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THE IMPACT OF ENGAGING IN SPORTS AS A HOBBY ON PROFESSIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT [1]

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of engaging in sports as a hobby on the development of a professional career, which does not necessarily have to be related to sports, thereby deepening the understanding of changes in interpersonal communication, especially in the context of the digital era.

Human ancient instincts for movement and competition form the basis of modern business careers. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, there is insight gained into the human need for movement and competition, which has now been reshaped into sporting activities in today's modern society.

The study further notes how changes in communication methods, due to the Internet revolution, affect time and activities, including physical activity.

A deeper understanding of the complex interaction between physical activity and psychological factors enables the development of a more effective strategy for personal and professional development. The results of this study can be utilized and implemented in various fields, including business environments, educational institutions, and sports organizations.

Using comparative methods, analysis and synthesis, as well as descriptive statistics, the research relies on a review of relevant literature from the subject scientific field, providing a foundation for analysis and conclusions.

Engaging in sports positively impacts career development, offering both physical and mental benefits, as well as skills such as teamwork and stress management. Understanding the impact of the digital societal transformation on daily activities highlights the need for further research on the connection between sports as a hobby, digital interaction, and professional development. At the same time, it opens up space to study how hobbies can be integrated into the digital environment to maximize their benefits for career development and personal advancement.

Keywords: sport, hobby, career, evolutionary psychology, communication

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Introduction

Sport, as a hobby, provides numerous advantages that can be transferred to professional life. Increased productivity, improved communication and teamwork, as well as developed skills to avoid and overcome conflict in a constructive way and build healthy interpersonal relationships, are just some of the aspects that lead to critical thinking, problem solving and innovation and they can positively influence a career.

This paper researches how engagement in sports activities – outside the professional framework, may contribute to career development, with a special focus on the physical and psychological aspects that are transferred from sports hobbies to the professional environment.

The aim of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of the connection between sports activities and professional success, as well as to identify methods that can help in the integration of sports hobbies into professional life.

Based on the research, it is essential to find ways and mechanisms to reactivate people in physical activities. This paper argues that it is necessary to insist on the inclusion of more physical activities in schools by introducing additional classes, organizing sports competitions, tournaments or similar activities. Acquiring sports habits at school is a prerequisite for pursuing a sports hobby at an older age, and this, in the end, can result in greater productivity at work and better career development.

The research is organized as follows: the historical and contemporary context of the importance of physical activities – movement and walking is considered, the available research, theories and authors relevant to the topic of this scientific paper are analyzed, as well as the importance of evolutionary psychology that reveals the adaptive physical advantages of human beings. Human activity over time is largely shaped by development processes and interaction with the environment.

The suggested programs for the integration of sports hobbies into professional life, such as the development of corporate sports programs or the promotion of physical activities in the work environment – all these would be reasonable steps in the further development of this research. This paper contains an analysis of the results as well as suggestions for future studies, with a special emphasis on the application of sports hobbies in professional development.

Furthermore, directions are provided for the adoption of digital tools and applications that can support physical activity and mental health of children and adults.

Methodology

This research used an integrated methodological approach, which includes comparative, analytical and descriptive statistical methods, with the aim of comprehensively examining the impact of sports hobbies on professional development, taking into account contemporary digital challenges. This methodology enabled a detailed understanding of the relationship between physical activity and professional success, providing a solid foundation for further studies and practical application.

The research began with the analysis of biographies and case studies of famous historical figures, with a special focus on their physical habits and inclinations. This step enabled the identification of patterns and trends related to the contribution of physical activities to professional development, mental health and the extension of human life span. Research was collected regarding the frequency of sports activities, time frames and professional achievements, which were then analyzed with descriptive statistics. In order to provide a thorough and relevant analysis, the following were used: scientific and professional journals, books, newspaper articles and research papers covering topics related to sports activities and improving the quality of life of various age groups.

The analysis included literature investigating the impact of physical activity on mental health and cognitive function.

