Evaluation of the total quality management maturity of the Hellenic National Sport Federations using the EQFM model

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Abstract:

In a constantly changing world, performance improvement is high on the agenda of most organizations. The economic growth of the past century along with the technological progress and the new emerging trends have created new theories and practices for the profitability and the welfare of businesses, offering them a wealth of improvement models to utilize. The European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM), which is based on self-evaluation and requires commitment of all levels of the hierarchy, is a significant one of them. However, improvement and evaluation models are not widely spread in Greece and particularly in sport related entities. This study is an exploratory attempt to investigate the level of maturity of the Total Quality Management in Hellenic National Sports Federations (HNSF) using the EFQM model. Data for the present study was collected through a structured questionnaire from HNSF's Board members. The results showed that the HNSFs implement some of the management practices suggested by the EFQM; nevertheless, more effort is required in order for them to claim that EFQM is systematically implemented.

Key words: Total Quality Management (TQM), European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM), Hellenic National Sport Federation (HNSF).

Introduction

The theoretical framework of management is constantly evolving and service quality has been recognized as one the most important concepts for the consumer making the term quality part of our everyday vocabulary (Gronroos, 1990). Despite the fact that Greek sport is growing, the lack of strategic planning and qualified sport managers, along with the financial crisis and the budget cuts, have led Greek sport organizations in an unpleasant situation. These circumstances render the change of philosophy towards providing better services more than urgent.

Quality is an element that determines a service or a product, in conjunction with cost, time and reliability. According to Slack (2007) quality is the most important factor that allows an organization to stand out from its competitors and an element that potentially creates satisfied clients and generates revenue and reputation. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) suggest that quality is the alignment between clients' expectations for a product / service and their perception after having used it. Oakland (1989) sets quality as a factor for client satisfaction and McNealy (1993) underlines that quality should meet or overcome the clients' perceptions. Focus on quality secures a higher share of the market (Buzzell & Gale, 1987) and according to Anderson et al., (1997) and Gronroos (1990) increases profitability. Additionally, according to Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996), it increases customer loyalty through customer satisfaction.

The EFQM is a framework applicable to any industry and to any sector. It is a best practice, a transferable knowledge (Landesberg, 1999; Martin, 1998), towards enterprise excellence. Hence, the sectors that have tried to implement it vary from manufacturing and engineering, to healthcare and education (Hides et al., 2004). Most of the bibliography applies to the latter and within that long literature of EFQM in higher education, some researchers have tried to identify whether the TQM models are effective indeed in educational contexts (Biehl, 2000; Spanbauer, 1995; Weller, 2000). According to Lussier and Robert (2013) in the wider context 67% of the business related to the services industry use some kind of TQM. In general, it could be argued that the EFQM in sports is a relatively new trend. In Greece, a pioneer study conducted by Karastathis, Afthinos, Gargalianos, and Theodorakis (2014) evaluated the HNSFs using EFQM and came to the conclusion that some principles of management excellence already exist and are indeed applied in HNSFs but neither often nor systematically.

Material & methods

The present study is an exploratory attempt to evaluate the total quality management maturity of the

HNSFs using the EFQM model. The sample constituted of HNSFs' Board Members. Thirty-four (n=34) out of 49 Federations were selected through the convenient sampling method. Questionnaires were sent to all Board Members (total 419 according to their Organizational Chart on October 2015), of whom 86 responded and considered valid. A primary email regarding the survey was sent to the participants, where the questionnaire was attached. A second email (reminder) followed one week later. In some cases, the questionnaire was printed out and distributed during a board meeting. In these cases, with the permission of the HNSFs, one person of the research team visited the Federation and delivered / collected the questionnaires.

Results

The results showed that 84.5% of the participants were male and 15.5% were female. Out of a valid sample of 78 a significant number of participants (23.3%) stated that they hold (at least) a M.Sc. or a Ph.D. title. Not one of them (0%) left school before finishing the lower secondary education (gymnasium, in Greek), the obligatory level as it is defined by the Greek legislation. Another important outcome was that almost three out of four (74,4%) have had at least a higher education diploma (obviously those having a M.Sc. and a Ph.D. are included). Additionally, regarding the board members' experience in the HNSF, the average number of years was nine. The results showed a high standard deviation of 8,06.

