
**The Relationship between Human Resource Empowerment and Organizational
Performance in Football Clubs**

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which empowerment is applied to Greek professional football clubs, and the relationship between empowerment and organizational performance. Empowerment, on the one hand, has been described as a means to enable employees to make decisions and accomplish their work in meaningful ways, and on the other hand, as a personal phenomenon where individuals take responsibility for their own actions. For analytical purposes the participatory football clubs were divided into two groups based on their budget: (a) wealthy football clubs, and (b) less wealthy football clubs. The results of the study indicated that empowerment is being used similarly in wealthy football clubs as well as in less wealthy football clubs. The basic difference between them was in the managerial styles they used. In particular, in less wealthy football clubs there was a strong and positive relationship between average of revenues in five years and two key factors of empowerment such as: the “management information /communication system skills” and the “total of all managerial functions”. Limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research are presented.

Keywords: human resource empowerment, organizational performance, professional football clubs

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Introduction

Nowadays sport organizations develop and implement strategies in a globalized economic, social and technological environment. The managers of sport organizations all over the world must respond effectively to the changes that take place in their political, social, economic, competitive, technological and legislative environments. Many authors maintain 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 (Lipiec, 2001; Marken, 2000; Morton, 1996; Slack, 1997; Tosi, Rizzo, & Carroll, 1986). Because of that, human resource 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 important capital, which should be managed effectively in order to constitute a source of competitive advantage for the organization (Bowen & Lawler, 1992).

Empowerment refers to a change strategy with the objective of improving both the individual's and the organization's ability to act and to operate more effectively in an extremely competitive environment. Moreover, empowerment has been defined as helping employees take personal ownership of their jobs (Byham & Cox, 1988), as well as the passing of decision making and responsibility from managers to employees. In short, it is the process of encouraging and rewarding employee initiative and imagination. A basic prerequisite is the fact that the members of the organization are willing and capable of assuming more power, make better decisions and effectively perform them.

In the literature as well as in practice, 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). Across the private, public, and voluntary sectors, empowering staff is widely supported as a means to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations (Leslie, Holzhalb, & Holland, 1998). The literature also sets benefits regarding the application of empowerment. Organizational benefits include strategic guidance from the level of the work unit and strategic implementation at the level of the work unit, increased work unit

efficiency and increased customer focus at the line level (Klagge, 1998). Moreover, organizational implementation includes increased emphasis on problem solving and prevention as well as increased respect and trust among work units (Klagge, 1998). Lastly, improved cross-functional coordination is also an important organizational benefit (Ransom, 1994).

Regarding employee benefits from empowerment the literature includes improved motivation (Kappelman & Prybutok, 1995) and increased personal strengths (Dodd & Gutierrez, 1990). Also, added accountability (Shearer & Fagin, 1994) and increased personal power and sense of self efficacy (Dodd & Gutierrez, 1990). Lastly, according to Crawford (1995), increased abilities to achieve full personal potential are also included in the employee benefits from empowerment.

Empowerment is a topic that appears frequently in human resource, business, and management literature but infrequently in sport management literature. Managerial interest in employee empowerment in the sport organizations has generally been associated with the concern to gain competitive advantage through improvements in organizational performance. Empirical research on organizational performance has been conducted within the services sectors in various countries. However, research regarding empowerment in the sport sector is still limited.

Literature Review

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).

Blitzer, Petersen, & Rogers (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 & Williams, 1995).

Human resource development through empowering employees and establishing appropriate compensation and recognition systems have positively affected 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, & 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.

Roth and Jackson (1995) explored the strategic determinants of service quality in the banking industry in the USA. Their empirical model was tested using the 1991 Survey of Retail Banking Strategy and Performance. The survey exemplifies a rigorous longitudinal research approach. This study showed that establishing a motivated, customer-oriented management philosophy and practice will result in favorable levels of internal service quality where investment in people is critical to establish success. The researchers proposed that possessing organizational knowledge and skills is a prerequisite for employees in order to deliver service quality. High levels of employee morale and satisfaction were found to depend on the empowerment and involvement of employees. The study supported the idea that satisfied workers provide a higher level of service quality.

Furthermore, research has suggested that empowerment practices (employee autonomy, access to information and resources and involvement practices) when simultaneously implemented in a holistic and planned manner have a positive effect on employee well being (job satisfaction and employee morale), productivity, performance and service quality in the banking sector in Australia (Geralis & Terziovski, 2003).

