

Establishing an effective partnership network in the sports paradigm

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Abstract. The paper offers a theoretical overview based on strategic approaches to the establishment of an effective partnership network to help the adaptability of sports clubs to modern competitive and everchanging conditions. Methodologically, the article is conceptual, based on contemporary data and multi-perspective development directions. Initially, the article indicates the importance of establishing affiliate networks in business. Subsequently, presents strategies for creating long-term relationships with diverse organizations and guidelines for practical implementation. Sports organizations should analyse their resources and potential future partners and choose the most appropriate practices to connect with them. Thus, they would strengthen their effectiveness of strategic club cooperation.

1 Introduction

A business partnership is a legal agreement between two or more organizations that terminates their governance [1]. The new business paradigm for success increasingly imposes the principles of cooperation to realize a synergistic effect and significant benefits for partner organizations [2]. Successful organizational activity in a strategic plan relies on building effective partnerships to develop its competitiveness.

In essence, a strategy for building an effective affiliate network is an action plan that shapes the future direction of an organization and forms the framework for how its long-term goal can be achieved [3]. Planning is considered as forward thinking that anticipates future actions. To make an efficient and effective business partnership, planning must consider the complexity of the company, the activities it engages and the environment in which it develops.

In today's competitiveness setting, the environment of sports organizations is becoming not only increasingly uncertain, but also more closely interconnected; thus, changes in external factors echo back unpredictably and chaotically. This increased uncertainty and interconnectedness requires organizations to respond and build appropriate collaborations and communities. They must build coalitions that are large and strong enough to meet the needs of an ever-changing environment [4].

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The chosen topic is relevant because business partnerships, partner networks and the processes related to their successful management are poorly researched in Bulgaria. The subject of the article is the strategy for building and maintaining partner relations. The subject of the article are the strategies for reaching suitable and effective partners for the development of the activity of a sports club. The article aims to provide a multi-perspective plan of strategic partner network building, examining the importance and value of a well-built partner network and how it affects business, and presents strategies and processes for creating long-term relationships with like-minded organizations; state and municipal institutions; legal entities and private sector companies and media partners.

2 The partnership network in the business environment

Positive relationships with business partners are vital to the development of any sports organization. Relationships with business partners are important connections and resources helping to implement the activities of the sports club, to plan new activities, as well as to follow modern sports trends. Building future relationships with business partners can be helpful when a product or service changes or when the club's activities need to grow. Positive relationships with business partners also provide a way to improve the professional level in sports communities, as well as easier implementation of innovations in the future. Partnerships allow all participants to derive mutual benefits [5].

Collaboration and strategic partnerships are fundamental to improving business performance in a sports organization. They benefit both the sports club and coaches, athletes, and practitioners. The sports organization can expand its activities and increase its target groups; athletes and coaches benefit from the strengths and opportunities that each organization provides as a field for performance and development when new perspectives of cooperation with other organizations are presented. Thus, teams manage to showcase their talents and grow together towards common goals. In addition, strengthening the relationship between complementary businesses fosters collaboration and longevity for both organizations and allows companies to offer services and solutions to become more successful [6].

To build an effective partnership network, the organisation must consider its goals, also its strengths and weaknesses to select suitable potential partners who share their goals and complement each other with their strengths.

A business partnership begins with a verbal agreement between business partners to create a joint project or share goals of existing business organizations. This agreement should be evidenced by a written document outlining the type of partnership and the details of the agreement, signed by all parties.

3 A strategy for establishing positive long-term relationships with external organizations

Positive long-term relations with external organizations are of vital importance for any sports organization worldwide. This includes those with similar activities, state and municipal partners, companies and legal entities from the private sector, media partners and public relations. Sports organizations build and maintain their image, find new horizons for development, expand the scope of their activities, and reach a wider audience by maintaining positive relations with partner organizations.

Although there is no exact formula that guarantees the successful building of these relationships, sports organizations today often rely on the support of municipal and regional institutions to sustain their activities, and on co-working with organizations with same ideal

goals. Building a partnership network requires time, effort, loyalty, and pursuance of the obligations from all parties.

3.1 Strategy for establishing a network of partners - municipalities

Building a partner network at the regional level is important for the development of public activities and the organization of publicly accessible events. The partnership with the municipalities can be realized by organizing public sports events with a cause, or by applying for national and local financing mechanisms. It could be achieved by planning sports events combined with cultural activities part of the cultural calendars of the municipalities; or renovation, and maintenance of municipal sports spaces; another option is conducting open sports lessons on municipal areas, as well as any other type of local sports events. By building the partnership network with the municipalities, the sports organization would have the opportunity to present its activities, both in large cities and in smaller towns, to be socially engaged in regional development and sports enrichment.

