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## Strategic Planning and Selection of Players and Coaching Staff: A Case Study of a Basketball Organization

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The study aims to identify the activities of a professional basketball organization in the area of planning and selection of players and coaching staff. It focuses on understanding how strategic personnel decisions support the club's goals and overall performance.

**Methodology:** The case study method was used, supplemented with a structured interview and direct, time-limited observation. The research was conducted over several months in 2024 within a top-tier Polish basketball club, using an interview questionnaire as the main research tool.

**Findings:** The research highlights that effective team planning in the organization is a continuous, strategically integrated process aligned with the club's financial and competitive goals. Selection of players and coaches is based on both performance data and psychological traits like team fit and mental resilience. Recruitment relies on internal development, scouting, and networks rather than open calls. The organization emphasizes the importance of aligning coaching staff with the club's philosophy and allowing head coaches autonomy in building their teams.

**Practical Implications:** The study shows that structured, ongoing planning and well-informed recruitment processes are key to building competitive sports teams. Developing internal databases, fostering scouting networks, and giving coaching staff decision-making power enhance organizational effectiveness in sports clubs.

**Originality/Value:** This paper provides a unique contribution by exploring planning and recruitment processes in a professional basketball context—an area underrepresented in HRM literature. It offers practical insights into the operational and strategic logic behind team-building in elite sports organizations, bridging management theory and sports practice.

**Keywords:** Planning, recruitment, selection, human capital, sports organization.

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## **1. Introduction**

Human capital management is a key element of the functioning of modern sports organizations. In a dynamically changing environment, where competition is increasingly relentless and the expectations of key stakeholders are constantly growing, paying attention to human capital management, and in particular to planning and selection of employees, is becoming essential for success both in sports activities and in the business aspect.

Human capital in a sports organization is not only the players, the manager, but also the coach, assistant coaches, physiotherapists and support staff. Effective planning and selection of personnel allow for their optimal use, which in sport means both improved sports and financial results.

The aim of this paper is to seek to identify the activities of basketball club "X" in the context of planning and selection of players and training staff. The research focuses on the analysis of the team planning process, the selection of players and the coaching staff in a sports organization.

Through the interview and observation, answers to bothering questions were obtained and scientific horizons were broadened. In addition, the paper tries to determine what elements of these processes are crucial for a sports organization and how to improve them.

## **2. Literature Review**

The twentieth century, and in particular its beginning, was marked by further multiplication of the capital of the upper strata of society, but also a certain opposition and emphasis on the legal protection of work. It has been noted that labour productivity is influenced by technology and the degree of mechanisation, which in the 1930s and 1940s contributed to a decline in interest in human capital and education (Jarecki *et al.*, 2011, p. 16-17).

In addition, the International Labor Organization was established in 1919 to improve working conditions (Daugherty, 1934, p. 170-171). During this period, J. Schumpeter proposed a revolutionary way of perceiving human capital, according to which all active behavior of employees was required for the development of the company. The economist noted that the employee's salary should be adequate to the company's results. The entrepreneur should influence creativity and innovation growth by enabling the employee's freedom of action and a sense of cooperation (Schumpeter, 2006, p. 81-82).

The turn of the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century contributed to faster development and provided arguments saying that people are the most valuable element of the company. During this period, one of the basic analyses of this topic in

economic theory was created, called *the theory of human capital*. In Poland and in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, this concept developed quite strongly at the time of political changes, i.e. from the turn of the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century (Jarecki *et al.*, 2011, p. 18).

The definition of human capital is a topic widely discussed in the literature on human capital management, human resources management and organization management. A. Bagińska in her publication defines it as the total knowledge, experience and skills of individual employees that have economic value for the organization. It also includes "know-how", i.e. the value generated that grows with the company's experience (Bagińska, 2015).

According to Baron and Armstrong (2008), capital is a comprehensive resource that includes the knowledge, experience, skills and potential of employees, contributing to the achievement of the organization's goals. All these elements and the consideration of human capital along with appropriate management by increasing employee engagement and improving work efficiency contribute to creating a sustainable advantage in the market and creating added value for the organization (Baron and Armstrong, 2008; Armstrong, 2006).