Ashness and Lashley (1995) examined employee empowerment (focused on the managerial intentions of empowerment) in Harvester Restaurants. The results pointed out that overall organizational performance has improved. There has 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.

In their study of 279 hotel units, Hartline and Ferrell (1996) found that empowerment, under the appropriate conditions, increased job satisfaction and service quality. It seems logical and makes instinctive sense that allowing customer-contact employees to use their discretion in serving customers could have many positive influences on their responses and the service encounter. From an employee's perspective, feelings of empowerment should provide employees with the sense of control that is needed to make the necessary changes for service quality improvements.

Furthermore, Littrell (2003) in his case study, "employee empowerment in China" examined the attitudes toward employee empowerment by staff and management in a group of hotels in China, where the general opinion of management theorists was that empowerment is not a workable concept. However, results of the study indicated a positive attitude toward employee empowerment on the part of supervisor-level employees, with a lower, but still positive opinion of the practice exhibited by higher-level managers. More than half of the respondents indicated that they were empowered in their ability to do their work as they see fit, and Chinese managers believed that the ideal leader should be more tolerant of freedom.

Thomas (2001) examined the perceptions and symbolic meanings constructed by African American sports managers and how they make use of power and empowerment, via a phenomenological in-depth interview study. Five themes came into surface: (a) The participants' perceptions of power (The Need for the Control of the Human and Natural Resources), (b) The participants' perceptions of empowerment (Sharing Power: Providing Leadership Opportunities through Decision-making), (c) The participants' perception of the influence of race (Acknowledging Race and the Actions Needed to

Break the Color Barriers), (d) The participants' perception of the sports management setting (Making Your Way in a Hostile Environment), and (e) The steps to move from dialogue to implementation (Getting It Done: Moving from Strategies to Implementation). It was shown that although African Americans male sports managers have varying perceptions of the social construct of power, the psychological construct of empowerment, and the influence of race they agree on the use of power and empowerment as a vital management vehicle for leadership development.

Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore (2000), in their research explored the multiple realities of women's work experiences in coaching and athletic management positions. Eleven women who had previously coached or directed women's athletics programs were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. The work experiences showed what problems women met with at work but also the way organizations can be empowered and the role empowered women can play. It is believed that the individual search for empowerment should be diverse and at the same time not forget that if we are to improve the work environment for women important and systemic changes should be made. Furthermore, Freysinger and Bedini (1994) proposed that educators in leisure and recreation studies ought to promote empowerment in the classroom, by using ways to facilitate the empowerment of students, including biological, psychological, and sociocultural processes of empowerment as related to race, gender, and disability.

The purpose of this study was to examine: (a) the extent to which employee empowerment is applied to Greek professional football clubs, and (b) the relationship between that empowerment and organizational performance (revenues, profit/loss, and classification of football club). In particular the research questions addressed by this research are:

1. To what extent is human resource empowerment used in Greek professional football clubs?
2. Is there a relationship between the key factors of empowerment and performance of less wealthy Greek professional football clubs?
3. Is there a relationship between the key factors of empowerment and performance of wealthy Greek professional football clubs?

Significance of the study

Sport organizations are constantly changing or are submitted to constant changes (Slack, 1997) by virtue of the rapid growth in emerging markets, new standards

of global competition (Aghazadeh, 1999), changes in the economic climate, increase in international competition, increase in collective bargaining, greater levels of automation and the demand for more specialist personnel (Gibb, 2000b; Slack, 1997). The pressures for change have led sport organizations to change their attitude towards Human Resources Management. By effectively managing their human resources, organizations can foster the type of employee behavior that contributes to the success of their competitive strategy (Huang, 2001). Additionally, a human Resources Management strategy such as empowerment provides a means by which organizations can set forward their competitiveness, promote managerial efficiency (Wright, McMahan, McCormick & Sherman, 1998), and remain competitive in the marketplace. According to Ferris, Hochwarter, Buckley, Harrell-Cook, and Frink (1999), an issue that is not answered yet is the extent to which the various practices in HRM systems have differential impacts on organizational effectiveness, including except for financial performance, success in applying organizational strategy and achievement of strategic goals. This paper is useful in extending the concept of empowerment to Greek football sector. The paper will be useful in helping sport directors to their further understanding of the empowerment process in their respective sport organizations. More specifically, the present study of empowerment process in Greek Professional football clubs provided information concerning the extent of the empowerment process currently being used in these sport organizations, and the relationships between the extent of empowerment used by Greek football clubs and the club's performance. It is the first study worldwide which relates the concept of empowerment with organizational performance in the area of professional sports.

