Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football industry in the Iranian Mazandaran Province

R. Darzi Khelradi1, M. Hami2*, V. Shojaei2, and M. Sanai3

Abstract: The objective of this study was to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football industry in the Iranian Mazandaran Province. The sample of the present study consisted of 80 football experts (92.5% males and 7.5% females). The instrument used was a valid and reliable questionnaire consisting of four parts: 1- Strengths (17 questions), 2- Weaknesses (25 questions), 3- Opportunities (13 questions) and 4- Threats (19 questions). The statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS 24. The results showed that Mazandaran football industry had more weaknesses than strengths and more threats than opportunities. Considering these results, the authors propose a series of strategies to improve the football industry of this province using the SWOT approach.

Keywords: Strategic planning; football; SWOT analysis; sport management.

1. Introduction

The strategic planning is a basic process in the realization of an organization’s mission. An effective strategic planning process provides a framework to decide how to allocate organizational resources and challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that appear (De Andreis, 2019). A strategic plan contains goals, tools and actions that are useful for its accomplishment in a long-term perspective. Numerous studies showed a positive impact of strategic planning on organizational performance in developed countries (García et al., 2016; Jayawarna, 2019; Sánchez et al., 2019). Since the main task of a sport manager is planning, it is important to provide appropriate conditions for planning, which itself depends on the organization’s attitude towards sports and its importance in the life of the community (Ilić, 2013).

Planning is a process implemented also by the sports organizations and it affects the environment in which they are functioning. In order to be effective and sustainable, sports organizations should plan their actions, analyze their competing environment, develop strategies to achieve goals and evaluate their progress and performance periodically (Avgerinou, Skoula, Papaioannou & Kriemadis, 2017).

Football is the world’s most popular sport and most countries in the world consider it as a national sport (Fernández et al., 2019; Prieto, 2020; Radzimirski & Hajduczenia 2019; Sánchez et al., 2019). In consequence, it could be said that football is not only a sport. Although this may seem like a cliché, in the real world it is obvious that football is an industry. In Iran, football is the most common and popular sport and, in comparison to other sports, it has the highest number of players (Elahi & Ardakani, 2004). In general, the Iranian sports industry reveals a gap in human resources, lack of strategic policies, inconsistency between institutions, insufficient equipment and insufficient supervision over sports activities.

In Iran, football federations need to use strategic management methods more than other sports organizations. In consequence, the quality of goal setting, planning and implementation of football sports activities is of special importance. Therefore, the objective of this study was to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football in the Iranian Mazandaran Province. We also tried to...
draw a strategic plan for the football industry of this province using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) approach.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 80 football experts (92.5% males and 7.5% females). The participants were heads (26.25%) and secretaries (26.25%) of the football associations of the Iranian Mazandaran province, as well as coaches (25%) and players (22.5%) of Mazandaran football teams. The most frequent age range of the participants was 40–49 years and the least frequent age range was 11–25 years. The most frequent work experience of the participants was 16–20 years (33.75%) and the least frequent work experience was 1–5 years (6.25%). The most frequent level of education of the participants was M. A. degree (37.5%) and the least frequent level of education was diploma degree (7.75%).

2.2. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of four parts: 1- Strengths (17 questions), 2- Weaknesses (25 questions), 3- Opportunities (13 questions) and 4- Threats (19 questions). This questionnaire was designed ad hoc for this study and its validity was confirmed by 10 sport university professors and experts. Also, the four parts of the questionnaire had the required validity according to Cronbach’s alpha test.

2.3. Statistical analysis

SWOT analysis was carried out using the following statistical tests: descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations), t-tests and Friedman test. All the analyses were done with SPSS 24. The level of statistical significance was set at P< 0.05.

3. Results

The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the sample had a normal distribution in all the variables except in the variable ‘Threats’. The results of this test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics for normal data distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>0.955</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>1.263</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>1.806</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>Non-normal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were classified using the Friedman ranking test. The results of Friedman test are presented in Table 2. The four variables were significant.

Table 2. Significance of Friedman test in strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>113.568</td>
<td>89.875</td>
<td>87.272</td>
<td>299.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of freedom</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3 it is possible to observe the prioritization of items in each dimension of SWOT analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Table 3. Prioritization of items of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>T-test</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employing interested individuals and players</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding workshops and special courses of human resources</td>
<td>3.379</td>
<td>1.005</td>
<td>11.09</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization and delegation of authority for holding football events in the cities</td>
<td>3.379</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>10.88</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering talent and introducing elite to famous teams</td>
<td>3.224</td>
<td>1.155</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of experienced volunteers with high education</td>
<td>2.672</td>
<td>1.129</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of experienced and specialist personnel in the field of coaching and refereeing</td>
<td>2.931</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The internal factors evaluation matrix was used to evaluate the internal factors. In this matrix, the identified strengths and weaknesses are classified and scored by special coefficients and rankings to determine whether the Mazandaran football has strengths or weaknesses in terms of internal factors. The sum of the internal matrix scores showed that there were more weaknesses than strengths. The external factors evaluation matrix was used to evaluate the external factors. The results of the external matrix showed that the Mazandaran football has more threats than opportunities.

According to these results, Mazandaran football should use the following strategies:

- To develop a strategic plan and to establish a system of continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities of football.
- To create a reward system to attract professional football players.
- To host football events and competitions with presence of talented athletes.
- To activate the marketing department and to attract financial resources.
- To benefit from the experience and knowledge of professors, experts and experienced staff.
- To benefit from natural resources, suitable environment and free sports facilities.
- To use international football champions of Mazandaran province to attract attention.
- To identify and to nurture sports talents.
- To increase the number of football stadiums.

4. Discussion

In this section we discuss the results of the present study and the main planned strategies of the SWOT matrix.

Regarding the strategy of developing a strategic plan and establishing a system of continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities of football, this strategy is consistent with the research conducted by Ghofrani (2008), Khosravi Zadeh (2008) and Asefi et al. (2014). The competition space in today’s world is very hard and narrow. The essential condition to remain in this environment is the provision of new and superior services and products. Meanwhile, research and development play a significant role. Therefore, it is necessary to design a system for research and development of soccer, and establish close communication and interaction with sports centers and football clubs (Asefi et al., 2014). Considering the current weaknesses and mentioned opportunities,
it seems necessary to adopt an appropriate strategy to utilize the opportunities through overcoming those weaknesses.

The strategy of creating a reward system to attract professional football players is consistent with the studies by Khosravi Zadeh (2009), Nasirzadeh (2002), Ghofrani et al. (2009), Javadipour & Samienia (2014) and Sadeghian (2015). This strategy is established by combining the weakness of failure in appreciating football players with the threat of the lack of the required motivation of these players. Creating a reward system is a very important factor to avoid lack of motivation in sports (Ghofrani et al., 2009). Therefore, applying this strategy will increase the motivation of football players and coaches.

The strategy of hosting football events and competitions is in line with the studies by Khosravi Zadeh (2009), Ghofrani et al. (2009), Javadipour (2013), Sadeghian et al. (2014) and Mehdizadeh et al. (2013), but not consistent with the study by Nasirzadeh (2011). For the success of this strategy it is important the cooperation with academic experts and media. If the number of football players increases, the competition in this sport will increase too, which will result in enhancing the quality level of the players.

5. Conclusion

This study detected the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football industry in the Iranian Mazandaran Province. The results showed that Mazandaran football industry had more weaknesses than strengths and more threats than opportunities. Considering these results, the authors propose a series of strategies to improve the football industry of this province using the SWOT approach.

5. References