

Innovation and business performance in sport business

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Abstract

Since the innovation constitutes a critical business factor which has been described as outstanding business practice in managing the sport organizations and achieving excellence the purpose of the present study was (1) to determine the extent to which innovation is applied to medium and large sport businesses, in terms of financial status, organizational structure and facilities in the region of Attica and (2) to examine the relationship between innovation and business performance in the abovementioned organizations. The study was a quantitative design using descriptive statistics and Kendall correlation, to examine the purpose of the study. A sample of 162 managers of 162 Greek Sport Businesses was surveyed using a questionnaire. The results of this study indicated that innovation process is applied to a great extent by Greek sport businesses. Also, the present study supported that there were significant and positive relationships between innovation and business performance of Greek sport businesses. This study is useful in extending the concept of innovation to sport sector. The study will be useful in helping sport managers to their further understanding of the innovation process in their respective sport organizations.

Keywords: innovation, sport businesses, business performance

Introduction

Whenever a sport business wishes to accomplish the top position in the market, innovation should be the major goal. Moreover, innovation offers a competitive advantage to the organization and serves as a basis for a proactive and entrepreneurial organization (Johannessen et al., 2001). Thus, it is considered to be the core of competitive success. Human resource empowerment has been proved to be a critical element of service innovation by empirical research (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005; Ottenbacher et al., 2005; 2006; Ottenbacher, 2007). It can be achieved by having employees take part in the innovation process with the view to human resource empowerment (Atuahene-Gima, 1996), and by raising motivation with reward systems (Amabile, 1998; De Jong & Vermeulen 2003; McGourthy & Tarshis, 1996;).

Following the literature, one should find a significant accordance between the organizational culture and the innovation in the work behaviour which leads to the fact that organizational culture predicts the innovative work behaviour. This is crucial for the performance and the success of any sport organization in leveling higher (Eskier, Ekici, Soyer & Sari, 2016).

Since the innovation constitutes a critical business factor which has been described as outstanding business practice in managing the sport organizations and achieving excellence the purpose of the present study was (1) to determine the extent to which innovation is applied to medium and large sport businesses, in terms of financial status, organizational structure and facilities in the region of Attica and (2) to examine the relationship between innovation and business performance in the abovementioned organizations.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What is the extent to which the innovation is being used in the Greek sport businesses?
- Is there a relationship between innovation and business performance of sport businesses?

Literature review

Innovation

Nowadays, there seems to be a major need for innovation and competitive advantage concerning the organizations. As innovation is perceived as a key to economic growth and development, it should be considered to sustain efforts individually and in an organizational line (Jung, Chow and Wu, 2003; Mokhber, bin Wan Ismail, and Vakilbashi, 2015; Al-Husseini, and Elbeltagi, 2016). Literature offers different definitions for the innovation. It can be defined as “a new idea, method, or device. The act of creating a new product or process. The act includes invention as well as the work required to bring an idea or concept into final form” (Belliveau et al., 2002, p. 446). Furthermore, innovation is not only perceived as the conceptualization of an improved service or product but it can be the launch of new methods, practices or new products and services. It can also be defined as “a procedure through which employees’ knowledge and valuable ideas are transformed into new forms of added value for the organization and its stakeholders” (Dasgupta, and Gupta, 2009; Ertürk, 2012). As far as it concerns service industry, innovation is found in non-technical areas so as to make a contrast among innovation services and service innovation (Rubalcaba, 2007; Winand, Scheerder, Vos, and Zintz, 2016).

Potentially, service innovation includes a wide outlook (Snyder, et al., 2016). Ostrom et al. (2010) claimed that innovation promotes value for the customer, the employee, the partners, the owner and the communities via service procedures, service business model and service offerings. Thus, linking service to innovation adds new perspectives (Witell et al., 2015; Snyder, et al., 2016). Furthermore, the significance of the service innovation regarding different areas such as marketing may be underscored in research (Berry et al. 2006; Nijssen et al. 2006; Oliveira and Von Hippel 2011). This may be the case for the informational systems (Alter 2008; Lyytinen and Rose 2003; Rai and Sambamurthy 2006), operations (Edvardsson and Olson 1996; Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons 2000; Metters and Marucheck 2007; Oke 2007), and strategy (Dörner et al. 2011; Lusch, and Nambisan, 2015).