Methodology

Sample

The original sampling frame consisted of 30 managerial and technical directors of 10 Greek professional football clubs, which had a continuous attendance in the first division (Greek football Super League) during the last five years (from 2003 to 2007). Responses were received from 27 managerial and technical directors of 9 Greek professional football clubs with a 90% response rate. According to the findings of this research, 25.9% of the participants were females and 74.1% were males with a mean age of 43.4; the educational level of the participants was grouped into 3 categories: 14.8% had elementary/high school education 51.9% had university level education and

33.3% had post-graduate level education. More than seventy four percent (74.1%) were managerial directors and 25.9% were technical directors. All had full-time working experience.

Questionnaire

The empowerment construct, consisted of 30 questions (developed by Vogt & Murrell, 1990), and demographic characteristics. This particular part provided information on how managerial and technical directors assess themselves in relation to the empowerment. The survey instrument included six units based on the following six key factors of empowerment: (a) "Management – information / communication system skills", (b) "Decision-making and action-taking skills", (c) "Project-planning, organizing, and system-integration skills", (d) "System-evaluation and internal-control skills", (e) "Leadership, motivation, and reward-systems skills", and (f) "Selection, placement, and development of people skills". The questions were answered using a five point Scale. Each point of the scale represented different managerial styles (deriving from the three basic managerial styles, which are the "totally empowering style" of management, the "empowering and less controlling style" of management, and the "controlling style" of management) and depicted the respondent's behaviour and actions. In the first case ("totally empowering style" of management) the manager has a managerial style that reflects the manager who creates and shares power. In the second case ("empowering and less controlling style" of management) the manager is more empowering than controlling, and in the third case ("controlling style" of management), the manager is concerned with control or seldom shares, creates or empowers subordinates. The reliability of the survey instrument was assessed through Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha ($\alpha = .84$). The organizational performance indicators consisted of items indicative of performance outcomes of Greek professional football clubs during the last five years (from 2003 to 2007). The performance indicators included: (a) average of revenues in the previous 5 years, (b) average of profit/loss in the previous 5 years and (c) average of classification of professional football clubs within the Greek football Super League in the previous 5 years. The first two performance indicators concentrated on financial measures based on the clubs' annual reports, while the third was an actual performance measure which was easily obtainable through the Greek Football Federation statistics and clubs' annual reports. Measures were adapted from the literature (Brown, 2005; Gerrard, 2005; Smart & Wolfe, 2000).

Process

The data collection was accomplished through structured interviews. The sequence of events realized as follows: managerial and technical directors of the foresaid football clubs were informed of the research and their consent was requested in order to realise the structured interviews. After consent was given, appointments were scheduled at specific dates with each of the directors of the professional football clubs. Dates were rescheduled whenever requested due to heavy workload. The structured interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes and clarifications were given to subjects when asked for. Additionally, another 60 minutes were required with each interviewee for completion of the organizational performance construct items. This was either done at the same date as the structured interview, or at a separately arranged date. That was convenient for the interviewee to complete the data requested.

Research Design

The study used a quantitative design. The analysis was exploratory in nature and examined whether there is a relationship between the key factors of human resource empowerment and the performance of professional football clubs, the strength and the direction of this relationship.

Data Analysis

For analytical purposes, the participants (Greek professional football clubs) were divided into two groups based on their reported budget: (a) wealthy football clubs (n=3), and (b) less wealthy football clubs (n=6) shown in Table 1. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations.

Table 1. Financial Criteria for Dividing Football Clubs.