To estimate the reliability of the instrument Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used (Table 1). The results indicated that the instrument had high level of reliability (α = over 0,75 when calculated in all items and when calculated in standardized items).

Table 1. Cronbach α

Rank	EFQM criteria	α
1	Leadership	,782
2	Human Resources	,813
3	Policy and Strategy	,878
4	Partnerships - Resources	,888
5	Processes	,888
6	Society	,808
7	Key performance (total)	,818
7a	Key performance (SPT)	,776
7b	Key performance (FIN)	,812

Regarding enablers and results of EFQM: In the following tables the percentages are presented, classified accordingly as "enablers" and "results": The highest score was achieved by Processes (4,43/5) and Leadership (4,40/5), followed by Policy and Strategy (4,16/5). Human Resources and Partnership – Resources score below 4 but both of them over 3,9 points, with 3,98 and 3,93/5 accordingly. All enablers appear a Standard Deviation over 0,818, which indicate that there is not a big diaspora of the responses (Table 2).

Table 2. Enabler's table

Rank	EFQM criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Leadership	4,40	0,818
2	Human Resources	3,98	0,962
3	Policy and Strategy	4,16	0,912
4	Partnerships & Resources	3,93	0,980
5	Processes	4,43	0,845

Results: Society scored 3,63/5 and the total Key Performance score was 4,03/5. The lowest mean score was indicated for Key Performance (Sport) 3,6/5, whereas the highest was indicated for Key Performance (Finance) 4,46/5. The standard deviation scores were high, apart for the Key Performance score which was 0,782 points (Table 3).

Table 3. Result's table

Rank	EFQM criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	Society	3,63	0,853
7	Key performance (total)	4,03	0,810
7a	Key performance (element A - SPT)	3,60	0,782
7b	Key performance (element B - FIN)	4,46	0,839

One of the special characteristics of EFQM is the scaling. All criteria do not weight the same. As presented in table 4, the highest percentage (when examined in percentage out of 100) was achieved by the

Processes criterion (88,6%), closely followed by Leadership (88%), while Policy and Strategy scored 83,2%. Below the line of 80% scored Human Resources (79,6%) and Partnerships – Resources (78,6%), whereas the lowest score was achieved by Society (70,9%).

Table 4. Scaling scores

Rank	EFQM criteria	Mean	Criterion Weight	Points	%
1	Leadership	4,40	10% = 100	88/100	88,0%
2	Human Resources	3,98	9% = 90	71,64/90	79,6%
3	Policy and Strategy	4,16	8% = 80	66,56/80	83,2%
4	Partnerships - Resources	3,93	9% = 90	70,74/90	78,6%
5	Processes	4,43	14% = 140	124,04/140	88,6%
6	Society	3,63	6%=60	42,56/60	70,9%
7	Key performance (total)	4,03	15%=150	120,90/150	80,6%

When grouping enablers and results together, a generic view of the scoring is presented. The overall scoring of Enablers was 420,98/500. For the two results included in this study the score was 163,46 points (maximum points= 210). If that score is scaled from 210 to 500, then the 163,46 points will change to 389,1 points, out of 500. That is not as high as the Enabler's score, nevertheless is quite high.

Discussion

Due to a number of reasons, mainly related to cultural characteristics, the sports industry is considered worldwide to be male dominated in terms of holders of top management positions (Hoerber & Shaw, 2003). Sport organizations are recognized as institutions that are not eager to adopt gender equity policies and despite the efforts made to increase diversity; women are still facing difficulties when they apply for top managerial positions (Pai & Vaidya, 2009). Despite the big steps that have been taken during the last years in Greece towards gender equality, it is not a surprise that the vast majority of the decision makers in sports federations are male (84.6%). There is no evidence that correlates the EFQM maturity levels of an organization with the percentage of female representation at the boarding members, yet it was worthy to incorporate an item in the instrument as equal gender representation is an indicator of modernized entities of the developed world compared to others coming from the developing or the third world.

