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Abstract

We live in a globalized economic, social and technological environment where organizations can be successful only if they have required resources (material resources, facilities and equipment, and human resources). The managers and the organizations should empower and enable employees to accomplish their work in meaningful ways. Empowerment has been described as a means to enable employees to make decisions and as a personal phenomenon where individuals take responsibility for their own actions. The aim of the present study was to present effective methods and techniques of employee empowerment which constitute for the organization a source of competitive advantage. The paper will present and explain empowerment methods and techniques such as: (a) organizational culture, (b) vision statements, (c) organizational values, (d) teamwork, (e) the role of manager - leadership, (f) devolving responsibility - accountability, (g) information sharing, (h) continuous training, (i) appraisal rewards, (j) goal setting, and (k) performance appraisal process.

Key Words: *athletic organization, sport managers, empowerment methods.*

Nowdays organizations and enterprises function in a globalized economic, social and technological environment. Every organization can function efficiently only if it has at its disposal the required resources. These resources are grouped into material resources in the form of capital, facilities and equipment, and human resources that include employees and their managers. The managers and the organizations should consider three elements which are vital for their development. These elements are: (1) precise goals to be achieved (2) limited resources and (3) people. Of these three, it is the entity of «people» that is most challenging to the managerial attention. Many authors retain that for a manager to be effective, he or she must be a good manager of people because it is they who make up an organization and make everything work (Tosi, Rizzo and Carroll, 1986).

Because of that, management and more specifically *empowerment* of human resources in the particular working and social environment of each organization has greater importance than the management of other resources and requires a meticulous attention. As a matter of fact, human resources represent an important capital, which should be managed effectively in order to constitute for the organization a source of competitive advantage (Bowen and Lawler, 1992).

Empowerment has been the focus of relatively few empirical studies (Kirkman & Rosen, 1996; Konczak, Stelly and Trusty, 1996; Zimmerman, Israeli, Schulz & Checkoway, 1992). Empowerment has been defined as helping employees take personal ownership of their jobs (Byham & Cox, 1989), as well as the transfer of decision making and responsibility from managers to employees. Basically, it is the process of encouraging and rewarding employee initiative and imagination. Basic prerequisite is the fact that the members of the organization are willing and capable of assuming more power, make good decisions and perform them effectively. Until recently, most discussions of empowerment aimed at empowering management behaviours, particularly delegation and shared decision making (Conger & Kanugo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995a). Empowerment was mainly conceptualized as a matter of «power» (Mainiero, 1986).

Many authors (Ashness and Lashley 1995; Dickmeyer and Williams 1995; Goodale et al. 1997; Maxwell, 1997;

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Ugboro and Obeng, 2000; Ling, 2000; Savery et al. 2001; Patterson et al. 2004; McKenna, 1998) supported that human resource management and more specifically the empowerment of human resource for enterprises practice. The literature sets the following profits regarding the application of empowerment:

Organizational benefits include:

- strategic guidance from the level of the work unit,
- strategic implementation at the level of the work unit, increased work unit efficiency, increased customer focus,
- increased emphasis on problem solving and prevention,
- increased respect and trust among work units,
- improved cross-functional coordination (Ransom, 1994),
- improved service quality (Fulford & Enz, 1995),
- increased customer satisfaction within the service industry due to the impact of an empowering service environment on customer perceptions (Brymer, 1991), and the need for employees who can more readily adapt to customer needs (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996),
- increased managerial effectiveness and innovation (Spreitzer, 1995a, 1995b, Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, in press),
- increased organizational effectiveness as indicated by higher profits, growth, and expense control (Kouzes & Posner, 1987),
- increased quality of service delivery (Fulford & Enz, 1995),
- increased employee commitment to their organization (Fulford & Enz, 1995).

Employee benefits from empowerment include:

- improved motivation (Kappelman and Prybutok, 1995),
- increased personal strengths (Dodd and Gutierrez, 1990),
- added accountability (Shearer and Fagin, 1994),
- increased personal power and sense of self-efficacy (Dodd and Gutierrez, 1990),
- increased abilities to achieve full personal potential (Crawford, 1995),
- increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and creates a culture that supports high service quality (Brymer, 1991, Sparrowe, 1994; Fulford & Enz, 1995; Bowen & Lawler, 1995), and

- increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy and decreased levels of job strain (Spreitzer, 1995a, 1995b; Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, in press; (Fulford & Enz, 1995).