Budget	N	Amount of budget in €
Wealthy football clubs	3	≥ 7,500,000
Less Wealthy football clubs	6	≤ 7,499,000

Results

Data of the managerial and technical directors' responses were analyzed to gather information specific to the extent to which empowerment is applied to wealthy Greek professional football clubs. From the analysis it is shown that the managerial and

technical directors used 100% “more empowering style and less controlling” in the key factor “Project-planning, organizing, and system-integration skills”. Referring to all managerial functions (the six key factors mentioned above) results indicated that 66.7% of the managerial and technical directors used “more empowering style and less controlling” and 33.3% “controlling style”. Similarly, for each one of the rest key factors the results pointed out that the managerial and technical directors used 66.7% “more empowering style and less controlling”, and 33.3% “controlling style”. Finally, it was shown that the “totally empowering style” of management was not used by managerial and technical directors of wealthy football clubs (Figure 1).

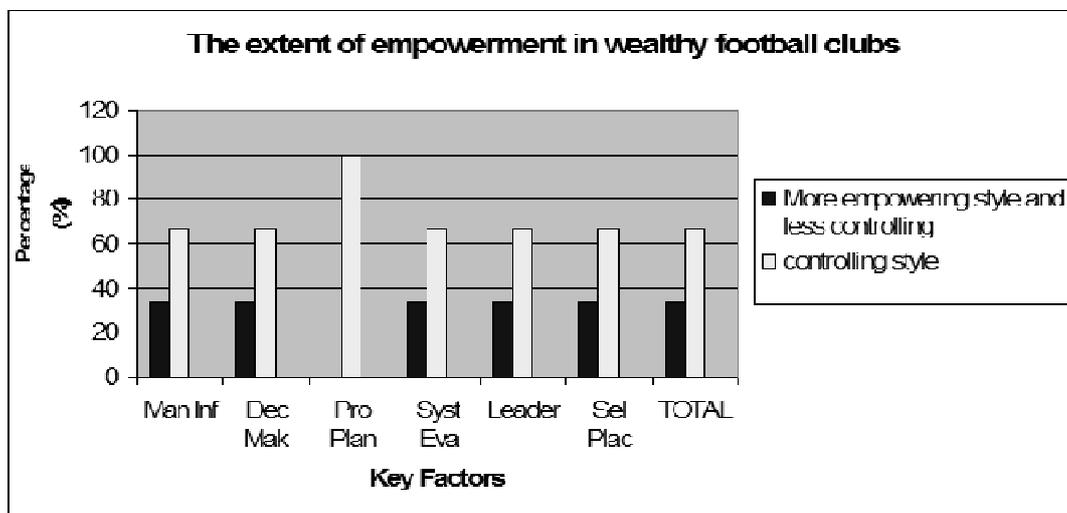


Figure 1. The extent of empowerment in wealthy football clubs.

From the analysis it is shown that the managerial and technical directors of less wealthy football clubs used 66.7% “more empowering style and less controlling”, whereas 16.7% used “totally empowering style” and “controlling style” in the key factor “System-evaluation and internal-control skills”. Furthermore, 50% used “more empowering style and less controlling”, 16.7% “totally empowering style” and 33.3% “controlling style” in the key factor “Management–information /communication system skills”. Referring to all managerial functions (the six key factors mentioned above) results indicated that 16.7% of them used “more empowering style and less controlling”, 33.3% “totally empowering style”, and 50% “controlling style” (Figure 2).