Sports decision makers in Greece seem to be well educated. Almost one out of four (23.3%) of the respondents has a higher education degree (Master or Doctorate). This is very important for the future of the sports in the country as educated people are more likely to implement scientific methods in the managerial context. Regarding the scope of the current research, the above mentioned result is an indicative factor that puts the maturity of the HNSFs in a slightly higher scale. It is the prerequisite, the fundamental element not only for the implementation of best practices and managerial methods, but also for acting as pioneers that will spread the message to other related sport entities. This will result in a general upscale of the sports industry and in a well-established competition of progress. However, a statistic research on the education levels of the boarding members and their perceptions on education would be very interesting and would add more value.

Regarding the experience of the decision makers, there are two ways to approach the issue: a) the more experienced they are, the more productive they can be and b) new people bring fresh ideas and work with more enthusiasm. The mean of nine years (M=9) with a standard deviation of eight clearly indicates that HNSF's board members are well experienced people, who know the processes and the environment of sport rather well. This answers the scope of the current research as well, given that the decision makers are members who know how to manage sport entities. Whether they are sports management literate or not is a different question¹, nevertheless they most probably have already obtained the experience required that will add points to the maturity level of the HNSFs to implement a TQM best practice such as EFQM.

Regarding all the seven examined criteria means, all of them marked scores over 3,6 (I would rather agree / I agree), meaning that the board members' perspective of the way the HNSFs are operating (in a broader sense), quite match the EFQM's guidelines.

The HNSFs achieved a high score in both parts of the questionnaire (enablers - results). However, the present essay examines two out of the four criteria and further information is needed in order to be able to generalize in a greater scale. For the results' criteria the result was 164/210, which means around 75%. It is highly important for both the enablers and the results to mark high scores as this is another indication that the entity is running according to the EFQM standards not only when it comes to internal processes but regarding the relations with the external clients too (links with society, sport results, etc).

However, a previous research (Van der Wiele et al., 1995) conducted in six European countries showed

¹ The interdisciplinarity as well as the need of an approach by a specialized personnel is well explained at (Gargalianos, Asimakopoulos, Chelladurai & Toohey, 2015) and (Gargalianos, Toohey & Stotlar, 2015). The Olympic Games and in general mega events are the most appropriate example for understanding the complexing aspects of the sports product and that the sports manager has to be a well experienced and educated professional.

that there are five important reasons for the application of an assessment's program: a) searching sectors for improvement, b) creation of TQM culture, c) guidance of improvement programs, d) renewal of motive for the application of the program and e) overall management of the company. As before mentioned, this research is the second out of six steps towards "The EFQM" journey. It is a structured self-evaluation, necessary in order to proceed to the "EFQM Quick check" and check the most technocratic concepts such as a strategic plan, customer surveys or the process management.

An overall estimation indicates that the HNSFs score quite high at the enabler's scale ($M = 4,18/5$), which is translated in 418/500 in the EFQM practice. Analyzing one by one the scores of the enablers, the highest score was the Processes (88,6%), meaning the adding of value to various inputs for the best output. In this case the output could be a National Championship or Cup, a new sportswear / equipment collection or even a sports educational program. The second highest score was Leadership (88%), indicating that the HNSFs do have vision, mission and people to operate in an inspirational way for the organization. The lowest score among the enablers was Partnerships and Resources. Despite being the lowest among the enablers, it is still quite high (78,6%), not causing any harm in the harmonious run of the federation. It should be mentioned though that this could be a great opportunity for the federations to focus on that and create more fruitful partnerships that would have multiple benefits. It should be set towards the direction of business extroversion and alignment with the new global trends in sport. As before mentioned the enablers cover what an organization does and how it does it. In other words, the high scores at this part indicate that the HNSF's boarding members have a very positive perception for the way the federations are managed and the actions they take internally and externally. The following step is the interpretation of the results that will show whether what is done properly has the expected outcome too, according to the perceptions of the boarding members.