Human capital is most often defined today as a set of resources in the form of knowledge, skills, experience, creativity, health, creative abilities and other competences possessed by employees in an organization (Schultz, 1981, p. 24). Human capital plays the role of a transmitter of knowledge, a determinant of advantage and development in an organization. J.L. Chatzkel emphasizes that "*it is human capital that determines the differences between organizations and is the real basis of competitive advantage*" (Chatzkel, 2004, p. 139-145).

### **3. Human Capital Planning Process**

One of the most common divisions is the analysis of the nature of planning from the perspective of time. Three basic categories can be mentioned: tactical (short-term) perspective; operational (medium-term) perspective; strategic (long-term) perspective (Kostera, 2006, p. 49). By properly adjusting the personnel structure to strategic goals, the organization is able to avoid both competence gaps and focus on the development of its potential. At the stage of planning needs and personnel equipment, attention is also very often paid to the creation of a book of successors, qualifications or transaction matrices in order to systematize activities (Pocztowski, 2007, p. 110-122).

In sports organization, operational and strategic planning will mainly concern more extensive plans and goals. Tactical planning, on the other hand, is the process of planning a team despite hiring players for a longer period of time. The sports organizations formulate a specific goals for the team, plans and modifies the composition of the team.

Analyses that are carried out include technical skills (throws, defense, passes of specific players), as well as tactical skills (execution of the team's tactics, understanding of the game), physical skills (endurance, strength) and mental skills (determination, motivation, stress response).

Another important step in the team planning process is to identify gaps and possible excesses. They may be concerned the lack of specific skills or positions of players, but also the coaching staff that affects the achievement of sports goals. The club must also predict what changes may take place in the created team in the long run.

#### **4. Selection of Personnel**

Effective selection of employees has a significant impact on the achievement of future organizational goals. The key elements of this stage include, above all, ensuring that the employee's values are consistent with the values of the organization and matching the candidates' competencies to the requirements of a given position (Pocztowski, 2007, p. 113-116).

The first, *i.e.*, *recruitment*, consists in properly searching and then selecting candidates for the job position that the company wants to create or a job that already exists and will be transformed or maintained in the future (Louart, 1997, p. 121). In this process, it is crucial to use a variety of sources, such as advertisements, recruitment agencies, professional networks, in order to reach as many potential employees as possible (Gatewood *et al.*, 2019).

In their publication, H. Król and A. Ludwiczynski divide recruitment into two types, broad and segmented (Król and Ludwiczynski, 2006, p. 203). The first of them, *i.e.*, broad recruitment, focuses on the so-called broad labor market and aims to reach information about potential employment to as many candidates as possible. The second, segment recruitment, is directed, as the name suggests, to a specific segment, *i.e.* a narrow labor market. E. McKenna and N. Beech proposed a different division of recruitment.

It is the commonly used separation into internal and external recruitment (McKenna and Beech, 1997, p. 120-121). Internal recruitment is addressed to people who are employed in a given unit. External recruitment, on the other hand, takes place among people who do not work for a given organization. The basic and most frequently used recruitment techniques in practice include (Jarecki *et al.*, 2011, p. 192) announcements in traditional media and social media, special events; entrance without knocking; student internships, recruitment at universities and schools; head hunter services; computer databases.

In the second stage, *i.e.* *selection*, potential candidates are assessed in terms of the compliance of their qualifications with the requirements for the position (Cascio and Boudreau, 2016). The basic activities in the selection process include the analysis of

the cover letter and curriculum vitae (CV), conducting interviews and all tests to check actual qualifications (Jurkowski, 2003, p. 135-159). Selection methods may include interviews, psychometric tests, job simulations, and references from previous employers. The initial selection is made among the candidates submitted for the recruitment campaign.