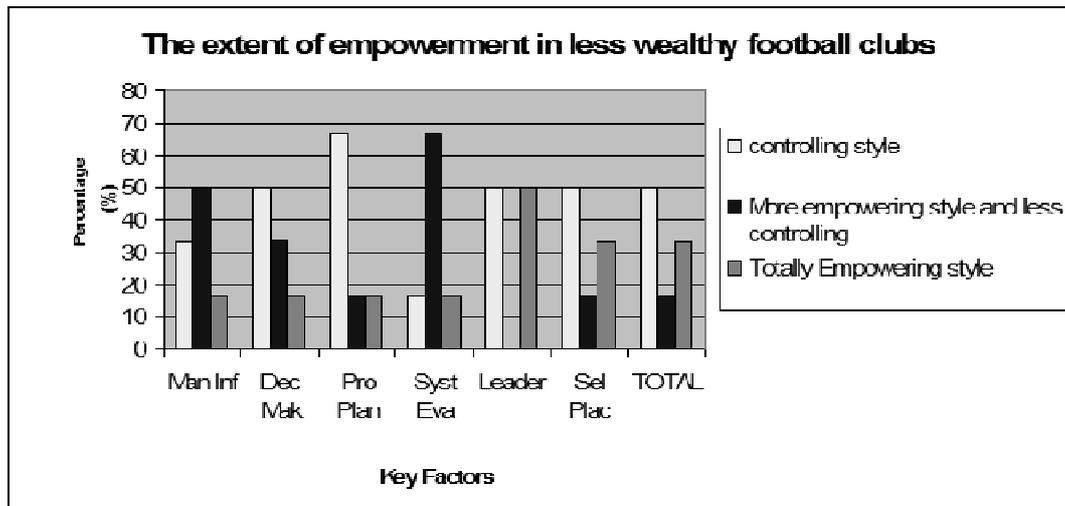


Figure 2. The extent of empowerment in less wealthy football clubs.

In wealthy football clubs the analysis indicated that there were no significant relationships between the key factors of empowerment and the three performance indicators which were: the average of revenues in five years, the average of profit/loss in five years, and the average classification of professional football clubs in five years (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations between key factors of empowerment and performance indicators in wealthy football clubs.

	Average of Revenues in 5 years	Average of Profit/Loss in 5 years	Average classification of football clubs in 5 years
Management-information/communication system skills	.358	-.080	-.170
Decision-making and action-taking skills	-.947	.715	.866
Project-planning, organizing, and system-integration skills	-.715	.343	.566
System-evaluation and internal-control skills	.572	-.870	-.721
Leadership, motivation, and reward-systems skills	-.917	.655	.822

Selection, placement, and development of people skills	.659	-.919	-.792
Total of all Managerial functions	-.712	.339	.531

In less wealthy football clubs the analysis indicated that there was a strong and positive relationship between average of revenues in five years and two key factors of empowerment such as: the “Management information /communication system skills” with a correlation of $r = .970$, ($p=.001$) and the “Total of all managerial functions” with a correlation of $r = .845$, ($p=.034$). There were no significant relationships found between the key factors of empowerment and the other two performance indicators which were: the average of profit/loss in five years and the average classification of professional football clubs in five years (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations between key factors of empowerment and performance indicators in less wealthy football clubs.

	Average of Revenues in 5 years	Average of Profit/Loss in 5 years	Average classification of football clubs in 5 years
Management–information/communication system skills	.970**	-.696	-.646
Decision-making and action-taking skills	.811	-.381	-.384
Project-planning, organizing, and system-integration skills	.758	-.053	-.113
System-evaluation and internal-control skills	.537	.132	-.524
Leadership, motivation, and reward-systems skills	.666	-.457	-.128
Selection, placement, and development of people skills	.616	-.242	-.113
Total of all Managerial functions	.845*	-.292	-.339

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study suggested that empowerment is being used similarly in wealthy football clubs as well as in less wealthy ones. The basic difference between them can be found in the managerial styles they use (as previously mentioned the managerial styles define and measure the concept of empowerment applied in organizations). In wealthy football clubs, directors used “more empowering and less controlling style” of management and “controlling style” of management, while in less wealthy football clubs directors used not only “more empowering and less controlling style” of management and “controlling style” of management, but also “totally empowering style” of management.

In less wealthy football clubs, the implementation of the “totally empowering style” of management means that the directors were sharing “sensitive” information relative to financial, organizational, and strategic issues, (key factor “Management – information /communication system skills”) which constitute an important issue in understanding the challenges that the organization faces in today’s turbulent environment (Vogt & Murrell, 1990).

In relation to the key factor “Decision - making and action-taking skills” the directors of less wealthy football clubs play a facilitative role, ensuring that decisions are made accurately and carried out effectively (Vogt & Murrell, 1990; Psoinos, Kern, & Smithson, 2000). The “totally empowering style” includes suggestions and ideas from employees, effective participation with sense of “ownership” and finally, establishing trust which in turn, ensures organizational commitment (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Bridges, 1994; Burdett, 1991; D’Annunzio-Green & Macandrew, 1999; Klagge, 1998; Lawler, Mohram, & Ledford, 1992; Psoinos et al., 2000; Randolph, 1995). Committed individuals usually contribute their expertise, often working together as teams to produce their best work towards their own development and the integrity and growth of the organization (Cook, 1994).

Regarding the key factor “Project-planning, organizing, and system-integration skills”, in less wealthy football clubs, the strategic plans were established in a collaborative and participative process, which provides subordinates opportunities to influence the system and redefine the general organization goals. The empowering directors served as facilitators, helping to coordinate the workflow of the responsible individuals and teams (Cook, 1994).