Regarding the collective results in percentages, the most popular scale out of the five was the "I Agree", gathering 33,8% of the answers. The status means that no further action is required and that according to the self-evaluation conducted, the participants believe that the organization is already strong on those points. The second most popular was the scale "Rather agree" meaning that action is already taken, the plans are already up and running, nevertheless more detailed or careful implementation is needed. The neutral response "Neither agree – nor disagree" gathered 15,35% meaning that few actions are already taken but more emphasis on method and application is needed. The "negative" responses "Rather disagree" and "Disagree" counted only 5,12%. It seems that there is a positive perception among the participants on the way the HNSFs are managed. Despite that the two positive options (4 and 5) counted collectively 66,6% the same time options that have a call for change (options 1 to 4) gathered together 53,27 %. In other words, two out of three participants have a positive view towards the management style and the direction the federations head to but still one out of two believes that there is still room for change and self-evaluation. As before mentioned the results section refers to the outcomes of all the action taken by the federations; The results cover what the federation achieves. There could be a positive outcome from the enablers and a less positive (or negative) for the results. Nevertheless, the outcome is a harmonious positive perception for both enablers and results. There always space for improvement but the achieved score permits the organizations to proceed to the next practice of the "journey to excellence" as designed by EFQM. Nevertheless, it is worthy to mention that the response rate could be higher. One out of five (20,5%) of the Boarding Members participated in the research. Despite this is a firm base for a first evaluation providing scientific results of the HNSFs profile and a solid background along with Karastathis' research (2014) the Board Members could be more willing to participate to such initiatives that will take the management processes one step further. The results of the present research are in alignment with Karastathis, Afthinos, Gargalianos, and Theodorakis (2014), indicating that the HNSFs indeed implement some management processes but neither often nor systematically. Definitely more research and a wider sample is needed in order to extract individual results for all factors, values and perceptions and understand the current management style.

There is no doubt that during the past 30 years Greek sports has been modernized and aligned with the international standards. It all started with the unsuccessful attempt to host the 1996 Olympic Games and continued more intensively when the country was awarded the 2004 edition. Luckily and maybe because of their public character, HNSFs tend to have well educated personnel in comparison with other sports entities (i.e., professional soccer clubs). Sadly, though, the Greek sports industry is not as developed as it could be. Greek sports need well educated decision makers and stakeholders that can deeply understand the special needs of the sports business and market. Further and deeper research would showcase the strengths and weaknesses of the HNSFs and the administration of Greek sports in general. That way, it will assist transforming itself from a traditional centralized style of management in a modern styled governed business. In a constantly changing world and in a high demands competitive environment sports, HNSFs are in a particular need to recognize the new conditions and adopt best management practices along with self-evaluation.

Conclusions

Despite the movements towards the direction of equal representation on a global scale HNSFs are still male-dominated. HNSFs' board members appear well educated. This fact should make them value higher the need for scientific data and moreover, the need of lifelong education for themselves and the HNSF's employees in general. Furthermore, the HNSFs achieved high scores in the "enablers" section, meaning that they believe

that they already have what is required to develop and implement their strategy. Finally, the HNSFs achieved average-high scores in the “results” section, meaning they are in good track with the outcome of their efforts but, more focus is needed. The HNSFs achieved an overall high score in both “enablers” and “results” sections indicating that they are in good track at the self-evaluation model.

Undoubtedly, all organizations have to use some kind of management practice. In a constantly changing globalized environment this is the only way to maintain part of the market. Future research might focus more on the demographics of the boarding members, their education, their perspectives towards sport and more importantly whether they have sports related studies allowing them to have a deeper understanding of the special elements of the sports product and the sports organizations. Equally important, future research should focus on all management levels of the HNSFs and maybe compare the difference in management styles in relation to the size, the gross annual income and the support the Federations receive from the government. Moreover, it would be very interesting to investigate the influence of the financial crisis -that definitely affected the income of all federations and evaluate to what extent it forced them to seek for new ways for becoming self-sufficient.

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