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Designing Strategic Programs of Handball Clubs for the Central Euphrates City of Iraq

Hasan Hadi Hashim¹ ✉ Farzam Farzan² ✉ Saeid Tabesh³ ✉

Mazandaran University / Faculty of Physical Education and Sports Sciences^{1,2,3}

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Abstract

the main goal of the current research is to design strategic plans for handball clubs in the Middle East. This qualitative research was conducted with a phenomenological approach. The research community includes: professors and members of specialized university faculty, presidents and vice presidents of sports organizations, managers, experts of Iraqi physical education and handball sports departments. The sampling method was purposeful and finally 20 people were selected from the mentioned society. The results of this research show that the integration and coordination between financial perspectives, customers, growth and learning, environment and society, internal processes and employee satisfaction, allows managers of Iraqi Euphrates handball clubs to respond to existing challenges and opportunities with a comprehensive and strategic approach. Paying attention to the needs and expectations of the fans, improving the quality of services and creating an innovative culture along with the effective management of financial and human resources leads to increasing loyalty, attracting investors and improving the overall performance of handball clubs in the Euphrates of Iraq. Also, this research emphasizes the importance of these dimensions in order to achieve sustainable and distinct successes in the competitive world of sports and invites managers to adopt comprehensive and integrated strategies.

1. Research Definition

1. Introduction and Importance of Research

Considering the concept of strategic management and the important role it can play in sports organizations, especially sports federations and sports trustees, in order to achieve goals, especially in providing health and well-being of people in society, the growth and spread of sports and professional promotion, we can understand the necessity of using it. (Čater & Pučko, 2010) this will not be realized unless planning becomes part of the culture of sports organizations and federations. Sports federations are responsible for promoting, improving the health and well-being of people in society, in fact, they act as the driving force of society in the process of health development, and in the light of having superior sports authority, they are in charge of this important task in the country (HEMMONSBEY & TICHAAWA, 2019)

According to their goals, missions and special functions, sports federations have found a special position in the realization of sports growth and promotion programs and at this point in time, on the one hand, due to population growth, increasing demand for service supply, increasing international competition and decreasing government financial support (Shehab et al., 2022). On the other hand, foresight and the necessity of strategic thinking in order to achieve long-term goals are discussed in these organizations (Ibrahim et al., 2022) In addition, sports organizations used purposeful management based on strategic planning to accomplish their missions and achieve their goals and missions so that they succeeded in achieving their goals and missions in championship sports and providing the necessary resources (Ahmed Ameen Altaee, 2023). In this field, (Avgerinou et al., 2017) have stated in their research that if sports managers want to create a competitive advantage in the complex business environment of sports and gain its benefits, they should force to achieve a strategic planning for the sports department through the analysis of various factors (internal and external) and to implement and evaluate it. (András & Havran, 2015) have shown in their research that many changes in international sports over the past 10–15 years have had a significant impact on the success of some clubs; Among these changes, we can mention income, balance of transfers and financial and sports successes. Also, in their research, (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010) considered achieving great success under the umbrella of long-term plans, taking into account all aspects of the organization and they believe that without having a vision, goals and long-term plans, sports organizations should not expect any success at different local, national and regional levels. In addition, (Kartakoullis et al., 2013) have also shown in their research that sports clubs need to manage strategic resources that are

systematically planned, implemented and evaluated. (Tjønndal, 2016) found in his research that sports organizations are adapted, renewed and developed through creative and new ideas. In other words, modern sport is formed and improved through strategy, strategic management and innovation.

The Middle Euphrates Province is a geographical region located south of Baghdad in the Euphrates River basin. It is considered the most fertile area of Iraq. The Middle Euphrates Province includes the governorates of Najaf, Karbala, Diwaniyah, Babil, and Muthanna. This region is one of the oldest areas where civilization emerged in the world, as it witnessed the rise of Sumerian city-states around 6000 BC. Its area is 98,870 square kilometers, and its population is approximately 8 million people.