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to examine human resource empowerment importance and contribution to the effective management and operation of modern businesses and organizations. Moreover, the research will present effective methods and processes for human resource empowerment which top management of sport businesses and organizations may implement so that their goals are realized and their further development and viability is ensured.

Research Methodology

There was systematic and analytical literature review in the broader area of development and human resource empowerment aiming at collecting theoretical and practical data which relate to the research aim so that to be used by theorists and sport professionals. There were also interviews with business and organization members.

Literature Review

Empowerment in the Business Sector

Empowerment is most often considered to be a viable means to increase the effectiveness of an organization, as well as to improve the quality of working life for employees (Manz, 1992; Wellins, Byham, & Wilson; 1991). Furthermore, Mathis and Jackson (1991) proposed three kinds of individual performance criteria that organizations need to cultivate in order to flourish: productivity, innovation and loyalty. All three can be succeeded through effective enforcement of the empowerment principles, because responsibility and accountability encourage not only job satisfaction but also satisfaction in the achievement of better standards of performance. Bernstein (1992) claimed

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that companies in which employee empowerment has actually been put into force frequently found that such an approach bore fruits in such key aspects as morale, productivity and quality.

Ashness and Lashley (1995) examined employee empowerment (focused on the managerial dimensions of empowerment) in Harvester Restaurants. The results pointed out that overall organizational performance had improved. There had been a sale increase of 7 per cent, team member turnover had fallen by 19 per cent, wages costs were marginally reduced, from 24 per cent to 23.2 per cent and administration costs had fallen by 41 per cent and labour turnover was particularly low at about 10 per cent. An increase in understanding and commitment to the business objectives throughout the organization was also noticed. Unit management also reported a low level of guest complaints, and problems were sorted out more quickly. Moreover the empowerment of employees in service organizations has been shown to produce positive outcomes in the form of increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Maxwell's (1997) case study of empowerment at the Glasgow Marriott, indicated higher levels of job satisfaction, better customer service, more rapid decision making, and personal development. However, many disadvantages were also clearly stated (unclear work practices, communication difficulties, increased competition among employees, and higher levels of pressure on staff). The need to support the early stages of the empowerment process with training to elucidate the extent and implications of its use was of equal importance.

Previous research has also found that employee understanding of empowerment has had an influence on employee loyalty, concern for others (including customers), and satisfaction. The implication of this finding is that boosting employee service capability through empowerment contributes to employee job satisfaction, job commitment, pride of workmanship, and what Anderson, Rungtusanatham, and Schroeder (1994) called employee fulfillment or the degree to which employees feel that the organization continually satisfies their needs (Fulford & Enz, 1995). Similarly Heskett's (1987) Quality Wheel and Schlesinger & Heskett's (1991) Cycles of Success and Failure show the link between employee satisfaction through empowerment,

customer satisfaction and enhanced business performance. From this theoretical basis it is proposed that customer satisfaction, employee empowerment, morale and service quality are directly linked because the more-motivated employee will provide better service.

Furthermore, if employees understand that their manager values them and provides them with appropriate control and authority over their work, they will feel more confident about their jobs (Yoon et al., 2001; Babin and Boles, 1996). Hocutt & Stone (1998) in two experiments, using a sample of 329 undergraduate marketing students from a large midwestern University tested predictions from a service recovery model regarding employee and customer responses to empowerment in a restaurant context. In other words, on the one hand they looked into the impact of two dimensions of employee empowerment (autonomy and training) on employee job facet satisfaction, including three levels of empowerment (no autonomy or training, autonomy - not trained, and autonomy - trained). On the other hand, the researchers suggested that employee empowerment and job facet satisfaction influenced dimensions of perceived fairness (responsiveness and empathy/courtesy, respectively) of the service recovery attempt which, in turn, affected consumer satisfaction. It was disclosed from the results that empowerment via training and autonomy led to higher service employee satisfaction. Greater customer satisfaction following a service failure was created by higher employee responsiveness and empathy during a service recovery.

Sigler & Pearson (2000) examined how organizational culture (doing orientation, collectivism, and power distance), may support perceptions of empowerment (psychological empowerment), and outcomes important to organizations (performance and organizational commitment) in 727 front line textile employees working in five plants for two companies located in the Southeastern United States. According to the results employees whose organizations are high in doing orientation and collectivism felt more empowered than employees whose organizations tend toward being-oriented and individualistic.

Furthermore, employees who perceived higher levels of empowerment had higher performance levels than employees who perceived low levels of empowerment. Also employees' perceptions of empowerment was positively related to

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organizational commitment (except the dimension of competence). (Savery & Luks, 2001).