On the other hand, further selection applies to employees already employed in the form of promotions (Kostera, 2006, p. 64). B. Jamka includes the basic techniques used in the selection of candidates: initial selection – analysis of biographical data; initial and qualifying interview; psychological tests; simulations – work-based tests; assessment center; reference analysis (Jamka, 2001, p. 104-135). Sports organizations strive to take the leading position in their activities, thanks to the strengths and qualifications of their staff, which includes athletes, coaches, physiotherapists, coaches and other experts (Panfil, 2010, p. 566; Panfil, 2004, p. 57-61).

Hunting is a special method of recruiting players for a sports club. This method is widely used in the recruitment of professional players and consists mainly in the search for talented players who are not promoted or formed in sports, playing in clubs with a lower league, located in sports education centers or outside any club or union institutions.

Scouting, on the other hand, consists in observing specific trainings and games of teams from individual leagues by qualified employees of organizations or other companies called scouts. The end of the scouting process is usually the presentation of an information card of a specific player, which includes data on his potential, predispositions, skills, character, position, as well as strengths and weaknesses.

Jaworski also includes sports competitions and sports competitions among the selection methods. He claims that *"athletes achieving the best results are usually subjected to various tests checking the level of development of individual motor skills, including features particularly important for achieving success in a specific discipline and even sports competition. Such results are increasingly analysed in terms of the possibility of developing specific motor skills, body structure and the like"* (Jaworski, 2008, p. 1-3).

## **5. Methodology**

The main objective of the study is to seek to identify the activities of basketball sports organization "X" in the context of planning and selection of players and coaching staff. The detailed objectives of the work include the analysis of the team planning process, the selection of players and the coaching staff performing in the sports organization. In addition, the paper tries to determine what elements of these processes are crucial for a sports organization and how to improve them.

From many available scientific research methods, the individual case method was chosen (Lachiewicz and Matejun, 2010, p. 88). In the study, the author adapted the research technique in the form of an overtly structured interview and direct, partial observation limited in time to the case study method. The research tool used is an interview questionnaire.

The study is based on the activities of a private sports club taking part in the highest in the hierarchy of men's basketball leagues in Poland. The entire research process lasted from January to the end of May 2024. During this time, three meetings were held, each of which lasted an average of two hours.

## **6. Research Results**

To maintain the transparency of the work, the following research results are divided into two parts: the team planning process and the selection of players and coaching staff.

### **6.1 The Process of Planning a Team in the Surveyed Organization**

One of the most important elements in the team planning process is that the club manager does not carry out the whole process in June after the end of the season. His work on the next season begins at the time of signing contracts for the current season.

This first stage of composition planning is followed by another, which can be called observation. It consists in the fact that the players, after signing contracts, start training and at this point the club manager supervises the work and tries to assess whether they will be useful in a year and how they will be able to help the organization achieve its goals.

In the entire process of planning a team for the sports organization under study, it is important to constantly analyze the basketball market. The scope of this activity includes observing as many leagues in the world as possible, creating lists of interesting players, establishing contacts with their agents and checking employment opportunities. At this stage, it also becomes important to determine whether the players in question are within the price range of the organization. In this aspect, it is also worth adding that the creation of a formalized form of a successor book or a qualification book is not very practiced.

Team management in sport is a natural direction for players, i.e. becoming a coach or being an agent. It is very rare to find people who have the competence to function in management, i.e. manage a group outside of sports. A more common practice is to use well-known figures as the face of projects, i.e. a person who is known for being a very good player, coach after the end of his career is engaged to promote and create the image of the club.

The audited sports organization, as mentioned earlier, treats the book of successors a little differently. For example, they point out that in the structure of their organization, young players were trained at the age of 18-19, who then left for other clubs. The organization naturally observes them, collects a certain database, completes it on an ongoing basis and records who played for them with what results, when along with the coaches' opinions. The club uses the data collected in this way to hire a specific player at the time of planning.

The same situation applies to the coaching staff. The planning process begins with setting a goal and determining the financial capabilities of the club, and then coaches are selected for this.

