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DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT

PHD THESIS
- SUMMARY –

STUDY REGARDING MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT OF SPORT
CLUBS PRIVATE LEGAL ENTITIES

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KEYWORDS

- *Sports Clubs*
- *Sports management*
- *Management of sports clubs*
- *Performance Management*
- *Customer satisfaction*
- *Goods and sporting services*
- *Improved performance sports organizations*

The huge competition on the market of the sportive services offered by the sports clubs, especially by the private ones, is deeply influenced by a high level of uncertainty. This situation requires a continuous improvement of the quality of the offered services. In order to have success, the sports clubs must be flexible and to display a great capacity of adaptation to the sudden changes from the exterior environment.

The sports clubs are more and more preoccupied to develop and implement those strategies which may lead to the improvement of their performances. In this way, the organizational diagnosis and the correct evaluation of the present situation become very important in the attempt to identify the most adequate interventions for their development.

In our study, the performance's evaluation of the sports clubs is based on a few instruments like: the questionnaires and the interviews. The analysis of the sports clubs' management wants to identify the organizational problems and to evaluate the state of the organization's management.

The responsibility for performance imply a combination of the human, material, technological and financial resources with the purpose of achieving the organization's goals.

Organizations, by their nature, are complex and difficult to manage.

The gradual changes have been replaced by rapid ones, the managers having been put in the situation of facing new challenges due to a changing and uncertain environment. This state of facts intensify the competition and impose new and high standards of performance which must be accomplished by the managerial team.

As a consequence, the consumer has a lot of options and it is not enough for sports organizations to be managed properly. Today, as a sports organization to be a successful one, must face a lot of unexpected challenges; in this context, the management pays a lot of attention to the performance. The competition forces the sports organizations to improve the quality of their services and the clients degree of satisfaction, to increase the speed and flexibility in responding to their clients and to innovate continuously for offering new services. The sports manager has the responsibility of achieving these new standards.

1. THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND WORKING HIPOTHESIS

The main objective of the research is the development of an analysis model of the private clubs' management in order to identify those factors which determine their performance and the best ways to implement them.

In order to achieve this general objective, we consider some specific objectives such as:

- to design a model of analysis for the activities and processes performances from the sports clubs with the purpose of improving their management and increasing the organization's performances;
- to present the potential advantages of the activities and processes improvement, using a study(survey) in the private sports clubs;
- to identify specific methods of managing activities and processes in private sports clubs;
- to identify the most adequate methods through which the management of the sports clubs can improve their efficacy and efficiency in using the human resources, considering the planning particularities and characteristics, in organizing and controlling the activities and processes from the private sports clubs;
- to use the information flow properly as a result of the newest technologies and the improvement of the marketing informational system of the sports organizations;
- to make a study regarding the way in which the sports product or service is perceived by the clients and the potential ones;
- to design a model of analysis and evaluation of the clients degree of satisfaction, taking as an example a representative private sports club.

The research has started from the following working hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS 1: the models of management analysis, in the private sports clubs, must be adjusted considering the clients characteristics, the complexity of the processes, the particularities of the specific sports activities performed by the clubs, the characteristics of the sports clubs which apply these processes and the characteristics of the human resources.

HYPOTHESIS 2: to design and implement the management policies and strategies is a way of determining the efficacy and efficiency of the processes and activities which take place in the sports clubs.

HYPOTHESIS 3: the impact of the employees' involvement in the organization activities and processes is stronger when they have a more complex character; the structure variables have impact upon the models' quality and parameters.

HYPOTHESIS 4: there is a strong connection between the offer's quality and the quality of the clients requests; in other words, there is a strong connection between the quality of the services (CalServ) ant the clients attachment (Atsm).

Hypothesis 5: there is a strong connection between the dependent variable "Request" and the factor variable "Reput".

Hypothesis 6: the quality of the offer is determined by the following variables: the quality of the tennis courses offered to the clients (CalCurs), the club's price policy(PolPret), the trainers quality (CalAntr) and the programs of keeping the clients (FidelClien).

2. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH SAMPLE

Sample has been composed by private sports organizations. I have used a sample consisting of a controlled group of 42 clubs ,representative in the field, which have guaranteed support in addressing this type of research. This reason has allowed us to accomplish an exploratory study in which we have engaged persons with concerns and management positions in private sports clubs.