The comparative method was used to compare different aspects of sports hobbies and their impact on professional development in the context of traditional and digital communication frameworks. Case studies dealing with sports hobbies have been compared with research focusing on digital technologies and communication. The above method enabled the identification of similarities and differences in the impact of sports and digital transformation on professional development. The literature that analyzes the impact of digital technologies on physical activity was also studied. These sources were used to develop recommendations for reducing the negative impact of digital technology on physical activity and thought processes. Finally, strategies for integrating physical activity into educational and corporate sports programs as well as into the digital environment with the aim of improving professional and personal performance have been proposed.

Research results and discussion

In the contemporary world, the importance of physical activity is increasingly recognized not only for physical health, but also for cognitive functioning and emotional well-being. In this context, the legacy of human ancestors, the importance of historical figures who used walking as a tool for creative thinking, and the connection between

physical activity and modern professional challenges have been researched. These topics open up a discussion about how physical activity, deeply rooted in human evolution, manifests itself in everyday life and work.

Legacy of the Ancestors

Man's distant ancestors relied on physical movement as a key component of survival. Hunting required long periods of walking, running and hiding as well as quick reaction to changes in the environment, which made physical movement necessary for successful hunting and for avoiding danger. In order to hunt effectively, they had to develop endurance and physical strength, which enabled them to move more easily on inaccessible terrains and to be active for a long time. These abilities brought about greater physical endurance than is present today in modern man.

Men are not aware of the potential that nature has given them: at the back of the human head is a modest ligament that is missing in other great apes, and which is crucial to the advancement of man as a species. That occipital ligament has only one function: to keep the head still while running. „And running – seriously, persistently, over long distances—is one of the things that man does exceptionally well." (Bryson, 2020: 184)

Although men are not among the fastest creatures, as anyone who has ever chased a dog or cat knows, the fastest human beings can run at speeds of about 20 miles per hour (albeit only in short bursts). However, if compared to antelope or wildebeest on a hot day, people will last longer while hunting them. The reason for this is that humans sweat to stay cool, while four-legged mammals lose heat by breathing – panting. If they are not allowed to rest and recover, they easily overheat and become helpless. (Ibid.)

The evolution of other body parts, such as the waist and shoulders, helped make human bodies perfect for spear throwing and hunting. „The shoulder joint in humans is not a firmly attached ball in the socket like the hips, but a much more comfortable and open arrangement. This allows the shoulder to be more flexible and rotate freely." (Ibid: 185)

In this way, the physical adaptations of men's ancestors shaped not only their abilities to survive, but also defined the evolutionary path of the human species.

„Upon analyzing femur and lower leg bones that are seven thousand years old, it was found that the average bone quality at that time – bone mass and strength – was similar to that of today's long-distance runners. The shape up situation of hunters and gatherers who were in the best way was better than the condition of today's best athletes. Scientist Colin Shaw from the University of Cambridge described our ancestors as 'monsters' when it comes to physical fitness." (Hansen, 2022: 164)

Anders Hansen claims that the root of everything lies in man's primordial genes and ingrained habits of ancestors in order for the concentration to be the greatest in the moments when it is most needed, when they are physically active – when they are hunting or someone is hunting them. „Considering that the brain is largely unchanged from our days on the savannah[3], your and my concentration is also better when we are physically active." (Ibid: 159)

Historical walkers

Historical walkers, famous people and authorities who left their mark on human time were familiar with the benefits of physical activity.

One of the most famous walkers, Henry David Thoreau, wrote the eponymous essay *Walking* which explores the philosophy of walking. The key premises of the essay are that walking is seen as an expression of freedom and autonomy. He believes that walking allows an individual to free himself from the constraints of everyday life and find space for reflection and personal development. (Thoreau, 2016) Sport is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to simple definitions (Penezić, 2020: 348-349), and the same can be said for walking as a practice that enables deep thinking and introspection. Thoreau's essay perceives walking as an activity that encourages intense analysis and self-reflection. He considers walking to be a means of exploring ideas and thinking about life, society, personal identity, spiritual and intellectual development. (Thoreau, 2016)

Just how important walking and sports activity are for healthy thoughts, the arrival of ideas and for productivity, was best described by Friedrich Nietzsche in his book *Twilight of the Idols:* „Only thoughts reached while walking can have value." (Newport, 2022: 113). Wanting to emphasize how much he valued walking, Nietzsche noted: „A sedentary life is a sin against the Holy Spirit." (Ibid.)