A number of authors have argued that innovation helps improve organizational performance (Senge, 1990; Damanpour, 1991; Argyris and Schön, 1996; Hurley and Hult, 1998; De Jong and Hartog 2007; García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, and Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012). Additionally, research has demonstrated that product

innovation is also an important issue as it is essential to product success and which leads to organizational success (Valencia, Valle, and Jimnez 2010). It is argued that innovation should be comprised of implementing the developed ideas, methods and processes so as to accomplish the objectives of the organization effectively.

Furthermore, literature has demonstrated that there is a positive and significant link between innovation and human resource empowerment (Ootenbacher & Gnoth, 2005; Ottenbacher et al., 2005; 2006; Çakar and Ertürk, 2010; Ertürk, 2012) as well as leadership (Senge, 1990; García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, and Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012), customer oriented strategy (Griseemann, Plank, and Brunner-Sperdin, 2013; Thourungrroje and Racela, 2013), organizational culture (Chang and Lee, 2007; Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez-Jiménez, and Sanz-Valle, 2011;) and TQM (Sarkees, and Hulland, 2009; Bon and Mustafa, 2013).

Organizational culture, innovation, TQM, customer oriented strategy, leadership and human resource empowerment seem to be the key factors to promote the performance and as practices regarding the service organizations to help achieve excellence (Senge, 1990; Argyris and Schön, 1996; Hurley and Hult, 1998; Ottenbacher et al., 2005; De Jong and Hartog 2007; Prabhjot and Kumar, 2014; Valmohammadi, and Roshanzamir, 2015; Papaioannou, Kriemadis, Kapetaniou, Yfantidou and Kourtesopoulou, 2017).

Concerning the sport sector, in a study was investigated the innovation effects to sport federations. It took the types of innovation applied to sport federations as well as their attitude and their preferences into consideration. The results demonstrated that some federations apply innovation and some of them reach a high degree of its application. Additionally, the study claimed ten different of sport and nonsport service styles in innovation and that membership size as well as categories of sport influence preferences in knowledge creation – appropriation and finally what type of innovation is developed. It is suggested that sport federations are influenced by the members' requirements and try to meet the demands or expectations. Federations also are open to newness and so to innovations. Hence, leaders and in that case managers should consider innovation as a key element and make use of the typology to promote new services and meet members' requirements. (Winand, Scheerder, Vos, and Zintz, 2016).

Organizational and Business Performance

Performance can be characterized by the degree of accomplishment of the task at the work environment that makes an employee's job (Cascio, 2006). In majority researchers think about performance as a scope of measurements of transactional influence together with input and output efficiency (Stannack, 1996; Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, and Shabbir, 2012).

Performance can cause debate between researchers Barney (1991). Organizational performance not only refers to the problem but also to its solution (Hefferman and Flood 2000). Daft (2000) claimed that organizational performance uses resources that lead to accomplishing the goals effectively. Ricardo, and Wade (2001) following Daft (2000) stated that organizational performance is actually accomplishing the goals and the objectives. He also argued that organizations success indicates that it does justice and it makes it possible because of the founding of the good employees performance management system (Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, and Shabbir, 2012).

Performance as it concerns business encloses a range of elements such as organizational or benefits, long or short term performance etc. It can be rated in two strands. Firstly, it can be rated though an objective method by comparing the absolute measures of performance such as, sales revenue, balance sheets, pre-tax profit etc.). Secondly, it can be rated by a subjective method that is based on managerial perceptions of the business performance. In such a case, managers are needed to evaluate the performance of the company according to their expectations and their competitors. Finally, studies that have taken both methods into consideration have demonstrated a strong link between subjective and objective rates of business performance (Dess and Robinson, 1984; Robinson and Pearce, 1988; Papaioannou et al., 2012).

