

Using the FIRO tool to develop the sports leaders and teams of tomorrow

A university sports tutor wants to prepare her students for their careers in the best possible way. Understanding team dynamics, within both sports teams and organizations, is crucial to career success.

Chartered Sport Psychologist Claire-Marie Roberts, Course Leader for Sports Studies at Worcester University's Institute of Sport and Exercise Science, wanted to bring psychometric insights to her 3rd year Group Dynamics in Sport module. To facilitate this, she approached Omada Consulting's Managing Director Grant Morffew.

The idea was inspired partly by the 2012 Olympics. Grant had worked with the teams responsible for the event itself, and Roberts, as psychologist in residence, had helped prepare and support Team GB – athletes, governing bodies, and support staff alike. Their joint experiences have made them very aware of the fundamental importance of team dynamics in sport, and how varied the teams working and competing in sport are.

Many of the students from the Institute of Sport and Exercise Sciences go into coaching or management roles after graduation. For this they need experience of team dynamics, not just in the sport itself, but in the wider context of sporting organizations – an area where the necessary people-management skills have often been lacking. By looking beyond the confines of the sport to this organizational setting, graduates would be able to address the bigger picture and make a greater impact in their chosen field. In conjunction with Roberts, Omada Consulting looked for a suitable

Business Challenges

- Team building
- Organizational development
- Personal development

Company Profile

Omada specializes in the development of executives and executive teams, particularly in the leadership skills necessary to implement big change programs at speed and the alignment of senior executive groups through individual, group and team interventions. They seek to impact business performance through the application of psychological principles in the workplace, with an unwavering focus on results.

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development tool to underpin the 12-week Group Dynamics in Sport module.

Solution

The module involves the students working in pre-selected teams and learning a new sport, tchoukball – a sport sufficiently obscure to make things fairer for everybody (given that some of the students are Olympic-level athletes). Roberts wanted the chosen development tool to manipulate the way these teams are put together and provide valuable insight into the nuances of interaction in individual groups.

Morffew (who is also a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and FIRO practitioner), suggested the FIRO instrument.

“It provides quick and easy levels of insight, and gives a framework for understanding and managing interactions and dynamics.”

He has used the tool many times in the past, valuing its insights and user-friendliness. “It’s not too scary,” he says. “It doesn’t take long to grasp the framework, and once you’re there, the uses and implications are far-reaching.

“We wanted to leave the students with a mental framework to cover the challenges they would be facing in their own teams. We wanted them to pick up the theory and run – to hypothesize, and ask themselves ‘is this an issue of inclusion needs? Or control?’, and answer the question using insights derived from FIRO.”

Morffew covered the background and framework of the tool in a workshop and gave personal feedback. Based on this the students were able to examine the dynamics of their own group and design interventions necessary to promote the effective development of their team.

“FIRO provides a great platform for understanding the group dynamics at play in any situation,” he says. “We wanted them to gain some insight into those dynamics and then apply that thinking to

Solution

- Team dynamics
- FIRO training

“FIRO is inspiring for the students, and a lot of useful conversations have emerged as a result. It’s all about insight and understanding, and taking those skills to the sporting world in the years to come.”

Grant Morffew,
Managing
Director, Omada Consulting

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what they're seeing within their own carefully architected tchoukball teams. FIRO provides them with a framework for understanding potentially performance-damaging dynamics, for example conflicting control needs, and then the interventions they might utilize to develop that dynamic positively."

The module culminates in a tchoukball tournament. This provides a useful measure allowing the students to examine how their understanding and manipulation of team dynamics may have impacted on the performance of their group.

Results

The development work was received with great enthusiasm by Worcester's Sports students, who recognized immediately the power and potential of the FIRO tool.

"The students were so engaged," says Roberts. "It's rare to find students engaged with a process so well and for so long. They all loved it."

"We're introducing a young generation to a tool that they haven't met before, and a form of personal and team development that they might not have encountered either," says Morffew. "It's inspiring for them, and a lot of useful conversations have emerged as a result. It's all about insight and understanding, and taking those skills to the sporting world in the years to come."


Claire-Marie plans to become FIRO trained herself and hopes to embed the FIRO tool as a permanent feature of the Sports Studies course at Worcester University.

"Students who went through the course are now all enthusiastic supporters of FIRO," she says. "They are able to talk about their experiences of using a tool that generates an awareness of the interpersonal skills needed in a team environment. This really aligns with the university's employability objectives. FIRO has transformed the module – I hope it is something we will be using on the course every year."

Results

- In-depth understanding of team dynamics
- Increased self-awareness
- Awareness of people skills necessary in an organizational setting

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One inspired student has already started planning how he could use the FIRO tool to help modify the learning and teaching methods in a physical education curriculum. This is exactly what Roberts and Morffew want – to transform the sporting world by innovative teaching that helps the next generation understand the importance of personal and organizational development, which is the foundation of success.



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