

SPORT BUSINESS EXCELLENCE: A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

Manuscript

Not Published Yet

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If a sport business wants to achieve a leading position in the market, customer satisfaction should be its main objective. Towards this direction, human resource empowerment is of vital importance according to the existing literature (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2010). Therefore, having the right set of employees and practices helps to deliver high levels of service quality for the customers and helps a sport business to adopt the customer-oriented behavior mindset (Horney, 1996; Chow et al., 2006), which provides competitive advantage and increases the profits of organizations (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin & Day, 2006).

Moreover, one of the most important aspects that contributes to sport business competitiveness is the use of Total Quality Management (TQM) techniques. TQM techniques contribute to increase the overall quality, and play a significant role in innovation, employee involvement and loyalty and the financial stability of sport businesses (Rexhepi, Ramadani & Ratten, forthcoming).

According to the business literature there is a statistically significant positive relationship between organizational culture and innovative work behavior and that organizational culture significantly predicts innovative work behavior, which is crucial for the enhance of performance and success of any sport organization (Eskiler, Ekici, Soyer & Sari, 2016).

In addition, the research has revealed that the sport organizations led by transformational leaders achieve organizational goals, superior teamwork, and customer orientated strategy (Wallace & Weese, 1995).

Given that critical business factors such as: human resource empowerment, customer oriented strategy, leadership, organizational culture, innovation and TQM have described as outstanding business practices in managing the sport organizations and achieving excellence (as suggested by the literature) the purpose of the present study is to examine in a holistic manner all the above mentioned business practices and their contribution to the effective management and operational excellence of modern sport businesses.

Methods

The particular research project is an on-going research and up to now data has been gathered from a random sample of 162 managerial and technical directors of 162 Greek Sport Businesses (from a total sample of 180 large fitness clubs in the Region of Attica, which recognised by Association of Fitness Clubs Owners). For the purpose of the study a 48 - item questionnaire was used, which developed by Papaioannou and Kriemadis based on the reviewed literature on strategic management and business excellence as well as on input and suggestions from reviews offered by a selected panel of experts. The questionnaire provided specific information concerning the sport business excellence in the Greek sport business sector, demographic characteristics of the respondents and managers' perceptions related to the performance of the sport business. More specifically, the questionnaire comprises the following key units:

- 1) Human resource empowerment
- 2) Customer oriented strategy
- 3) Leadership
- 4) Organizational culture
- 5) Innovation
- 6) TQM
- 7) Business performance

The seven-factor questionnaire describing the most salient dimensions of sport Business Excellence which referred in achieving excellence in the most critical aspects of a sport business. The questions were answered using a five point Likert Scale. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's coefficient alpha (α). The reliability of the scale was found to be: $\alpha = .936$. The content validity of the questionnaire was determined by a panel

of experts which consisted of 6 academics and practitioners in the fields of strategic management, business excellence, sport professionals, management research, and sport management.

Conclusion

The paper will present and explain descriptive statistics of the research and the extent to which the sport business excellence is applied to Greek sport businesses. As the number of sport businesses is increasing there is immediate need to perceive what will make them more effective and competitive. The results of the study reinforced the belief that sport business excellence is a major factor for sport business activity, because it may contribute to the viability and profit increase of sport businesses.

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