Research Methods

Population of the study

The population for the particular research was selected from the database of the Association of Fitness Clubs Owners (AFCO), the organization in which all sport Service Providers (sport businesses) in the Region of Attica are listed. It includes 180 medium and large sport businesses (fitness clubs). Many of them have many

branches and thousands of members who enjoy different services. The selection of the population was based on the approach that surveyed respondents (sport businesses) should be appropriate in terms of financial status, organizational structure and facilities in the region of Attica and therefore are equipped with managers who are the most knowledgeable regarding complex and multidimensional processes (such as innovation activities) and who can respond as accurately as possible. The final participation in the particular research was 162 managers of 162 Greek Sport Businesses with a 90 percent response rate. According to the findings of this research, 75 (46.3%) of the participants were females and 87 (53.7%) were males with a mean age of 37.2 (SD = 8.01). In relation to the position of responsibility that managing research respondents of the sport businesses occupied, the 45.7% of the total population (74 research respondents) were technical managers. In addition, the 9.2% of the total sample held upper managerial positions in the sport business (15 General Managers), while the rest percentage 73 (45.1%) was owners of the sport business. In relation to the educational level of the research participants, the majority of the managers held a postgraduate academic title (postgraduate education) – 56 (34.6%), while the 94 (58%) of the total sample held a graduate degree (university education). High-school education appeared to hold only the 12 (7.4 %) of the total sample. By reference to the work experience of the research participants, 102 (63%) had over 7 years, 32 (19.7%) had three to seven years and 28 (17.3%) had one to three years work experience

Instrument development

A 23-item questionnaire, was used which developed by Papaioannou and Kriemadis (2017) 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 innovation in the Greek sport business sector, demographic characteristics of the respondents and managers' perceptions in relation to the performance of the sport business. The questions were answered using a five point Likert Scale where the 1 corresponds to very little, 2=little, 3=some, 4=great and finally 5=very great. The content validity of the questionnaire was determined by a panel of experts including academics and professionals in the fields of strategic management and marketing,

sport management research, and sport management and marketing. The reliability of the scale was found to be: $\alpha = .92$. In the particular study the business performance of sport businesses was rated by a subjective method that is based on managerial perceptions of the business performance. In such a case, managers are needed to evaluate the performance of their sport business according to their expectations relative to their current years' objectives, as well as their last financial years' objectives and their competitors on a five-point Likert scale. On each of the three bases, performance was judged against four criteria two financial (profit and ROI) and two market based (sales volume and market share). Moreover, the questionnaire included five closed questions related to the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The questions referred to gender, age of the participants, work experience, educational background and Job title in the sport business.

Procedure

The data collection was accomplished through questionnaires. The completion of the questionnaire took place at each sport business' premises, after their agreement, via appointments that were arranged by phone. Information was given to the managers of the foresaid sport businesses about the research and their consent was requested in order to realize the questionnaire. After their consent was given, appointments were scheduled at specific dates with each and every one of the managers of the sport businesses in order to complete the questionnaire. Clarifications were given to subjects when asked for.

Data analysis

The data from each collected questionnaire were entered into the statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS -version 22.0), in order to be analyzed. Standard descriptive statistics including mean, percentages and standard deviation were used to answer the first research question. Research questions two was answered by using Kendall correlation.

Results

Data of the sport businesses managers' responses were analyzed to gather information specific to the extent to which innovation is applied to the sport businesses. From the analysis it is shown that 11 (6.8%) of sport businesses used innovation to a little extent, and 45 (27.8%) used innovation to some extent. On the other hand, 94 (58%) of sport businesses used innovation to a great extent, and another 12 (7.4%) used innovation to a very great extent (Figure 1).