Concerning the key factor “System-evaluation and internal-control skills”, in less wealthy football clubs, the directors have the role of evaluator and counsellor to help individuals evaluate themselves. They assess the unit, division, or the club as a whole, seeking out excellence to praise, noticing previously unnoticed good deeds, and offering appreciation to those who are working hard for the common cause (Vogt & Murrell, 1990).

With reference to the key factor “Leadership, motivation, and reward-systems skills” the directors in less wealthy football clubs create a day to day motivational climate of the club in two categories: (a) they ensure safe, healthy, and fairly compensated conditions of employment, and (b) they assist and support the team work (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Bridges, 1994; Lawler et al., 1992; Vogt & Murrell, 1990). Like a good coach, the directors ensure that the team is playing on a level field with fair rules and the right equipment. Empowered teams produce their own motivation and are very different from participative teams, quality circles, or semi-autonomous teams. They recommend ideas, make decisions, implement them, and are held accountable (Cook, 1994).

Finally in the key factor “Selection, placement, and development of people skills”, the directors in less wealthy football clubs spend considerable time to reflect on how well they helped develop the individual’s, teams’ and club’s abilities to work effectively. They support and encourage the growth capacity of individuals. They use intrinsic incentives to encourage all the members of the club to maintain a developmental perspective. The developmental goals of individuals and the club as a whole are reviewed, evaluated and either affirmed or redesigned (Cook, 1994; Vogt & Murrell, 1990).

These findings suggest that directors in less wealthy football clubs are increasingly aware of new management approaches such as team working, devolved management, performance appraisals, etc. According to Bacon, Ackers, and Coates (1996), innovative human resource practices are no longer restricted to large corporations, since small businesses (such as football clubs) are in many ways the ideal site for the development of human resource management because of the direct communication, flatter hierarchy, greater flexibility and clearer impact of each employee on organizational performance.

On the contrary, it was shown that the “totally empowering style” of management was not used by managerial and technical directors of wealthy football clubs. It seems that they used a more formal/controlling style of management. More specifically, they depended on extrinsic incentives like pay or punishment, made lone decisions regarding

what team members should do and how they should do it. They also set the desired achievement standards and a working plan of action without the input of team members, and finally they focused on providing specific guidance and establishing work schedules and rules. Moreover, it seems that the directors of wealthy football clubs have more explicit and impersonal rules and procedures associated with all managerial functions (decision making process, evaluative systems, planning process, and developmental plans), while they are more concerned with strategic planning, business formalisation and control, and human resource exploitation.

The results also supported that empowerment had a strong and positive relationship on performance of less wealthy football clubs. More specifically, two key factors of empowerment (the "Management - information /communication system skills" and the "Total of all managerial functions") had a strong and positive relationship with average revenues of less wealthy football clubs. This result is consistent with previous studies on empowerment and organizational performance, in services sectors (Ashness & Lashley, 1995; Geralis & Terziovski, 2003), and shows that the level of empowering style which technical and managerial directors exercised in less wealthy football clubs is related to the club performance. However, the findings of the present study revealed that empowerment had no significant relationship with performance of wealthy football clubs.

Almost all of the Greek professional football clubs which belong to the first division (Super League) during the last five years (from 2003 to 2007) participated in this study (90% of the clubs participated and thus we can generalize our result for this particular division). Furthermore, studies should seek to include other divisions of the Greek football as well as other professional federations such as basketball and volleyball federations. Researchers may also examine amateur sport federations and ascertain the effects of empowerment on their performance. Areas of further research could also include measuring the impact of empowerment on the satisfaction and loyalty of spectators.

The present findings add credence to the argument that investment in the human capital is a particularly important factor to achieve competitive advantage (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Considering that empowerment plays a vital role in ensuring that football clubs will survive and prosper, the directors of wealthy football clubs should move towards "totally empowering style", of management. This could happen by developing an empowering culture based on principals such as: (a) collaborative process of decision making, (b) evaluative systems, which build on the

process of “valuing” and not of “criticizing”, c) participative planning process, d) reward systems which encourage teamwork and cooperation e) developmental plans that emphasize career goals but also set out the training, experience, and growth in skills needed to progress in the organization (Vogt & Murrell, 1990).

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