To sum up, in the surveyed sports organization, the creation of plans and the process of planning a team is primarily a matter of gathering knowledge, international contacts and adjusting these plans to the previously set goals set for the team. An important job in the context of team planning is to check the possibilities and build different scenarios, any potential structures like how the team will develop, where and which elements should be changed.

## **6.2 Recruitment and Selection in the Personnel Selection Process**

Selection in the surveyed sports organization is classically divided into recruitment and selection. The first of them, i.e. recruitment, begins with an analysis of the current squad. Knowledge and analysis of the period for which the club has a player is the starting point for further activities.

Because the team consists of twelve to fourteen players, the organization has a part of the squad assured. Then the question is asked whether the club wants to keep all these players while fighting for predetermined goals, or whether some of them do not meet the requirements.

In the surveyed organization, there is internal recruitment in the form of reaching for the resources of youth teams, where young players are trained, which usually applies to supplementary players. When recruiting for more important positions in the team, the organization is also very willing to return to players who were also so-called alumni. It often happens that a young player, who was once trained in the club's youth structures and then there was no place for him, gains experience elsewhere, "grows up" and returns to the club.

The surveyed sports organization also naturally uses external recruitment. It happens that the organization gets proposals that a particular player will come at his own expense and show his skills. However, it is worth noting here that the surveyed organization rarely uses this form. The club aims to recruit players at the level they are interested in, not lower, such proven and experienced players, not those who want to prove something.

In the case of training staff, training staff, i.e. assistants and physiotherapists, the situation is similar. It was very often the case that youth coaches became assistants in the first team or even later became the first coaches. Acquiring training staff by means of external recruitment is used less frequently.

On the other hand, a very important and desirable element that the club pays attention to is emotional commitment and the willingness to give "something more" and dedication to team play. The above aspects are perceived as more important than purely theoretical qualifications acquired through education. The surveyed organization assumes that skills related to technology can be acquired, but such features as the willingness to sacrifice an individual for the group cannot, which makes them unique.

In the part devoted to theory, the author referred to several important forms of acquiring players, namely: scouting, loan and hunting. Each of them has its own application in the audited organization. In a given club, the sports manager is responsible for this.

This is a specialized person whose task is to collect all the necessary information about the market, the situation and the players. Such data is obtained in the form of written reports or video reports, and then the material used for the next stage is prepared. His tasks also include cooperation with players' agents. The purpose of the above activities is to have the right amount of knowledge to freely go through the next stages in the selection process and then select the best candidate.

In the scouting process, the most important thing for the organization is to observe how the player functions in matches. They also collect information about his functioning in the team, during training, outside training, relationships and the will to win. This information is very important, both for the trainer and the manager, but it is impossible to collect on any platform, so it functions in informal circulation.

Here, the club uses a network of contacts with other coaches or clubs and collects data from agents. In terms of recruitment, but also subsequent selection, it is worth adding that first of all, coaches, but also managers in the surveyed organization use certain tools that allow them to collect data on players. The coach analyzes the match in terms of two aspects: team play and individual play.

Then, when the club observes the players and thinks about their selection, it also evaluates them in terms of how the player presents himself individually in certain situations. The above-mentioned programs used by the surveyed organization are "Synergy Sports" and "InStats". Publicly available, paid databases such as "Eurobasket" and "RealGM" are also used. Statistics are expanding, more and more details are recorded in databases, but the so-called "eye test" is still very important in this process.

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In the case of the surveyed organization, the selection stage is not so advanced, the element of meetings with players is practically non-existent. The above-described recruitment and gathering of information in the organization, as well as in sport in general, is much longer and more extensive than the selection stage.

First of all, the organization checks how a given candidate functions in the team, among other players, in relations with coaches, but also how he functions mentally in training and match conditions. In addition, their mental resilience and whether they can make decisions under stress and pressure are examined. A player who is able to adapt under pressure and calmly perform the task entrusted by the coach becomes the most valuable capital for the organization.

