

AN INVESTIGATION OF HUMAN RESOURCE EMPOWERMENT IN FITNESS CLUBS

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Human resource empowerment has been defined as a means to allow employees to take decisions on their own and take responsibility for their actions (Kriemadis & Papaioannou, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine: (a) the extent to which the human resource empowerment is being used in Greek fitness clubs and (b) the relationship between human resource empowerment and the selected variables: (a) managers' educational background (b) managers' position of responsibility, and (c) managers' gender.

In particular, the following research question was addressed in this study: 1. To what extent is the human resource empowerment process being used in Greek fitness clubs?

Also, the hypotheses to be tested were the following: (a) The levels of human resource empowerment are independent of the managers' educational background, (b) The levels of human resource empowerment are independent of the managers' position of responsibility, and (c) The levels of human resource empowerment are independent of the managers' gender.

Theoretical background or literature review

Empirical research has shown that human resource empowerment plays a critical role in the viability of sport organizations (Papaioannou et al., 2009; Papaioannou et al., 2011; Papaioannou et al., 2012a). In addition, a human resource management strategy such as empowerment provides a means by which organizations can set forward their competitiveness, promote managerial efficiency (Wright, McMahan, McCormick & Sherman, 1998; Papaioannou et al., 2012b), and remain competitive in the marketplace. However, research regarding human resource empowerment in the fitness clubs sector is still limited.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

This research was addressed to 250 fitness clubs, in the region of Athens and involved 1000 experienced managerial and technical directors who were the most knowledgeable regarding personnel management issues. Responses were received from 735 managerial and technical directors of 187 fitness clubs with a 73.5% response rate. For the purpose of this study a 30-item questionnaire, was used (developed by Vogt & Murrell, 1990, and modified and simplified by Kriemadis, 2011 & Papaioannou, 2011), in order to provide information on how managerial and technical directors see themselves in terms of the human resource empowerment process and demographic characteristics, using a five point Likert scale. The scales represented three different managerial styles which were: (a) the "empowering style" of management, (b) the "middle-ground style" of management and (c) the "controlling style" of management. In the first case the manager has a managerial style that reflects the manager who creates and shares power. In the second case, the manager has a managerial style that combines the two styles of controlling and empowering in equal proportions, and in the third case, the manager is concerned with control or seldom shares, creates or empowers subordinates. The reliability of the scale was found to be: $\alpha = .87$. Descriptive statistics, Pearson chi-square (χ^2) statistics and Independent samples T-test was performed to examine variables relationship using SPSS software (version 17).

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

From the analysis it is shown that the managerial and technical directors of fitness clubs used 60.1% "empowering style", 33.5% "middle-ground style" and 6.4% "controlling style" in the six key factors of empowerment. In addition, the results revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the three levels of human resource empowerment ("empowering style", "middle-ground style" and "controlling style") and the educational background of sport managers ($\chi^2=43.731$, $df=8$, $p=.000$) (Total for all managerial functions). Also, the results revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the levels of human resource empowerment and the managers' position of responsibility ($\chi^2= 72.148$, $df = 12$, $p= .000$) (Total for all managerial functions). The above mentioned results are consistent with previous studies on human resource empowerment and educational background and managerial position of educational managers, in education sector (Smith, & Greyling, 2006).

Eventually, the results suggested that there was a significant difference in the implementation of the human resource empowerment process between women and men managers, in the key factor of empowerment: "Decision-making and action-taking skills", where men ($M=3.53$, $SD=.866$), had significantly a lower level of human resource empowerment than women ($M=3.65$, $SD=.849$) ($t(733) = -1.988$, $p=.047$). The findings of the present study are consistent with previous studies in the educational sector (Smith, & Greyling, 2006), and show that the implementation of the human resource empowerment process depends on the managers' gender, and propose that the policies dealing with human resource empowerment should therefore be gender sensitive (Alimo-Metcalf, 1995; Smith, & Greyling, 2006).

Our study implies that empowering style is applied to a mediocre extent by the managerial and technical directors of fitness clubs. Given that human resource empowerment has a positive relationship on business performance of the fitness clubs (Papaioannou et al., 2011) the directors are now encouraged to implement empowerment practices in their workplace. This could happen by developing an empowering culture based on a series of specific principals (Vogt & Murrell, 1990).

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