In connection with the sports history of handball in Iraq, it should be acknowledged; The country of Iraq became a member of the International Handball Federation in 1976 and since the first Asian Games (1977–Kuwait), has had a continuous presence in sports competitions and events, the country of Iraq ranks 69th among the countries of the world and 9th among Asian countries. It should be kept in mind that the progress of sports at the macro level is dependent on the development of sports disciplines and requires attention to various dimensions that many factors at the macro and micro levels also affect its dissemination and promotion. Based on this government attitude, sports organizations cannot ignore their upstream plans and policies when formulating their long-term plans (Mourao, 2010). The country's sports policies include the structures and procedures of sports organizations, provincial sports plans and strategies, the talent search system, the level of development of educational sports, etc. in all provinces, which can be considered strategic development factors in championship sports (Hussein, 2022). Therefore, there are many conditions and fields that can affect the development of sports; But there is no detailed information in this field for the development of sports and different sports at the level of handball clubs in Iraq and on a smaller scale in Euphrates province. Also, in connection with the research conducted at macro and national levels, regional planning with the aim of developing and reducing disparities between sports fields is considered one of the main concerns of sports managers in developing countries. Considering that the goal of balanced and balanced development is to create the best conditions and facilities for the development of all regions of the country, in regional and provincial planning, it is very necessary to identify the development position of regions and provinces in Iraq in relation to each other. In order to develop

sports and physical education in the society, especially in handball, there is a need to accurately identify the current situation and provide appropriate strategies to improve it. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the internal and external factors of handball in the development of sports clubs in Wasit province by conducting scientific research, and using the opinions of experts, experts and specialists who are considered experts in the society, a strategic plan and a suitable model for its implementation will be presented. with the hope that the results obtained from it can be used and help to increase the productivity of handball clubs, improve the quality and quantity of handball and increase the desire and tendency of young people to play handball, Therefore, the main goal of this research is to design a strategic plan for handball clubs in Wasit province.

Statement of the Problem

Given the concept of strategic management and the significant role it can play in sports organizations, particularly in sports federations and sports authorities, in achieving objectives such as promoting public health and well-being, fostering the growth and spread of sports, and enhancing professionalism, its necessity becomes evident (Čater & Pučko, 2010) This, however, cannot be achieved unless planning becomes part of the organizational culture of sports federations. Sports federations are tasked with promoting and improving the health and well-being of society. In fact, they act as the driving force in the process of health development and, by leveraging superior sports authority, take command of this important mission at the national level (HEMMONSBEY & TICHAAWA, 2019)

(Karim & Al-Diwan, 2024) referenced Daft's statement on the concept of a large organization managed with administrative scientific thinking. They also cited Trevor Slack's statement, which defined a sports organization as one that operates within an administrative system theory, reflecting the extent to which it is engaged in sports management.

Sports federations play a foundational role in the development and advancement of various sports disciplines in clubs and youth centers. This highlights the significant effort invested in preparing these federations to succeed in their missions and achieve capable national teams representing the country in international sports forums. They also face challenges such as reduced government financial support. On the other hand, the necessity of foresight and strategic thinking to achieve long-term objectives in these organizations has become increasingly critical (Ibrahim et al., 2022)

Research objectives

- 1– Identifying the key performance indicators and long-term goals of the clubs of Handball in the Euphrates region.
- 2– Identifying the strategies of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region from the perspective of internal processes.
- 3– Identifying the strategies of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region from a financial perspective.
- 4– Identifying the strategies of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region from the perspective of the customer.
- 5– Identifying the strategies of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region from the perspective of employee satisfaction.
- 6– Identifying the strategies of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region from the perspective of the environment and society (communications).
- 7– Identifying the strategies of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region from the perspective of learning and growth.
- 8– Determining the strategic priorities of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region of Iraq.
- 9– Mapping the strategic roadmap of the Handball clubs in the Euphrates region based on the Balanced Scorecard (BSC).

Scope of the Research:

Spatially limited:

This research was conducted in terms of location at handball clubs in the Al-Furat Al-Awsat province in Iraq.

limited in time:

This research began in Bahman (January 2024) and was completed in Shahrivar (September 2024).

Thematic scope:

The subject of the current research was the design of a strategic program for the handball clubs of the Central Euphrates region.