Across the private, public, and voluntary sectors, empowering staff is widely supported as a means to improve the performance and productivity of organizations (Leslie et al., 1998). Moreover, Nelson (1994) stressed that, efficiency and productivity can be increased through empowerment, giving the organization the chance to respond to strategic changes in the marketplace more rapidly. As Cordery (1995) expressed in his study of self-managing teams, empowerment techniques provide work experiences that are fundamentally motivating to employees whilst at the same time useful to organizational performance. Many organizations (such as Wilson, Eastman Chemical and Rhone-Poulenc) reported that through the use of empowerment they have managed to establish new and better ways of working as well as increasing profits (Wright, 1993, Industry leaders try new approaches, 1993).

Blitzer et al. (1993) argued that empowerment can positively influence employee self esteem of competence and security giving employees a clear sense of the contributions they can make to the company directly leading to increases in productivity. Similarly Denhardt (1993) found that managers who urge empowerment of employees are more successful in improving organizational productivity. Moreover, empowerment affected improvement on six performance measures, from four different companies (manufacturer, value-added reseller, contracting firm, and financial services organization). More specifically, employee turnover declined with empowerment, and increases in sales per employee, a higher profit margin, lower material cost as percentage of sales, lower labour cost as a percentage of sales, and higher net profit were observed (Dickmeyer and Williams, 1995).

Furthermore, Lewis and Lytton (1995) underscored that the key to successful organizational change and profitability within a small British engineering company is empowerment. By making employees fully appreciate the fact that employees recognize and respect them, they evolve as the most prized asset, even though not appearing on the balance sheet.

In another study the perceptual linkages between empowerment and employees' perceptions of the service

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quality that they are able to provide for the retail organization was analyzed. The results have shown that service providers' perceptions of service quality were strongly influenced by empowerment (component of competence), feedback, rewards, and culture and suggested that the firm should first ensure that employees receive the training, preparation, and resources necessary to deliver excellent service (Goodale et al. 1997).

Bennett (1999) argued that a specialist bicycle manufacturer in United Kingdom, who had to face ferocious European competition, introduced a radical productivity and quality improvement program based on empowerment. He made a deal whereby 20% of all financial savings achieved through workers' high productivity would be paid to them. Soon, productivity rose sharply as the workers put into force many labour-saving innovations to respond to their new organizational responsibilities. As a result, the firm quickly became one of the most efficient bicycle manufacturers in the world.

In another study conducted by Kirkman & Rosen, (1999), empowered teams were more productive and proactive than less empowered teams and had higher levels of customer service, job satisfaction, and organizational and team commitment.

Human resource development through empowering employees and establishing appropriate compensation and recognition systems have affected positively a firm's financial performance, and has appeared to be the most critical competency in business environment in China (Ling, 2000). Furthermore, Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow, and Lawler (2000), in their cross-cultural study on employees of a single firm (specializing in light manufacturing) with operations in the United States, Mexico, Poland, and India found that continuous improvement practices (defined as encouragement of employees for learning and development, rewarding employees for attaining competence, and pay for knowledge) and empowerment were found to be positively related to job satisfaction in the United States, Mexico, and Poland but not in India. Robert et al. (2000) attributed the inverse relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction in India to the unusually high power distance that exists in this culture.

Methods and Techniques of Empowerment

The human resource empowerment process has proved beneficial and essential. Empowerment is composed of processes, methods, tools and techniques which have been developed in the framework of human resource development, motivation, job design, responsibility devolve and delegation of authority. According to Cook, (1994); Nicholls, (1995); Randolph, (1995); Klagge, (1998); Norma D'Annunzio-Green & John Macandrew, (1999); Anna Psoinos et al. (2000); and Oakland & Oakland (2001), the human resource empowerment process includes:

Creation of vision and formulation of Organizational Values: Senior management needs to develop a vision and a mission statement for the organization which focuses on the customer and recognizes the significant role of human resource. Many organizations poured a great deal of effort into creating a vision of the company as a collaborative of empowered people – a vision of respect, responsibility, and cooperation, focusing on better service to the customer (Cook, 1994; Randolph, 1995). Values or beliefs endorsed by many organizations who adopt the empowerment route include the promotion of customer service, two-way communication, teamwork and integrity (Cook, 1994).