It should also be noted that the purpose of the surveyed organization is to search for and hire experienced players with the right qualifications and desired skills. That is why the club does not conduct tests, it relies on the knowledge gathered from the observation of the previous player, from conversations with his colleagues and coaches, with people who know him and who know how the player functions in given moments. The better the contacts, the broader and more accurate the answers the club can get to the questions asked, the better decisions it makes.

A very important and distinguishing factor in this process is that, according to the internal policy, the club gives autonomy to the first coach in creating its own staff. The surveyed organization points out that the trainer must have the comfort of working with loyal people who will believe that this work done together makes sense and leads to a good goal, so it is worth sacrificing even one's own ambitions. Another important aspect in terms of both recruitment and selection of the coaching staff is that these people should be characterized by mental resilience and the ability to work non-standard hours.

## **7. Conclusions**

Sports clubs have long ceased to function as voluntary groups of people passionate about a given sport. They have become thriving companies under commercial law, which are required to achieve certain results, both sports and financial. Therefore, for their proper and effective functioning, it is necessary to acquire appropriate players and coaches, who are not only an organizational resource, they are the basis capital, create a competitive advantage and are often the reason for the development and success of sports organizations.

The conducted research in the sports organization "X" allowed to obtain important information in the context of the stated goal of the work, which is to strive to recognize the activities of the sports organization in the context of planning and selection of players and training staff. Planning and selection of employees in such an organization is a complex issue, depending on many factors, such as the specificity of the sports market, organizational culture, competitive dynamics, the

structure of the entire team, as well as the individual characteristics and needs of the players and the coaching staff.

Due to the fact that this study only indicates the perspective of the board and the office, and more specifically the sports manager, the perspective of, for example, the coaching staff could be taken into account for a more complete analysis of the situation. Their perception of the subject may turn out to be different from the existing one. In addition, it should be noted that many common features can be seen in personnel controlling.

Controlling is carried out in order to obtain information about human resources and coordination of human capital, so that the organization achieves its goal. This clearly indicates that controlling can be used as support, in addition, it is the basis for creating proposals for changes in all personnel processes.

A characteristic feature of controlling that should be taken into account is that its use in the personnel context is particularly applicable in an organization that makes its goals dependent on its human capital. The basketball club and its staff in the form of players and coaching staff are unique employees. Their uniqueness is determined by their qualities, skills, predispositions, talent, and interests of coaches and athletes.

Therefore, it is recommended that the surveyed organization is interested in the topic of personnel controlling. An additional legitimacy of using controlling in a club is also the high risk associated with personnel, which is mainly related to sports results, which are very often unpredictable. An important argument is also the mobility of players in the form of transfers, high costs related to the acquisition and training of personnel, medical and health conditions imposed on players and the fact that the financial effectiveness of the club is very often related to the sponsors and external financing institutions acquired.

When analysing the management capabilities of sports organisations operating in an environment of growing competition, the specificity of the cultural environment of the clubs should be taken into account. In Italy, sport is treated as a kind of religion. In Spain, there is a certain social sports mobilization and patriotic symbolism. In England, on the other hand, the development of sport is mainly influenced by constant commercialization and customary law.

In Germany, on the other hand, the effects in sport are mainly determined by the involvement of public institutions and centralization. Unfortunately, in Poland, sports clubs, including basketball, face many adversities. Despite the constant development and results achieved, our society still lacks a certain bottom-up support for clubs, mass sports practice, adequate financing that is not only focused on the annual result and incentives for active participation of fans in the struggles of their favorite club. This also has an impact on the club's development opportunities towards acquiring better players and coaches.

This study is limited to a single basketball organization and primarily reflects the perspective of the sports manager, which may not fully capture the views of other key actors involved in planning and selection. The case study design also limits the generalizability of the findings, and future research should incorporate quantitative or mixed-method approaches to validate and broaden the insights. As for the future research directions, they could expand the scope of the study by including perspectives from multiple stakeholders, such as coaches, players, and support staff, to gain a more holistic view of the planning and selection processes.

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