Definition of terms and research terminology.

strategy:

Strategy or approach refers to comprehensive and forward-looking plans for interacting with the competitive environment, with the goal of optimizing the achievement of organizational objectives. This plan acts as a kind of organizational playbook, which, although it does not precisely define all future human, financial, and material needs, provides a framework for decision-making and offers information on how to compete with others, when and where to do so, and the related goals (Abdulrahman et al., 2020)

Strategic Plan:

Planning is the process of envisioning and visualizing a desired future, along with selecting the necessary tools or steps to achieve it. Strategic planning refers to choosing these tools and steps to reach the short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals of an organization. This type of planning is a vital tool for businesses, as it provides measurable goals that assist organizations in daily decision-making and guide their path.

Approach Bsc:

The BSC model, as a strategic management tool, helps organizations assess their performance from various perspectives (Kaplan, 2009). This model includes six key perspectives: financial, customer, internal processes, employee satisfaction, communications, and learning. Each of these perspectives addresses specific dimensions of organizational performance (Ahmed Obaid et al., 2024). Specifically, the financial perspective focuses on profitability and return on investment, while the customer perspective deals with understanding customer needs and satisfaction. The communications perspective evaluates the quality of internal interactions, and the internal processes perspective focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of operations. Additionally, the employee satisfaction perspective emphasizes motivation and employee retention, while the learning perspective highlights innovation and skill development.

Handball:

Handball is an exciting and competitive team sport in which two teams, each consisting of twelve players, participate. Out of these twelve players, seven are on the playing field, and one of them serves as the goalkeeper, positioned in front of their own goal to prevent the ball from entering. The main objective of the players in handball is to score points by placing the ball in the opponent's goal. This sport requires not only individual and technical skills but also emphasizes the importance of teamwork and coordination.

Materials and methods

In terms of exploratory–applied purpose, the present research is part of descriptive–survey research in terms of implementation method; that data collection was done in the field and qualitatively, This research intends to help the strategic plans of the handball clubs of Euphrates province through scientific methods, by examining the current situation, drawing the desired situation and formulating a strategic plan according to the six aspects of the balanced score card in the long term.

The research community was consisted of professors and academic faculty members, presidents and vice presidents of Iraqi handball teams, managers, senior experts of physical education and sports departments, Iraqi handball sports managers. The selection of the number of experts in this section is according to the nature of the subject, until the maximum information can be reached as the end point or theoretical saturation. Finally, the number of 20 people who were determined and interviewed through the snowball technique, theoretical saturation was achieved.

At first, vision, mission, organizational slogan, key performance indicators and strategies of Euphrates handball clubs from the review of genuine documents, background literature and opinions of council members (using the balanced scorecard method of strategies in financial, customer, environment and society perspectives, internal processes, employee satisfaction and learning) was developed using the qualitative research method of database in three stages of primary coding, central coding and selective coding. Also, in connection with the validity of the research, four criteria of acceptability, transferability, verifiability and reliability were examined and confirmed in the current research; At the end of the three stages of coding, the layers of the final research model were presented with the help of MAXQDA–2020 software.

Results

In this section, we have first reported the descriptive findings. In Table 1, the demographic information of the interviewees is shown in the qualitative stage.

TABLE 1, DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE INTERVIEWEES			
Interview number	Sexuality	Post	Activity record
1	Male	University professor and handball coach	21 years
2	Male	University professor of sports science	18 years
3	Male	University professor of sports science	9 years

4	Male	University professor of sports science	12 years
5	Male	University professor of sports science	14 years
6	Male	University professor of sports science	15 years
7	Male	University professor of sports science	10 years
8	Male	University professor of sports science	12 years
9	Male	University professor and handball referee	19 years
10	Male	University professor of sports science	25 years
11	Male	University professor of sports science	20 years
12	Male	University professor of sports science	17 years
13	Male	Handball referee	21 years
14	Male	Handball referee	18 years
15	Male	Handball Federation Member	15 years
16	Male	Handball Federation Member	10 years
17	Male	Handball coach	12 years
18	Male	Handball Federation Member	19 years
19	Male	Handball Federation Member	25 years
20	Male	Handball teacher	10 years

In the following, the results from the qualitative part of the research are presented. By analyzing the findings obtained from the information of the participants in the research, finally 62 expressions were placed in the form of 6 financial perspectives, customer, employee satisfaction, internal processes, growth and learning, environment and society (communication) (Table 2).