Teamwork: Teamwork is an important element in assisting employees to take on new responsibilities as it creates a supportive and open environment and enables empowerment to take place. Empowered teams are very different from participative teams, quality circles, or semi-autonomous teams. They make decisions, implement them, and they are held accountable, they do not just recommend ideas. The roles of the teams include accountable decision making, devolving responsibility from top management while the training on effective teamwork is necessary in order to begin the teams to act with autonomy, take over responsibilities previously held by their managers, carried out their managers' work effectively with a sense of «ownership» feeling job satisfaction and become self-managed teams. Teams must also become the hierarchy if organizations are to make full use of their members' Diversity as an asset for solving complex problems and

increasing their efficiency and effectiveness. Team approach requires significant amounts of training of both managers and employees to break through the accountability-control barriers (Cook, 1994; Randolph, 1995).

The Role of the Manager: A fundamental change in the culture of the organization as a result of empowerment is the role the manager needs to adopt to facilitate the process. The empowered managers adopted a more facilitative approach to the problem and encouraged a different relationship with their subordinates so that they in turn feel empowered to act. The role of the manager in an organization that has adopted the empowerment includes the role of (a) a coach, (b) a facilitator, (c) a team player, and (d) an enabler. The way a manager deals with mistakes is a sure indication of his true values relating to empowerment. The empowering manager supports the subordinates through their mistakes and provides them with emotional support to enhance subordinate's self-confidence and sense of wellbeing, enabling them to function with maximum efficiency (counselling experience). (Cook, 1994; Randolph, 1995).

Information sharing: Sharing of «sensitive» information relative to financial organizational and strategic issues play an important role in understanding the challenges that the organization faces and contributes to clarity of suggestions and ideas from employees, effective participation with sense of «ownership» and finally, establishing trust in order to make brilliant decisions and carry out their jobs.

Training support: Constant training contributes to the improvement of unit and team efficiency, increases the competitiveness of the organization and contributes to the achievement of organizational goals. The management usually plays the part of the trainer, defines the training needs of the employees and through appropriate educational programs provides skills which concern the job (technical skills knowledge), empowerment and teamwork and evaluates the effectiveness of educational programs.

Performance Appraisal Processes: Appraisals must be restructured as performance management processes, focused

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away from a manager's appraisal of the employee, and toward collaboration and continuous improvement. The performance appraisal process includes: (a) effective performance planning, including both collaborative goal setting and discussion of needed leadership style. At the planning stage, managers and employees collaborate in setting goals, and the manager agrees to provide the leadership needed to help the employee succeed, (b) ongoing coaching of employee progress, and performance reviews focusing on the partnership by criticizing the employee's accomplishments and the manager's leadership.

Reward system and recognition: The reward system based on organizational and individual performance constitutes an essential practice of motivation independently of the kind of rewards (financial, not financial).

Organizational culture: constructive organizations focus on: (a) determination of important goals at all levels, (b) development of full capabilities of human resource (innovation, creativity), (c) promotion of a uniform atmosphere within the organization and (d) promotion of effective cross-divisional cooperation. Furthermore, they promote the organizational climate where they reinforce mutual trust and trust to the human resources capabilities which align with the achievement of goals and affect the performance of the organization.

Devolve responsibility and delegation of authority: Devolving responsibility and delegation of authority are important aspects of the empowerment process which give the employees the feeling of «ownership» and motivate them to use the maximum of their capabilities and the talent they have so that to perform their duties effectively. Delegation of authority does not mean that the managers are released from the liability of the responsibilities they devolve, on the contrary they must know what is happening, give the general direction for their division, follow the progress of the responsibilities execution and make the overall evaluation according to the designated goals for each time period.

Goal setting: A system of goal setting and programming for the facilitation of individuals and teams so that they are

productive is Management by Objectives (M.B.O.). In Management by Objectives goal setting is realized through an interactive process. Top Management sets the general goals of the organization but the composition of the allocated goals of each unit is set through participative process and can redefine the general organization or unit goals. While the process of setting goals begins on top the conclusive goals are set with the participation of all levels. Goals are often set as «continuous improvement goals» rather than «end result goals.» Through Management by Objectives, the responsibilities are better defined, better co-ordination is achieved, the employees understand their duties and what is expected from them and have high morale and willingness to make attempts since they participate in goal setting.

Conclusion

As the number of sport organizations and businesses is increasing there is immediate need to perceive what will make them more effective and competitive. The above mention benefits reinforced the belief that human resource empowerment is a major factor for sport business activity, because it may contribute to the viability and profit increase of sport organizations. So, «empowerment» must not be considered as a simple technique or process which makes employees feel good about their job but an organizational need which takes extensive planning, requires time and requires capable and trained managers to empower human resource so that the latter constitutes an advantageous competitive resource for the sport organization.

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