For choosing the sample I have tried , on one hand to choose the most representative clubs from Cluj that show the most important variables and characteristic for the used model- namely private clubs- and on the other hand, homogeneity and representatively of organizations in that 23.80% of the investigated clubs are tennis clubs, 21.42% are football clubs and19.04% are basketball clubs. The sample size was influenced by time resource and cost.

From the structure's point of view, the clubs subject to the research are from the following areas: tennis 23.80%, basketball 19.04%, football 21.42%, handball 4.76%, chess 4.76%, snooker 2.48%, swimming 4.76. (fig.4.1). In terms of number of employees 35.71% have between 2 and 9 employees, 54.77% have between 9 and 50 employees and 9.52% have over 50.

The questionnaire distribution to the concerned population, meaning the clubs managers and employees that are subject of the study, plus specialists in sports management, has been done personally and by email; their collection has been done personally or by using postal services.

The questionnaire has been distributed to 100 people from these clubs; 59 were received back, 48 were valid which means a response rate of 48% which we consider good. The next step was to centralize and process the data and interpretation of the results based on a further analysis of the factors that determine organizational performance, focusing on the relationship between performance and the variables included in the model used. If we refer to the respondents, we have noticed that 29 have been sports managers (60.41%), 15 workers (11 coaches, 4 administrative staff) and 4 specialists in educational and regulatory bodies.

The research is focused on the development of some conclusions and proposals for improving the management of the private sports clubs considering the results.

The factors considered important in the questionnaire design and interview conduct refers to:

- changes that occur on the sports services market
- strategies, policies and practices of the private sports clubs
- the increasing requirements for the staff's potential development
- the outsourcing of the clubs activities and processes

2.2. RESEARCH TOOLS

The empirical research has included a first survey for the sports clubs management, namely the identification of the factors which may lead to sports clubs performance and the identification of the best practices in order to improve their management; they can be used in explanatory trails according to the general objective of the research and the specific ones.

After setting the sample, we have determined the type of information which meet the objective of our research by using questionnaire and interview. In order to analyze the management of sports organizations, a questionnaire has been developed with the purpose of obtaining all the possible data and of quantification the 78 items of the model.

The questionnaire has been pre-tested on a small group of specialists in practice and in theory (teachers of physical education and FSEGA, “Babes-Bolyai” University). After pre-testing the completed questionnaire (Annex 1) was distributed personally and by email to the managers and the specialists of the private sports clubs from Transylvania and Banat areas. The type of responses used were based on “yes” or “no” type questions; 15 items and 63 questions for assessing the agreement on the Likert scale from 0 to 4 (0- strongly disagree, 1-disagree, 2- undecided, 3-agree, 4-total agreement) and 63 items to assess the factors which determine the organizational performance and the management efficacy of the private sports clubs. To get the average score of each factor, we have calculated the arithmetic average agreement’s value from 48 questionnaires, from 0 to 4, with absolute frequency, the average score ranging between the minimum value 0(strongly disagree) and the maximum one 4 (total agreement).

To increase the efficiency in getting information using the questionnaire, we have conducted interviews with 19 people, most of them sports managers (14 persons and 4 specialists in sports management) from the clubs subject of the study. The used interview was a semi-structured type and it included a set of standard questions regarding the sports organization vision and mission, organization’s policies and strategies, customer service policy, marketing strategies, human resources policies, quality of services and customer relations, management’s quality, outsourcing clubs activities and processes, motivation practices, recruitment and selection of human resources, organizational culture, leadership style. To all these some other questions have been added during the interview.

We believe that the interviews have achieved our goal by the opinions and information we have obtained and which have been used to get more detailed information about the issues covered in the questionnaire. The interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours and the conversation was recorded on tape recorder; after that it has been transcribed.

Besides these information gathering tools, we have added the observation method, namely the direct observation through my role as an active participant in a tennis club and as a teacher and researcher at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport from “Babes-Bolyai” University.

The empirical study aimed to develop a model of analyzing the private sports clubs management in order to identify and implement the best practices and ways of improving their efficiency and effectiveness, ie. increase performance.