TABLE 2. RESULTS OF FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE COMPONENTS
1. Investigating the current financial situation of handball clubs in the Euphrates of Iraq
2. Identifying the financial goals of Iraqi Euphrates handball clubs
3. Financial strategic planning of Iraqi Euphrates handball clubs
4. Determining financial income from activities such as: financial sponsors and ticket sales
5. Attracting sponsors in holding handball competitions
6. Attracting advertisements in holding handball competitions

7. Determining current and operating expenses related to competitions
8. Examining invoices and financial requirements in paying expenses
9. Optimizing financial costs and eliminating unnecessary costs of handball clubs
10. Reviewing and modifying existing financial processes in order to reduce time and costs

In Table 3, the results of the customer perspective components are shown, which includes a total of 9 terms in this section.

TABLE 3. RESULTS OF CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE COMPONENTS

1. Checking and identifying current customers of handball clubs such as: fans
2. Examining the patterns of buying tickets for handball competitions and participating in events
3. Measuring the level of fans' satisfaction with handball clubs
4. Identifying the expectations of handball fans
5. Creating a positive and memorable experience to increase fan attendance
6. Providing platforms for fans to interact with the club through social activities
7. Strategic plans to achieve the goals of handball fans
8. Programs to increase fan loyalty such as: discounts, awards and special privileges
9. Creating effective communication channels with fans (such as website, social networks)
10. Improving service delivery to fans

In Table 4, the results of the components of the employees' satisfaction perspective are shown, which includes a total of 11 statements in this section.

TABLE 4. THE RESULTS OF THE COMPONENTS OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

1. Personnel review, including coaches, players, administrative personnel, and volunteer groups
2. Measuring the level of satisfaction and expectations of the club's human resources
3. Investigating and evaluating the values, behaviors and conditions of the working environment in the administrative system of the club
4. Promoting a positive organizational culture to increase the motivation and satisfaction of the club's human resources
5. Holding workshops and training courses to promote teamwork

6. Considering incentive programs for the outstanding performance of the club's human resources
7. Providing educational opportunities to develop personal and professional skills
8. Holding regular meetings to exchange opinions of the club's human resources
9. Ensuring effective and appropriate communication between the club's human resources and the fans
10. Creation of plans to attract the participation of human resources in activities related to fans
11. Encouraging the participation of human resources in training courses related to personal development

In Table 5, the results of internal process components are shown, which includes a total of 12 statements in this section.

TABLE 5. THE RESULTS OF INTERNAL PROCESS COMPONENTS

1. Review and analysis of processes related to the supply of goods and services
2. Review and analysis of the processes related to holding the event
3. Identifying strengths and weaknesses and obstacles in internal processes
4. Collect feedback from key stakeholders including HR and fans
5. Using new technologies to improve processes and reduce costs
6. Using project management techniques in planning
7. Strict monitoring of the implementation of processes
8. Strengthening relationships with suppliers, sponsors and other stakeholders
9. Determining key performance criteria in processes and progress in club goals
10. Training the club's human resources in the use of digital technologies and tools
11. Data collection and analysis in order to identify trends and growth opportunities for the club
12. Clarification of needs and expectations from stakeholders to understand and increase cooperation with the club

In Table 6, the results of the components of the growth and learning perspective are shown, which includes a total of 12 statements in this section.