Frédéric Gros describes walking with other people as „moments of shared solitude." (Gross, 2023: 39) Namely, during the walk you can talk if you want, but no one has to fill the silence, because it is already filled by walking.

Many historical figures have used physical activity to stimulate creative thinking, solve challenges or find inspiration.

Aristotle (Aristotélēs) developed his own method of teaching which involved walking. Actually, he had the habit of teaching his students during walks, because they gave him the opportunity to reflect, improve attention and memory. (Aristotle, 2022)

[3] In purely biological terms, the human body and brain have not fundamentally changed in the last 10,000 or even 20,000 years. (Hansen, 2023: 22)

With his daily walks, Nikola Tesla relieved himself of stress and developed new ideas. Walking helped him think slowly about his inventions and research, and he often came up with revolutionary scientific insights. Thus, during one of the walks in the park, the idea of alternating current occurred to him. (Šubarević, 2024)

Ludwig van Beethoven walked around Vienna in order to get rid of a creative block and find inspiration for his compositions. Walking allowed him to relax and focus on his music. (BIZLife, July 22, 2014) Charles Darwin was walking in the garden and surroundings of his home. These walks enabled him to think about his theories about evolution and natural selection, and this contributed significantly to his work *On the Origin of Species*.

Carl Jung also often took long walks in the countryside surrounding the stone Bollingen Tower that he built in order to focus his mind, resulting in incredibly original works that changed the world. (Newport, 2022: 7 and 21)

Steven Jobs often walked during business meetings, which allowed him to think more freely and solve problems more creatively. These walks helped him improve productivity and innovation in his work. Jobs practiced walking meetings to help his co-workers get away from their desks and find answers. He also took job candidates for a walk, which helped them to relax a bit, and he could „study" during the interview whether they would be good enough and whether they would be suitable for working in his company. (*BIZLife*, 23. August 2022 and *Kurir*, 8. June 2024)

Rebecca Solnit summed up the unique qualities of walking in these sentences: „Walking allows us to be in our body and in the world, without being busy with them. It gives us the freedom to think without getting lost in our own thoughts." (Solnit, 2010: 15)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized in his books that walking is the only way he can concentrate: „When I stop, I stop thinking, my mind works only with my legs". (Ha-mmond, 2024: 104) His own and other people's ideas that crossed his mind during his walks found their place in the essay *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. (Rousseau, 2022: 11)

Kierkegaard claimed that „Copenhagen is his guest room", because he cannot think until he goes for a walk. He composed his famous work *Either-Or* – while walking. Hobbes walked with an inkwell built into his stick, so that he could immediately write down what came to his mind. (Domazet, 2010)

Carolin Wolf states that every person has already experienced that they solved a complex problem while walking or jogging, and that this is not accidental. „Whenever we connect with movement, which is free from everything and allows free associations without plan or intention, the electric charge that allows us to suddenly 'shine' is especially great." (Wolf, 2022: 61)

The connection with evolutionary psychology

Evolutionary psychology provides a comprehensive approach to explaining how human needs for movement and competition have been transformed into athletic activity over the centuries. It „writes down" clear psychological clues according to which human ancestors developed physical abilities as adaptations for survival, including hunting, gathering and fighting. These abilities have become an important part of genetic predispositions and now influence the motivations and affinities of each individual towards physical activity.

Adaptive advantages are among the first on the list of evolutionary adaptations. Evolution has shaped humans to be physically active. Although today there is no longer a need to hunt for food, human genes still strive for physical activity as something natural and beneficial for health (reproduction and survival). It triggers chemical processes in the body – it releases neurotransmitters such as dopamine and endorphins which are associated with feelings of pleasure and reward. Those chemical processes were evolutionarily developed to motivate repetition of activity, overcoming obstacles, as it is today – physical activity.