For this purpose we have focused on improving the research of the organizational skills of sports clubs; the most important areas included in the questionnaire are:

- the management: the extent to which clubs have the management skills and experience required to harness and face possible threats;
- the operating systems: the extent to which clubs have equipment, knowledge, systems and procedures that enable them to manage effectively and efficiency;
- customer service: services quality and customer relations, namely the efforts made to ensure customer’s satisfaction and their loyalty efforts;
- human resources management: highlighting the extent to which clubs employees have the skills required to respond effectively to the changes in the environment and their strategy and human resource effectiveness;
- business promotion: the extent to which sports clubs have adequate marketing skills and resources to asses customers needs to develop appropriate policies and strategies for marketing the product (services, price and promotion);
- organizational performance: identifying criteria for assessing organizational performance and highlighting the factors that determine clubs performance;

- financial resources: the clubs access to financial resources , among which the sponsorship, to ensure the human resources and technology to perform marketing research necessary to ensure the market competitiveness.

3. CONCLUSIONS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF PRIVATE SPORTS CLUBS

The experimental research based on an analysis model of the private sports clubs management has aimed to identify good practice and complex issues faced by the private sports clubs and find the most appropriate ways of improving their management. The analysis highlights the concern of the sports clubs management in assuring the organizational performance, namely to improve their competitiveness.

The major objective of the empirical study is the knowledge of the Winner Club customers behavior in order to adopt measures concerning the delimitation of the market segments and the development. The reaching of the goal has been based on the random and representative character of the sample. The technique procedure of making the sample, of observation of the statistical data were the basis of an available data base in order to obtain new and pertinent observations. In this respect most statistical processing procedures were completed with appropriate statistical tests in order to expand the results at the level of the clubs' customers.

The existence of some relevant information at the level of the entire statistical population is a major component of the decision making process. The variables of structure have impact on the quality of the models and their parameters. If sex, number of household members, type of customers' participation and the study level are correlated or simply independent.

Regarding the hypothesis of the research, we can say that, generally, they are valid with the following observations:

- between the offer's quality and the quality of the customer demands there is a strong link; in other words, between the service quality variables (CalServ) and the customer attachment to the club (ASTM). This hypothesis is checked in very much. After determining the statistical correlation between these two variables(Table 4.2), it follows that the value of correlation for each pair of variables exceed 0.6, which is a

high intensity of correlation between the, which should be considered by the clubs management.

- Between the dependent variable “request” and the variable factor “reput” there is a close connection. “Reput” variable parameter is 0.463; it shows that an increase of reputation with 1 point will determine an increase of the demand with 0.463 points.

The quality of offer is largely determined by the variables quality of the tennis courses provided to the clients (CalCurs), by the clubs ‘price policy (PolPret), coaches quality (CalAntr) and customer loyalty programs (FidelClien). This hypothesis is largely verified through the improvement of the offer’s quality, client’s perception regarding the sports clubs services with direct effect upon the improvement of the demand, both qualitatively and quantitatively, especially as the club’s bid to offer tennis classes is evaluated by the respondents with an average score of 2.56, plus the prices of the competitors (2.47) and the customers’ expectations. (2.51)

The study of the customers’ behavior considering the major objective, involves the verifying and analyzing of the following assumptions:

- finding connections between variables;
- the impact of the structural variables upon the links;
- the analyze of the possibility regarding the average level of some significant variables and their dispersion.

In the section allocated to the linkage analysis, it has been insisted upon the classic model regarding the offer influence over the demand. Data encoding and construction of complex variables has allowed the expression of offer and demand in points. Importantly, they have found a way to quantify the demand variation in response to the changes in supply demand. At the level of the clubs customers, we can say how much does the demand changes if the offer changes, too with one point. The obtained information is based on a valid and certified statistic study against the most relevant statistical tests. It is important to know the parameters of this relationship in order to take valid decisions regarding the clubs offer. Similar studies have been done even in relation to the clubs advertising and reputation. In this respect, Publ and Reput variables measure, in points, the clients’ perception in relation to the clubs reputation

and advertising. The importance, significance and checking of the model is outlined in their relevant section.