TABLE 6. RESULTS OF GROWTH AND LEARNING COMPONENTS

1. Investigating and evaluating skill gaps in the club's human resources
2. Examining and evaluating the training needs of the club's human resources
3. Examining the current professional development opportunities of the club's human resources
4. Development of personal and social skills for the overall performance of the club
5. Creating a culture of adaptability and acceptance of changes in the working environment of handball clubs
6. Holding training sessions in the field of change management
7. Increasing the decision-making power of human resources in order to increase responsibility
8. Definition of clear duties and specific responsibilities for the club's human resources
9. Designing continuous training courses to develop specialized and general skills
10. Encouraging human resources to self-centered learning and skill development through educational resources
11. Creating a suitable and free environment for the expression of ideas and feedbacks of human resources

In Table 7, the results of the components of the environment and society (communication) are shown, which includes a total of 8 statements in this section.

TABLE 7. THE RESULTS OF ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY COMPONENTS
(COMMUNICATION)

1. Investigating and evaluating the club's interaction with the local community, fans and other stakeholders
2. Examining the needs and expectations of the community and stakeholders towards the club
3. Holding joint events with local businesses, such as: various festivals
4. Strengthening and developing relationships with local businesses and supporting the regional economy
5. Collaboration programs with local stores and restaurants in providing discounts to fans
6. Development of social responsibility programs such as: charity activities
7. Creating programs to attract talents and communicate with young people
8. Creating a strong communication team to manage the club's public relations



Figure 1. the final model of the research

Discussion

In general, in every sports club, especially in handball, financial management is recognized as one of the essential pillars of the club's success and stability. The financial landscape helps to provide the necessary resources for sports and non-sports activities and also leads to the creation of a strong and stable financial base for the future of the club. In this section, different aspects of the financial landscape are discussed and their impact on the overall performance of handball clubs is analyzed. The first point in this context is the importance of financial planning.

Clubs should pay a lot of attention to developing accurate and realistic financial plans. These plans should include projections of revenues and expenses, investments, and short-term and long-term financial goals. For example, handball clubs should carefully identify their financial resources and plan accordingly how they can achieve their goals. This helps to increase transparency and reduce financial risks and allows the club to make better decisions in critical situations.

Basically, in every sport, as well as in handball, customers and fans are considered as the main pillars of success. Understanding the needs and expectations of this group of people not only helps to improve the quality of the club's services and products; Rather, it leads to the creation of long-term and stable relationships with them. In this section, various aspects of the customer's perspective are investigated and their impact on the overall performance of handball clubs in the Euphrates of Iraq is investigated. One of the key points in this regard is identifying customers and target groups. Clubs should carefully identify different fan groups, including families, youth, and veterans, and understand the specific needs of each of these groups. Identifying needs helps clubs design their services and products specifically for each group. For example, holding special events for families, such as sports festivals and recreational activities, will help attract families to handball and increase their interactions with handball clubs. In addition, paying attention to the quality of the customer experience is also of great importance. Clubs should aim to provide a unique customer experience that includes all aspects of fan attendance at matches and club-related activities.

In the following, the importance of employee satisfaction in handball clubs is examined and the results obtained are analyzed. Employee satisfaction is known as a key factor in improving organizational performance and creating a positive work environment. In today's world, where the competition in sports and club ownership has greatly increased, paying attention to the needs and expectations of employees, in addition to helping to retain and attract talents; It can lead to improving the quality of services and increasing the satisfaction of fans. One of the important aspects of employee satisfaction is working conditions. Providing a suitable working environment, improving physical and psychological conditions, and creating comfort facilities help to increase the job satisfaction of employees. For example, the existence of rest spaces, sports facilities, and wellness programs lead to improving the morale of employees and increasing their productivity. Also, paying attention to the health and safety of the work environment is another important factor

in this field. Conducting training courses in the field of health and safety helps employees to work with more awareness in their work environment.

In this section, the internal processes of Iraqi Euphrates handball clubs and their impact on the overall performance are investigated and the results obtained are analyzed. Internal processes refer to a set of activities and procedures that help generate value and create services for customers and stakeholders. In today's world, where the competition in the field of sports has greatly increased, the optimization of these processes is recognized as a key factor in the success of clubs. One of the main aspects in internal processes is transparency and efficiency. Clubs should seek to create transparent and efficient processes that help facilitate decision-making and the implementation of activities. This can reduce time and costs and increase the satisfaction of fans and employees. For example, the use of information management systems helps clubs to effectively collect and analyze data related to financial performance, sports programs, and fan feedback. This information helps managers to make better decisions in various fields including recruiting players, planning events, and managing financial resources.

