Human Performance Program @Special Forces Belgium; a practical implementation

The abstract body should not exceed 2.000 characters (excluding spaces).

Maes Pieter[1,3], Franssens Tom[1] ,Vermeulen Griet[1] , Goorts Kaat[2,4]

1. Defense Belgium, Special Forces Group, Belgium
2. Defense Belgium, Department Health and Wellbeing, Belgium
3. University of Brussels, Department of Human Biometrics and Biomechanics, Belgium
4. University of Leuven, Centre for environment and Health, Belgium

Summary

The possibility of optimising human performance (HP), has been the subject of an extensive number of studies conducted over the past decades in civil and military settings. The Canadian army developed a Defense Team Total Health and Wellness (THW) Strategic Framework (SF) presenting a holistic view of health and wellness by integrating multiple dimensions of the individual, workplace and personal life[1]. Also in Belgium, a holistic framework was investigated to bridge the gap between physical and mental training; the gap between the curative or preventive medical approach and the performance enhancement approach; and the gap between individual and team training[2]

Translating the findings into working methods appeared to be a challenge. In the current study, a smartphone application is used to enhance the HP within a group of candidates for the special operations regiment.

Methods-results

A smartphone application developed for professional sportsmen was repurposed for use in military context. In the Special Forces group of Belgium, a first test case was executed during a training course for candidates. Candidates who installed the application on their smartphone, would receive daily and weekly questionnaires about their current physical and mental wellbeing. Testing outcomes (Recurrent body analysis and maximal physical tests) were added to the individual profile. Statistical overview enables the HP team (PTI's, physicians, psychologist, physiotherapists, and nutritionists) to follow individual and group progression and makes it possible to react and adapt to reduce injury risk, further injury and dropout rate.

Conclusions

[1] Mikolas C, Winfield H, Smith-MacDonald L, et al. Enhancing Resilience in Canadian Military Families and Communities: A Qualitative Analysis of the Reaching In… Reaching Out and Bounce Back and Thrive! Resiliency Skills Training Programs. Front Public Health. 2021;9:662313. Published 2021 May 20. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2021.662313

[2] Pattyn et al., "Lessons From Special Forces Operators for Elite Team Sports Training: How to Make the Whole Greater Than the Sum of the Parts."

A HP program within the military can be supported by the aforementioned application. Specialists will be able to train and enhance performance of large groups of people, using dashboards to identify outliers and using a multidisciplinary team for instantaneous interventions.

In the future, it is expected that there will be less dropout and injuries in training courses because candidates are followed and trained in a more efficient way. Additionally, the workload for the HP team will decrease because of the efficiency improvements. Finally, the historical dataset can be leveraged to develop data driven training programs which objectively meet their targeted needs against which future candidates can be benchmarked.