The second objective requires to check whether the structure variables have an impact on the models' quality and their parameters. In this study, I have considered some variables that allows to structure the customers into groups. The groups have been formed considering the following factors: sex, age, income, type of participation, level of education, number of family members; the groups are more or less homogeneous. The models' variation at the group level has been studied. It should be noticed that, in most cases, the marginal propensity of consumption changes with respect to the structure variable. Each group formed in relation to one of the structure variable of the individual' claim are opposite to the club's offer. In each case the statistical study highlights the customers sensitivity in relation with the offer. This allows to the decisional factors to consider each group separately, as well as certain categories of customers, in order to analyze the claims against the offer. The way in which this empirical study has been approached, ensures the credibility of the results gained from the statistical processing of the data from the database.

The third objective involves addressing behavioral studies using variance techniques. We have examined the hypothesis whether the qualitative variables (sex, Mgos, Fpart and Study) are associated. More specifically, we have anted to see whether sex, number of household members, type of customer participation and the level of study are correlated or simply independent.

The significance of the variables included in the study and the customers' spread around the average values, have led us to the definition of those groups with extreme behavior, relevant in terms of decision making.

It is the decision makers' responsibility to analyze the results gained from the whole group, and where appropriate, individually, to improve and diversify the offer in order to increase the number of people interested in the club's services.

Starting from the general and specific objectives of the experimental research, the analysis based on a sample survey of the private sports clubs, allows us to make a number of proposals to improve their management and increase the operational

effectiveness and efficiency of the specific activities. These can be summarized as follows:

- the achieving of the best practice guide in the management of the private sports clubs that ensure both the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizational strategies and policies, as well as operational activities specific to this area, important prerequisites for ensuring the market competitiveness;
- managers must be concerned not only to develop strategies and organizational policies, but also to constantly update them to keep pace with the rapid changes of the factors that determine the sports organizations' performance;
- provide continuous training of the staff in order to achieve the strategic and operational objectives at the organizational level and of those specific to the human resources function;
- the clearly defining of the club management' objectives based on a thorough analysis of the offer and demand, including the full range of issues related to the customers, competitors, system's structure, mission, people, reward system, personnel evaluation, involvement and integration in work;
- outsourcing of some specific activities of the private sports clubs based on some well-founded analysis, which ensures a good functionality, coordination of the outsourced activities with the suppliers specialized in the field, and getting benefits on the basis of an appropriate evaluation of these suppliers;
- effective implementation of the social responsibility system, based on professionally trained staff, good information, discriminatory social practices, effective policies to ensure safety and health at work, fairness of the employment practices, working conditions, transparency of the decision making process and protection of the environment;
- regular assessment of the employees' degree of satisfaction with their job, not neglecting its importance in the strengthening of the team spirit and in the stimulating of the work performance;

- periodic (annually) management audit to highlight the weaknesses in the private sports clubs management, in order to improve the strategic and operational processes;
- the development of some strategies focused on the customers, taking into consideration some efficient and effective marketing studies;
- the development of some specific and effective communication programs to achieve a higher level of the employees' involvement in work, important for the competitive advantage;
- the enhancing of the specific values of the organizational culture which stimulate individual and collective behavior.

4. PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The main contributions of our scientific approach can be summarized as follows:

- the defining of the concepts specific to the sports organization management based on the literature study and analysis in order to create a proper contextual framework of the empirical research;
- the developing of a management analysis model, namely the way in which the strategy, policies and the management practices contribute to the achievement of the objectives and targets of the private sports clubs;
- determine the ways in which customer's perception and satisfaction contribute to the development of effective policies and strategies that help clubs to achieve performances;
- determining the relative stage of design, organization and operationalization of the activities and processes from the private sports clubs, of the strategies and policies they implement to ensure the competitive advantage;
- identify the variables and characteristics of the planning, organization, coordination, training, motivation and control which determine the effectiveness of the strategies, policies and practices in the private sports clubs;

- identifying the best practices and the ways of improving the private sports clubs management.

Developing an evaluation model of the clients, taking as an example a representative tennis club, we must emphasize that the research has been conducted following a code of good practices and the transmission of the research results to the sports clubs that were subject to this investigation. Also, we have to show that the research results, the author's expertise and experience in the field of research, guarantee the premises of a thorough analysis of the identified problems.