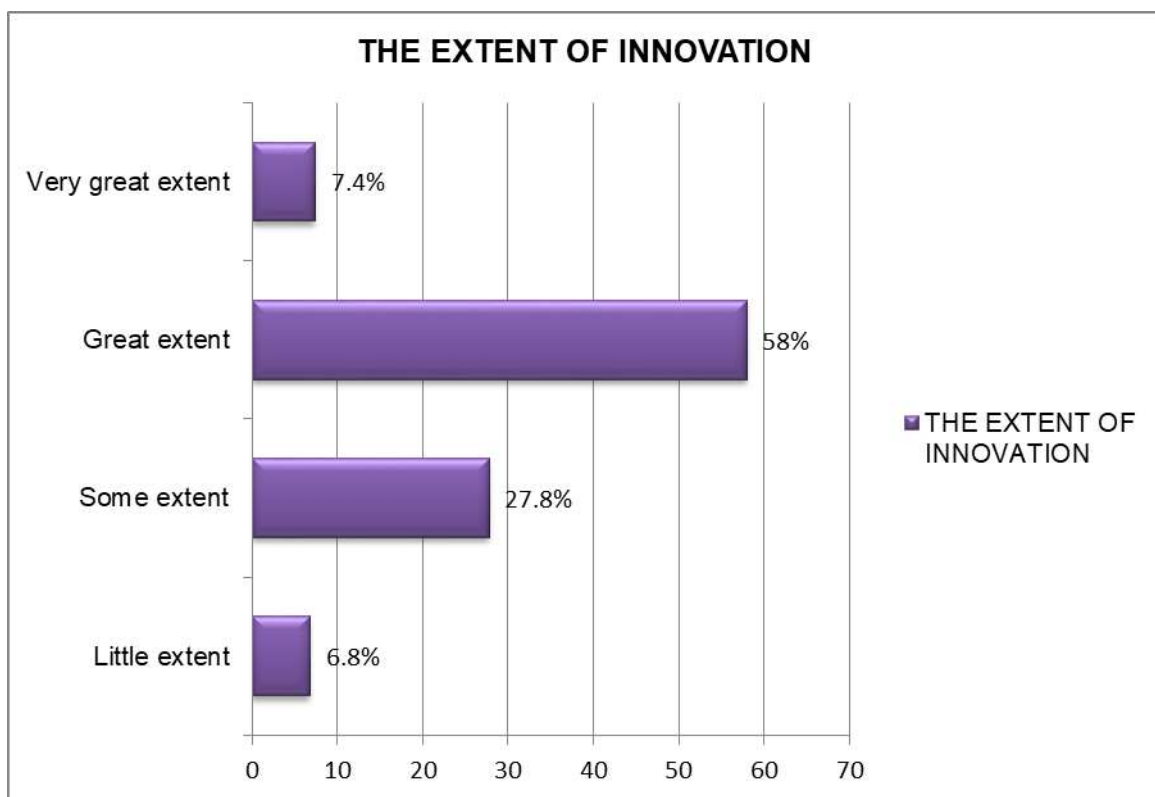


Figure 1. The extent of innovation in sport businesses.

Kendall correlation was performed to determine whether there was a relationship between innovation and business performance of sport businesses, the strength and the direction of this relationship. The data displayed in Table 1 revealed that there were significant and positive relationships between innovation and business performance (managers' expectations relative to their current years' objectives) of sport businesses.

In particular, innovation had a significant and positive relationship with profit ($r = .380, p=.000$), ROI ($r = .510, p=.000$), sales volume ($r = .499, p=.000$), market share ($r = .553, p=.000$), and Total Business performance ($r = .505, p=.000$).

Table 1: Significance of relationships between innovation and business performance (as measured by satisfaction levels in relation to current year's objectives) of sport businesses.

	Profit	ROI	Sales volume	Market Share	Total Business performance
<i>In relation to their current years' objectives</i>					
Innovation	.380 ($p=.000$)	.510 ($p=.000$)	.499 ($p=.000$)	.553 ($p=.000$)	.505 ($p=.000$)

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.001$

Also, the analysis indicated that were significant and positive relationships between innovation and business performance (managers' expectations relative to their last financial year's objectives). More specifically, innovation had a significant and positive relationship with profit ($r = .533, p=.000$), ROI ($r = .512, p=.000$), sales volume ($r = .509, p=.000$), market share ($r = .584, p=.000$), and Total Business performance ($r = .537, p=.000$) (Table 2).

Table 2: Significance of relationships between innovation and business performance (as measured by satisfaction levels in relation to last financial year's objectives) of sport businesses.