Sports often include teamwork and social aspects, and this was important for survival in the evolutionary past. Connecting with others and working in a team contribute to social well-being and a sense of belonging, as an additional motivation for dedication to sports. Learning and improving skills, such as strategic planning and decision-making, reflect adaptive mechanisms of the human brain acquired during evolution.

Evolutionary psychology studies development that manifests itself over time and uses a variety of dimensions, including age, phylogeny, and microgenetics. Tiedemann, Piaget, Vygotsky and Prayer dealt with child and human development and came to the conclusion that emotional connections and social environments play a key role in development (Brković, 2011; Piaget, Inhelder, 1990; Vygotsky, 1996). The above can have an impact on the motivation for physical activity. For example, children who grow up in stimulating environments tend to move and play more, and movement is essential for their motor development.

Physical activity and cognitive functioning – the key to professional success

In the modern context, the specific benefits of sports hobbies have significant applications in professional settings. The increased self-confidence that is developed by achieving goals in sports can be transferred to business challenges. When athletes overcome obstacles and adapt to change, they develop skills that are valuable in any professional environment. They often have to maintain mental stability under pressure.

Physical activity changes the brain by protecting thinking and memory abilities. Research by the University of British Columbia has shown that regular aerobic exercise, which activates the heart and sweat glands, affects the increase of the hippocampus – the part of the brain that participates in verbal memory and learning. (Kwik, 2020: 177)

Generally speaking, physical exercise can improve cognitive functioning in people, regardless of their age. (Popov, Jakovljev, 2017)

Studies have also proven the essential importance of regular movement for health.

A large-scale study, conducted in the 1940s, confirmed the connection between the increasing number of heart attacks and the level of physical activity. A double-decker bus in London was used as a laboratory, where the driver spent the whole day sitting, while the conductor was constantly on his feet. Over a period of two years, 35,000 drivers and conductors were monitored and it was found that drivers, regardless of how healthy they are, are twice as susceptible to heart attacks. (Bryson, 2020: 186-187)

Since then, study after study has shown that physical activity has extraordinary benefits. Regular walks reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke by 31 percent. Based on an analysis conducted in 2012, on 655,000 people, it was concluded that activity lasting only 11 minutes a day after the age of forty increases life expectancy by 1.8 years, while activity of an hour or more a day increases it by 4.2 years. (Ibid: 187)

„The importance of exercise is reflected in substantial and convincing evidence that it prevents the natural death of brain cells and thus slows the onset of dementia in the elderly." (Moore, 2020: 41)

An ordinary walk (not brisk walking) is a great way to get your joints moving, keep your mind active, burn some calories, and lower your adrenaline and cortisol levels and thus improve your mental health. Walking undeniably contributes to general physical fitness, and can also help alleviate physiological reactions in the „stage of resistance" to stress. (Clare, 2022: 46-47)

Engaging in sports a little at a time every day becomes a routine that you do not need to decide on. (Stahl, 2023: 226). In this regard, it is also suggested to build „thermogenesis activated without exercise", that is, to carry out all those small daily activities that are not exercise, but are physical activity, such as climbing the stairs instead of using the elevator, walking to the store or getting up from a chair on every hour and perform a five-minute trip to the garden. (Clare, 2022: 46)

In this way, activity levels have proven to be a key factor for a healthier life and extended existence. We should certainly not lose sight of the fact that „our mental and physical state while exercising is just as important as the number of repetitions and sets we do in order to improve our health" (Dispenza, 2020: 247).