In today's world, where rapid changes and technological advances are clearly felt in all areas; The concept of growth and learning is very important in sports clubs, especially in the field of handball. This concept, in addition to leading to the improvement of individual and team performance; It will lead to the creation of a positive and progressive organizational culture. In this section, various dimensions of growth and learning in handball clubs are examined and their effect on the overall success of handball clubs in the Euphrates of Iraq is examined. One of the main aspects of growth and learning is to pay attention to the development of skills and abilities of employees and players. Clubs should consider providing training and development programs for all their members, including players, technical staff, and administrative staff. These programs include: specialized courses, educational workshops, and scientific seminars. For example, holding training courses in technical, tactical, and sports psychology fields will help players improve their skills and, as a result, achieve better performance in competitive fields. Also, providing training programs for the technical staff and administrative staff helps to improve the internal processes and increase the efficiency of the club.

Also, Euphrates handball clubs should pay attention to transparency in their communication with the community. Transparency in decisions and providing information about club activities and programs helps to increase public trust in the club. Holding public meetings and presenting

financial and performance reports creates this transparency and gives fans and the community the feeling that they are participating in the decision-making process. This issue will ultimately improve the public image of the club and increase its social support. Paying attention to social responsibility is another important aspect in communication with the environment and society. Clubs should seek to create social and charitable programs that help improve the social and economic conditions of society. These programs include cooperation with charitable organizations, holding social campaigns, and providing services to the community. For example, holding sports training courses for children and teenagers in underprivileged areas helps to increase the prestige of the club in the society and attract new fans.(Chersulich Tomino et al., 2020) Finally, it is suggested that Iraqi Euphrates handball clubs should develop detailed and realistic financial plans, taking into account income and expenses, financial benefits from attracting sponsors and managing expenses. Also, by launching regular surveys and creating feedback systems, it can help to identify the needs and expectations of fans and improve their experience. In addition, Euphrates handball clubs should seek to create diverse sources of income, including product sales, television broadcasting rights, and holding special events, and help improve individual and team performance by creating training programs and skill development workshops for technical staff and players.(Abdul Hussein et al., 2023)

Practical suggestions

1. **Develop Comprehensive Financial Plans:** Clubs should create detailed and realistic financial plans that include forecasting revenues and expenses, attracting sponsors, and managing costs efficiently.
2. **Implement Regular Surveys and Feedback Systems:** Establishing regular surveys and feedback mechanisms can help identify fans' needs and expectations, enhancing their overall experience.
3. **Diversify Revenue Streams:** Clubs should aim to create various income sources, including merchandise sales, television broadcasting rights, and organizing special events.
4. **Provide Training Programs and Skill Development Workshops:** Offering educational programs and skill development workshops for technical staff and players can improve individual and team performance.

5. Foster Positive Relationships with Social Institutions and Media: Building strong relationships with social organizations and media outlets can enhance the club's credibility and gain wider social support.
6. Enhance Infrastructure and Services: Improving stadium facilities, such as seating comfort and hygiene amenities, can significantly enhance the fans' experience.
7. Leverage Information and Communication Technologies: Using tools like mobile applications for accessing information and purchasing tickets can attract more fans and provide better services.

Research Proposals

1. Conducting comparative research between handball clubs in different countries can help identify the best practices and management methods.
2. A study on the impact of social media activities on fan engagement and loyalty can assist in improving the communication strategies of clubs.
3. Examining how clubs respond to economic crises and their impact on financial resources and performance can provide a better understanding of risk management.
4. Researching the key factors that influence sponsor attraction can help handball clubs in the Farat al-Awsat region of Iraq develop financial strategies.
5. Conducting studies on fan behavior in stadiums and its effect on their overall experience can contribute to improving the services provided.
6. Researching the impact of organizational culture on team performance and staff efficiency can help identify best management practices.
7. Investigating the effect of training programs and skill development on player performance can contribute to improving sports results.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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