	Profit	ROI	Sales volume	Market Share	Total Business performance
<i>In relation to their last financial years' objectives</i>					
Innovation	.533 ($p=.000$)	.512 ($p=.000$)	.509 ($p=.000$)	.584 ($p=.000$)	.537 ($p=.000$)

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.001$

Finally, the table below shows analytically the significance of relationships between innovation and business performance (managers' expectations relative to their major market competitors' objectives) of sport businesses. The results suggested that innovation had a significant and positive relationship with profit ($r = .504$, $p=.000$), ROI ($r = .510$, $p=.000$), sales volume ($r = .544$, $p=.000$), market share ($r = .561$, $p=.000$), and Total Business performance ($r = .542$, $p=.000$) (Table 3).

Table 3: Significance of relationships between innovation and business performance (as measured by satisfaction levels in relation to major market competitors' objectives) of sport businesses.

	Profit	ROI	Sales volume	Market Share	Total Business performance
<i>In relation to their major market competitors' objectives</i>					
Innovation	.504 ($p=.000$)	.510 ($p=.000$)	.544 ($p=.000$)	.561 ($p=.000$)	.542 ($p=.000$)

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.001$

Discussion

Based on the findings of this study the innovation process is applied to a great extent by Greek sport businesses. It seems that the majority of the managers of sport businesses used it from "great extent" to a "very great extent" (65.4%), and another 27.8% of them used it to some extent (see Figure 1). This finding is in accordance to the literature in the sport sector (Winand, Scheerder, Vos, and Zintz, 2016). This means that sport businesses' vision or mission included a reference to innovation, which was linked to their business strategy. Moreover, the innovation strategy has facilitated the sport businesses to achieve their strategic goals. Also, it seems that customer satisfaction was part of sport businesses' innovation strategy and the internal cooperation of employees was an important part of innovation strategy implementation. Finally, the employees of sport businesses had the appropriate tools to support the implementation of innovation (Abdi, and Ali, 2013).

Additionally, the findings of this study confirmed the research question if there is a relationship between innovation and business performance of sport businesses. More specifically, innovation had a significant and positive relationship with profit, ROI, sales volume, market share, and Total Business performance of sport businesses. This finding is consistent with previous studies on innovation and organizational performance, in sport sector (Winand, Scheerder, Vos, and Zintz, 2016), and shows that the extent of innovation which managers of sport businesses exercised is related to their business performance (see Tables 1,2,3.). The present findings revealed that innovation activity is associated with durable organisational effectiveness, as sport businesses are driven by the demands of their customers in meeting their expectations of new services and are not risk averse (Damanpour et al., 2009; Smith and Tushman, 2005; Winand, Scheerder, Vos, and Zintz, 2016).

A total of 162 (90%) of Greek Sport Businesses in the region of Attica, which recognised by Association of Fitness Clubs Owners (AFCO) responded to the survey. According to Babbie (2015), a response rate of 50% or more is generally recognized as a satisfactory response rate in the surveys. Bearing that in mind, it seems that the results of the study could be generalized to the target population (Greek Sport Businesses). Given that innovation contributes in the survival and prosperity of sport businesses, the managers of sport businesses can be urged to carry it into effect in a greater extent. This could happen by developing an innovative culture which includes the encouragement of a positive attitude towards the development of new ideas within the organization and the utilization of various types of innovation, which could be related to improved performance. A prerequisite is the formation of different types of knowledge, which would broadening the offering activities and services of sport businesses in order to increase their performance (Winand, Scheerder, Vos, and Zintz, 2016).

The study was demarcated to the Sport Businesses. In the particular study the data was collected only from the Sport Businesses. Therefore, the generalization of this information to the whole sport sector is not possible. The study was also demarcated to a questionnaire aimed to collect data concerning innovation according to Papaioannou and Kriemadis (2017).

Possible limitations of this research need to be acknowledged as follows:

- The impartiality, degree of correctness and truthfulness of the participants during the completion of the questionnaire.

- The participant's level of comprehending the terminology of innovation.

Follow-up studies should be done to the same sample in three to five years to explore probable alterations in the application of the innovation process. Further research could also entail assessing the effect of innovation on customers' loyalty and satisfaction. Also, the Replication of the particular research should be done, using different measures of performance. For example, a future research may employ the objective way of measuring business performance, which is based on the comparisons of the absolute measures of performance (balance sheets, sales revenue, pre- tax profit, etc.).

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