The link between physical activity and school success has also been established in many scientific papers. These scientific findings have been tested in practice in several schools in Sweden. The approaches are different, but in some schools the children were physically active in the group for 15 to 20 minutes before the lessons started, so that time was not lost from the lessons. The results showed that children learn more and are calmer after physical activity, and many children said that they have more concentration and are less impulsive. (Hansen, 2022: 157) Furthermore, five hundred fifth graders who were physically active every day for four weeks had improvements in concentration and information processing, even though they were only active for six minutes each day. (Ibid: 157-158)

Research has shown that participation in sports, whether in community or elite sports, has a positive impact on mental health, including improved psychological well-being and reduced psychological distress. (Eather, Wade, Pankowiak, Eime, 2023) It is important to note that engaging in sports during the early years of maturation contributes to the development of positive personality characteristics such as self-confidence and independence (Zubić, 2023: 41). Also, playing sports improves social outcomes, including better self-control, pro-social behavior, interpersonal communication and a sense of belonging. (Eather, Wade, Pankowiak, Eime, 2023)

Observed on the sample of our country, the results showed that young basketball players have better communication skills, discipline and organization than their peers who do not play sports (Nenadić, Žubić, Petronijević, Ćopić, 2021).

All of the above sufficiently indicates the need for sports and recreation to be promoted more on television, but for some reason this is not being done. Namely, as noted in the analysis of media content, RTS's „Morning Program“ included 107 programs, while only five programs were recorded in the field of recreation and entertainment, which further emphasizes the lack of space for the promotion of sports among young people. (Vitković, 2021: 316)

Physicality in the modern digital age

The contemporary age, marked by ubiquitous digital technology and the „boundless supply of available information“ (Vitković, 2015), has brought numerous challenges in preserving physical activity. The introduction of technology into everyday life has changed the way today's man communicates, works and spends his free time. The global COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this trend by reducing physical activity levels for many people, including children. This created the need for new approaches in the integration of sports hobbies in the modern digital environment.

„Philosophy of digital minimalism“ stands on the position that less can be more when it comes to the use of digital tools and involves rediscovering the pleasures of the offline world (going for walks, watching clouds, reading books, talking with friends – live). The strategy for incorporating this practice into life includes „digital clearing“ as a way for today's man to reconnect with his inner „self“ and real experiences, avoiding technological overload. (Newport, 2022: 13 and 15)

The studies point to possible negative aspects of the digitization of sports hobbies, including activity tracking applications such as Fitbit. Although these applications can motivate people to be more active, the quantification and visualization of walking can reduce the quality of rest and the intrinsic enjoyment of walking. Research shows that pedometer users did not necessarily lose more weight compared to those who did not use these devices. (Hammond, 2024: 115-116)

Keeping in mind that in today's production-oriented culture, thinking in itself is not perceived as a productive way of using time, it is also noted that the modern mind cannot bear the feeling of doing nothing, even though the state of „doing nothing“ is necessary for deep thinking and mental relaxation. The closest thing to „doing nothing“ (this means performing things secretly, in the form of „doing something“), is walking as an activity that allows quality time for thinking, without the additional pressure of quantification and technological monitoring. (Hammond, 2024 and Solnit, 2010)

Sports programs in companies as prevention

Large multinational companies have recognized the importance of physical activity for their employees, but also the improvement of their own productivity and innovation. Global technology giants such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Apple offer various wellness programs and physical activity content as part of their benefits. These programs include gyms, fitness and wellness centers and allow employees to stay physically active and mentally healthy, which is directly related to increased productivity and overall job satisfaction. The company Google is an example of a successful corporate sports program. It offers bicycles for employees to use for transportation around campus, state-of-the-art gyms in its offices with the latest exercise equipment, and offers a variety of fitness classes, such as yoga and pilates.

The example of Google shows why introducing a wellness program as an integral part of an employee's workplace in companies is important and how physical activity is an essential part of the overall corporate culture. (Purkayastha, Sahy, 2017) Therefore, it would be good to consider the implementation of corporate sports programs in medium-sized companies as well. In order for corporate programs to be successful, it is necessary to analyze the physical activities and performance of employees, under-

stand their needs and interests, and provide appropriate resources such as sports equipment and instructors.

