

## The World Cup 2010 and the organisation of a business

by Josef Busuttil

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I was waiting keenly for this year's World Cup for two main reasons.

Firstly, it was being hosted in the African continent for the first time, where, in my opinion, the African countries are taking this game seriously and are playing good football. Hence, they deserve it.

Secondly, I couldn't wait to admire the individual players who are renowned for their thrilling football actions. Those players coming from all over the world, who we usually follow them playing for big European football clubs such as Inter, Barcelona, Manchester United, Bayern Munich, and the rest.

After a whole month of football, the World Cup tournament is now over. Football supporters returned to their respective countries, leaving the South Africans in peace and better off. Thank God, the annoying sound of the vuvuzelas has gone silent. The Spaniards are enjoying the World Cup trophy. But many people like me are still disappointed at the poor performance of the renowned football stars.

Rooney, Ronaldo, Kaka, Drogba – to name but a few – did not perform at all and they would have done better if they had spent a month sun bathing and swimming in one of the five-star holiday resorts that we have here in Malta!

Instead, we have all witnessed teams that were definitely not highly quoted, such as Ghana, Paraguay, Uruguay, Japan and The Netherlands playing intelligently as one team and beating big names like Brazil. We have also observed and some of us have been shocked by the horrible results obtained by France, Italy and England.

Some sports journalists and supporters are still arguing about the controversial Jabulani ball, the possible introduction of technology, poor refereeing and other topical issues that hit the news during the World Cup tournament. Maybe these viewpoints comfort their emotions and disappointment! If so, let them be. But from my point of view, I admired those teams who have worked as one team and have been led by a strong leader.

Teams that have performed and obtained good results were consistently promising throughout their matches as they have showed that they played for their team and not for their individual pride, ego or status. Some journalists are quoted to have said that this was the World Cup of surprises. To me it was the World Cup where team work and good leadership skills reined throughout the tournament! Japan, Ghana, Germany, The Netherlands and Spain were among those that demonstrated strong team work and good leadership.

People in business have a lot to learn from football and the World Cup 2010 – Team work and strong leadership are also critically important for the success of a business organisation.

Businesses, like football teams, are in competition with each other. The best firms that perform well conclude the sales, make their profit and prosper, while those firms that do not impress, simply do not sell and go bust. A better way to impress and gain competitive advantage in the today's business environment is to provide good customer service through better internal efficiencies. This can only be possible if the employees work as one team for the common good of their firm.

Individuals employed by a business organisation need to interact with each other. They should be part of the team – “every employee is important around here” should be the internal culture! They should be able to understand and work with each other to achieve their corporate objective/s.

We all know that by simply bringing people together does not make them a team. There should be the right chemistry which ties them together and coordinates their skills and strengths. Individuals should be able to perform not only effectively and efficiently but also in a concerted effort.

There can be a situation where a number of valid and skilful people work in the same office but they are far from being a team and although individually they are capable to do the work, the team fails to perform and they hardly sustain, let alone gain competitive advantage in the market. This World Cup tournament explained this issue perfectly well – Argentina, England, Brazil and Portugal among others were all composed of football stars who failed to play as a team and did not make it to the final stages of the tournament.

Additionally, to have a good team, there should always be a leader or a manager with strong leadership skills. The leader is the person responsible for giving the right chemistry to the team.

It was the responsibility of Vicente del Bosque who built a team of highly respectable individuals that have brought good results and won the World Cup, and it was Bert Van Marwijk who kept the team together despite alleged disputes in the dressing room. These two teams reached the final stage!

Business leaders and managers are also responsible to lead their teams, just the same as the football team managers. They are responsible to innovate, to motivate their subordinates, to encourage two-way communication within and outside the firm, to maintain the momentum, to generate ideas and solutions, to monitor progress, to implement and follow up ideas.

This concept applies perfectly to the credit function. A firm does not only compete to sell its products or services but also to get paid. Customers prefer those suppliers with whom they have good business relationship when it comes to payment of bills – it is human nature! And good customer relationship can only be achieved if the firm enjoys a good team led by a strong leader. I ask:

How can there be good customer relationship if the sales and the credit teams do not see eye to eye? How can there be internal efficiency if the leader does not encourage and support staff development and innovation to improve internal systems and procedures?

People in business have plenty to learn from the World Cup 2010. It is a matter of them willing to learn from the mistakes made by the teams who failed, and whether they are ready to develop their employees into one team in order to encourage innovation in order to improve their current processes and procedures.

The firms that believe in team building and are led by strong leaders are winning more profitable sales! What about your firm?

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