

THE RELEVANCE OF PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF FOOTBALL YOUNG TALENTS

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Abstract

Over the last decades, human capital has grown in importance and has become to be considered by both academics and managers as a critical ingredient for the organizational and team performance (e.g. Becker, 1983; Pfeffer, 1994; 1998). According to this perspective, organizations, especially those competing in labour-intensive contexts, try to improve their performances through the development of their human capital, which consists of their members' acquired knowledge, skills and abilities (Becker, 1983; Huselid, Jackson & Schuler 1997; Pennings, Lee & Van Witteloostuijn, 1998). In particular, the more knowledge and intellectual capital are the sources of a sustainable competitive advantage, the more organizations are looking for the selection of the best people available, the so called 'talents' (Derr, 1987; Hacker, 2001; Byham, Smith & Matthew, 2002). However, talent management (i.e. selection, training and retention) is very difficult, because talents are rare and, thus, there is a strong competition among different organizations to attract and retain the best talents (e.g. Pfeffer, 2001). In the sport industry, the problem of talent management is relevant. In such a context, in fact, human resources strongly influence organizational performance (Wright, Smart & McMahan, 1995). Thus, sport clubs are looking continuously for new talents. Nowadays, European football clubs, and Italian in particular, are engaged in a strong reflection about players' management policy. After Bosman ruling, Italian football clubs (like most European ones) have remarkably increased their expenditures in buying players and in players' salaries. As a result, most European football clubs are struggling under severe financial strains (Deloitte, 2010). According to these warning economic results and recent UEFA normative pressures (i.e. financial fair play), Italian football clubs are becoming more aware of the need in changing players' management policy in order to improve their financial situation. In particular, they are trying to increase their ability in developing young players through their academies. This change is supposed to bring several advantages: for example, clubs could reduce their expenditures for the acquisition of new players or they could have players more motivated with a strong commitment to the club.

However, it is not easy to achieve these results, since, as

also pointed out by Slack (1997), the attraction and development of football talents presents its own problems and difficulties and requires adequate techniques, infrastructures and resources (both human and economic). In particular, the issue of evaluating and measuring a player's performance is increasing its relevance. Football clubs seem to be more aware of the importance of developing adequate methodologies and techniques, which could be able to evaluating different aspects of a player's performance (Montanari, Silvestri & Bof, 2008). In other terms, consistently to performance management indexes traditionally adopted in other organizational contexts, it seems to be a strong interest in developing indexes that are not just limited to on field performance (Bof & Venturini, 2009).

According to previous observation, this paper has two main research goals. The first aim of this study is to analyze the experience of Parma FC by adopting the case study methodology (Yin, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989). We chose to analyse this experience, because it could be considered, for European sport and football clubs, as relevant benchmark model in youth management and scouting policies. In order to evaluate the club's organizational model, we combined different data collection methods (interviews, document analysis, etc.) and analyzed the following interrelated aspects:

- Strategic goals
- Organizational structure and resources
- Performance measurement systems

The second goal of this paper is to propose some ideas that can stimulate the discussion about performance measurement. In particular, we will focus on performance measurement indexes that could be able to measure different aspects of a young player's performance, not just sport (on the field performance). The discussion will consider also evidences emerging from other national contexts (i.e. other European football clubs) and other sport contexts that adopt advanced performance evaluation systems (e.g. NBA, Italia League of volleyball).

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