is clear that the tremendous significance attached to winning and the odds against it in any given tournament create enormous pressures, which some golfers are able to withstand better than others. David Leadbetter, the coach to such great players as Nick Faldo and Nick Price, when asked what the difference is between a good and a great player answered: "obviously, having a really strong mental attitude, one that allows you to play well under extreme pressure. That is really what the great players have the ability to do, they are able to find something within themselves..."

However, the fact that winning a tournament is not a common event, even for the best, and that, apart from winning a grand slam event, a major indicator of success was an individual's placing in the order of merit at the end of the season based on overall prize money gained, meant that some of the pressures on winning could be reduced, unless the individual was totally single-minded about being the best. This may allow players with lesser ambitions to relieve some of the pressures on themselves, but possibly at the price that they will win less often. In this context it was interesting that one of the middle group of golfers, who had nonetheless won a significant number of tournaments and headed the European Order of Merit in one year, said that he was not sure, when faced with a critical three foot put, whether he
was more scared of holing it than missing it. Even allowing that this is rather an unusual view, it does suggest that the pressures that these golfers experience are both great and complex.

It must be noted that the findings have to be seen in the context of a sport with enormous financial rewards for the successful. Despite the increase in the use of coaches and the variety of other advisers and helpers, the top golfers operate in a very lonely way when on tour. Overall, it is clear that the levels of motivation of top golfers are very high and the amount of work and disruption in their non-golfing life that they are prepared to tolerate is also exceedingly high. It may be for these reasons that security is valued by so many of the golfers, including many who are multimillionaires as a consequence of their success at golf. It is worth noting that one of the respondents explicitly suggested that although gaining security was very important to him, he felt his golf had deteriorated since he had become financially more secure. This same point was hinted at by a number of other respondents. Although many of them stressed the importance of money, it is clear that for the leading few, money can no longer be the main issue as they are typically exceedingly wealthy.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, at least in a non-clinical sense, the world’s leading golfers are obsessionlal about golf and the struggle to win. Although it was clear that patterns of motivation may change over a golfer’s career, it was interesting to note that in most respects the answers from men and women and seniors patterned in similar ways. In this context it must be noted that increasingly the rewards for women golfers and senior golfers are rising, and although not yet totally comparable to those on the main men’s tours, they clearly provide more in the way of financial rewards than most occupations.

Possible Generalisability?

One question that is raised by this study, relates to the extent to which the conclusions would be applicable in other domains. In examining this question it is necessary to consider the particular characteristics of tournament golf and ways in which these may have specific implications for the findings. Firstly, it must be noted that golf is different from most other major sports in two important respects. Firstly, each stroke is in many senses an isolated event which the individual has time to consider before playing. As Peter Alliss, the former Ryder Cup golfer and television commentator has suggested “being a non-reflex game you have time to think. That’s the great danger in golf.”

Golf is also different to a large extent in being non-interactive with other players whether on one’s own side or opponents. As David Leadbetter suggested “golf, for the most part, is not a match play situation. It’s the player battling himself.” Even snooker, which resembles golf with regard to the first characteristic noted is interactive in the sense that at the beginning of a break the situation has been created by the opponent.

When consideration is widened to a comparison between professional golf and other activities it has also to be noted that although strategy may be important in the development of a golf career the actions which matter in an individual moment of an individual tournament tend to be isolated from any long term strategic considerations. It is a common saying amongst golfers that the only shot that matters is the next one. Therefore, it follows, that the key decisions relating to a particular shot are typically taken irrespective of the long-term strategy that the golfer may be adopting. However, it is clear that strategy can be important. An example of this was the decision by Faldo to completely re-model his golf swing when he had already
become a very successful tournament golfer. The implications of that decision were that he went through a period of playing relatively poorly before, with his new swing, he was able to rise to the World number one position.

However, in a more general sense, it may be that the biggest difference between professional golf and a wide range of occupations, particularly managerial ones, is the extent to which most of golf is a highly individual activity with relatively small amounts of teamwork involved. Although there clearly are elements of teamwork between players and caddies and also between players and coaches, these would appear to be very limited compared to the teamwork required in many occupations.

However, despite all these differences there probably is some generalisability from the world of the professional golfer to other occupations. Particularly one would expect some similarity in the patterns with some professional occupations where considerable amounts of the work require individual effort rather than teamwork. It may however also be true that for the highest levels of success in most occupations an almost obsession level of motivation, dedication and single-mindedness are required. Certainly the biography of a number of very successful business leaders might appear to indicate characteristics of this sort.
References


Table 1: Needs Rated Most Important by Players

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<td>3</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>16</td>
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Table 2: Players’ Perception of Ingredients of Success

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Natural Talent</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
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Table 3: Use of Coaches by Players

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