Based on all of the above, it follows that an important role in creating or breaking a healthy habit is played by the context, i.e. the environment in which the habits take place. When the environment is designed so that constructive habits are easily practiced, then they are more easily maintained. (Clear, 2019)

Likewise, a quality school physical activity program should be carefully designed to provide a comprehensive approach to student physical development. It is important that the activities are adapted to different levels of physical fitness so that all students have the opportunity to participate and progress. It is necessary for the program to be supported by adequate infrastructure and equipment.

Sports hobbies can be successfully integrated into the digital environment of children and adults through different approaches that combine physical activity and technology.

The first step is to develop applications and platforms that offer personalized sports programs and challenges. These applications may use gamification in order to motivate users to exercise regularly. Gamification means the implementation of video game elements and game mechanics in non-game contexts with the aim of motivating and engaging people. This includes using points, rewards, challenges, leaderboards and levels to increase motivation and engagement in activities such as learning, work or physical activity. Interactive games that combine physical movement with video games, such as those that use motion sensors, offer a fun experience that encourages physical activity.

Another approach is to use wearable technologies, such as smart watches and fitness bands that track progress and provide feedback on physical activity. These technologies can help users set goals, track their performance, and receive tips for improvement. Connecting with friends or family through applications can add a social dimension to exercise, allowing for competitions or joint workouts via video calls. Furthermore, online communities and forums are important in integrating sports hobbies into the digital environment. Users can share their experiences, achievements and tips, which can provide additional motivation and support. Social networks and video platforms such as YouTube and Instagram can be used to share inspiring stories about sports hobbies.

Conclusion

Sport can provide significant help in overcoming professional challenges such as stress and pressure through various mechanisms. Starting from reducing stress and improving mental sharpness, to developing resilience and social connections, all the way up to increasing levels of general health and goal-setting, sports activities offer a range of psychological and physical benefits that can improve professional performance and well-being. Integrating these skills and strategies into everyday professional life can yield long-term benefits in terms of success and job satisfaction.

In this paper, the reviewed references show that physical activity improves mental functions such as concentration, decision-making and creativity. Recommendations from these sources suggest that physical activity is crucial for stimulating mental processes, reducing stress and promoting creative work, which is of great importance for professional development. Participation in sports activities enables the building of social networks and support. These social connections provide emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation during professional challenges.

Sports in general, and especially team sports, help develop teamwork and cooperation skills. These skills can improve interpersonal relationships and cooperation in a professional environment, reducing stress and conflict.

A historical review of the role of sports hobbies in professional development revealed that physical activities contributed to professional success and mental development. Celebrities, from philosophers and scientists to corporate leaders, have used physical activity as a means to improve their professional skills and cognitive abilities.

Physical activity contributes to the growth of productivity at work by increasing energy levels; it further improves mental health and cognitive functions, develops discipline and organization, prevents diseases and improves social interactions.

Digital technology can significantly affect the way sports hobbies are practiced, but it is important to find a balance between using technology and preserving authentic physical and mental experiences. The integration of sports hobbies into the digital environment should be designed to ensure both physical and mental well-being, while preserving the quality of experiences and reducing the potential negative consequences of excessive use of technology.

Practical recommendations include creating sports programs that integrate physical activities into the workday and promoting the use of digital tools to improve physical health and professional development.

Based on the research, it is clear that a balance needs to be found between digital engagement and physical activity. We herewith suggest implementing strategies that

can help preserve physical activity, such as digital tools that encourage movement and comprehensive sports programs to promote physical activity in school and professional settings.

Further research should focus on specific types of sports hobbies and their impact on different aspects of professional success.

Likewise, now is the right time for well-designed national sports programs, marketers, sports equipment manufacturers, the media and everyone involved in the promotion of physical activity. It is also important to find innovative ways to encourage people to engage more in sports hobbies. The pandemic has increased passivity, and internet services for online shopping and digital entertainment are doing the same now. The results of this change are visible in physical activity statistics, including a decline in children's sports activities. „The essence of a 'favorable image is that it should be earned', i.e., it 'cannot be bought, although some think it is possible'." (Penezic, 2021: 47) These challenges require new strategies to motivate people to re-engage in physical activities and hobbies, and it is especially important to ensure public support and understanding.

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