Reaching the municipalities and developing the common interests of the organization and the local government takes place according to a strictly announced procedure, which includes submitting an official application with the organization's intentions. It must include a clearly justified concept, goals, and a plan for their realization in a reasonable time frame, how these activities would enhance the local municipal space, financial and promotion strategies. The submission of the application will start a procedure for mutual activity and building a partnership with the selected municipality.

3.2 Strategy for establishing a network of partners - non-profit organizations

Cooperation with non-profit organizations with ideal goals is based on collaborative work on charitable causes, activities with a public purpose, or preparation of events with external funding. The main aim for both partner organizations will be expanding the partner network. This sector includes all types of cultural organizations, art organizations, educational and health organizations. Reaching out to organizations in the non-profit sector should include a proposal for common work related to a project or cause of a charitable nature, in which the sports club could offer activities such as open training, sports games or a small sports event for the audience of the potential partner organization.

3.3 Strategy for establishing a network of partners – legal entities from the private sector

Legal entities from the private sector could be companies, owners of sports facilities, private schools, kindergartens as well as sponsors. Partnerships with sports facilities service companies are important so that sports events and training can be performed. A similar type of relationship can be established by agreeing to rent a space where the sports club can conduct its activities, or by renting a large sports hall to hold a sports event with entrance for visitors. Another segment of partnership with private legal entities are the open scenes, where the sports club can present its activities for the purpose of promotion - for example, an open demonstration on a stage or in the shopping centre, participation in different kinds of festivals with a free sports program. This type of partnership can raise the profile of both organizations, reach new audiences, and gain new practitioners. Partnerships can be established with private or public schools and kindergartens. In this case the sports club provide special sports activities for the children. Finally, are sponsorship relationships. In this type of partnership, the offer that can be made to the sponsor is to promote its brand name and logo to be printed on the club's kits. In general, club sponsorship is a powerful mechanism

able to reach a wide audience of prospective consumers and increase brand awareness levels [7]. Sports clubs see sponsorship as an inherent method of raising additional funds and subsequently increasing their competitiveness both locally and internationally and regardless of the degree of strategic adaptation or standardization [8].

3.4 Strategy for establishing a network of partners – organizations from the sports sector

As an organization operating in the specific business environment and striving to popularize sports activities, relationships should be established with other organizations from the sports sector. Such type of relationship can be membership in a sports federation, sports associations and leagues and partnership relationships with other sports clubs. The personal contacts of the management with other organizations from the sports industry are particularly important here.

3.5 Strategy for establishing a network of partners – media

A media partnership is a collaboration between two organizations in which, one of them is a media. The goal of media partnerships is to get closer to customers and provide them with concise information at the right time. The main goal is to distribute content and stimulate audience engagement with the organization's activities. Also, the right media partnership provides opportunities to engage influential figures in sports and reach international sports federations. Media relations should be tailored to the organization's target group and which media would reach the right people. It is desirable that representatives of the selected media - reporters, journalists, be regularly invited to events of the organization and be notified of all kinds of new activities and news surrounding the sports club. For starters, the sports club can target the local media to inform about upcoming events, their nature and importance. This can be done through a press release or personal invitations. The media that the sports organization can target can be newspapers, radios, news sites, etc.

4 Conclusion

The theoretical findings that follow from the research paper highlight the need to build long-term positive relationships with other organizations in the sports industry and beyond. The concepts touched on in the article should not be considered as separate components, isolated from each other, but should be used in the overall planning of future collaborations that lead the sports organization to growth and development. Building and maintaining the club's affiliate network should not be a separate process, but integrated into the club's strategic planning to ensure alignment between community, means and goals. The considered directions for the development of partnerships are multi-perspective and mutually complementary. Although the above realizations may superficially seem redundant, the findings of this article actually go beyond the obvious: they highlight the need to plan for future partnerships and to simultaneously appreciate the multiple resources that effective collaboration between two organizations offers. For this purpose, the management of the sports organization must analyze and assess its strengths and weaknesses, the resources available to it and plan strategies and practices to connect with organizations that complement and strengthen its weak units.

The article presents topics, which are poorly researched in the context of the Bulgarian sports business regarding the construction of strategic partnerships and the processes of their positive maintenance. The work on the topic could be upgraded through a more detailed study

of the specifics of the strategic partnership in sports and how it affects the development of the organization. The aspiration to strengthen the connection between theory, strategies, practical application and providing modern competitive tools for preparing management and management units to reach reliable partners and effective collaborations is emphasized.

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