

# Recruiting and Integrating Personnel in a Sporting Organization. Case Study: Liga Economistului, 2010-2011 Season

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## *Abstract*

*The paper presents how the recruitment and integration process of personnel was managed in Liga Economistului, a football championship in college sport. Sporting organizations, like for example leagues, clubs, associations, federations or teams, may find themselves in the situation of selecting and integrating personnel in order to fulfil needs or demands induced by participating athletes or teams, managerial structures, fans or stakeholders, or by the market, in general. This paper wants to present a successful model of recruiting and integrating human resources into a sporting organization. The model was implemented in late summer and early fall of the year 2010, before the fourth season of the Liga Economistului football championship started. Volunteers were recruited in order to help in organizing the league.*

**Keywords:** football management, HR in sport, recruiting personnel, integrating personnel, championship management

**JEL classification:** M 19, M 50

## **Introduction**

In order to sustain its development, a sporting organization needs to have free access to capital. The most important capital for a sporting organization is the human capital, not only because it includes the athletes, but also because it refers to the persons with managerial functions: the persons who make the organization exist and develop from behind the sporting field where the athletes perform. Without access to resources, organizations cannot exist. One category of resources, the human ones, is contributing to the procurement of the other types of resources. People use their abilities for drawing resources into the organization. Moreover, the human is the production factor which can bring the highest productivity to the organization (Hrebenciuc, 2010).

Considering the previous statement, sporting organizations have to pay attention to their human capital and to their human resources management. The

importance of the human capital is given by its ability to contribute to the development of the organization, because (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2007, pp. 427-428):

- The human capital is a driver of value creation in the organization, be it moral or material value;
- The know-how of each individual is transferred to the organization, enriching the knowledge capital of the latter one;
- The return on investment in the human capital has great chances to be a long-time return, not just a short-time return, as the technologic capital offers;
- The humans are the ones who initiate change and who innovate in the organization. Change and innovation are characteristics of the human being.

The functionality of a sporting organization is a result of the decisions made by its people. Thus, having people is essential for such an organization, whose managers have to make sure that the necessary human resources exist for development. If the resources do not exist in the organization, managers have to procure them. To do so, managers can use the selection/recruitment process, which is one of the key components of the human resources management.

Through the selection of personnel, the management chooses the right people with whom to work (Dumitrescu, 2004). The choice has to be made taking into consideration the vision of the manager(s) and/or the mission of the organization. The managers are the ones who have the vision of development and who formulate the mission of the organization. Therefore, the choice of human resources has also to be correlated with the development strategy of the organization.

### **1. Presentation of Liga Economistului**

The case study of this research article is based on Liga Economistului, the football championship of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. Translated into English, the name of the competition would be „The Economist’s League”. This name was chosen because of the affiliation to the Academy: we are talking about a football competition which is organized in an academy where Economics are studied and the participants are students and professors of Economics. Further on in the article, the references to the league will be made by using the Romanian title: Liga Economistului.

Ten teams play in the league, each representing a faculty (college). The main characteristic of the league – and which differentiates it from other sporting competitions – is that teams are formed both by students and professors of the Academy. At the moment when writing the article, the fourth competition season is played.

However, playing football is not all. In order to guarantee the playing possibility for participants, the league has to be organized, it has to be managed. Liga Economistului is a project of the representative governing body of the

students in the Academy of Economic Studies („Senatul Studențesc”), being organized voluntarily by students. The competition was first played in the 2007/2008 academic year, and since then it has developed continuously. The development has led to increased expectations from the participants (be they players, organizers, fans or stakeholders), which could not have been fulfilled without a better organized human resources management than in the previous editions. This is why, at the beginning of the 2010/2011 competition season (the fourth season of the league), the management of Liga Economistului decided to organize a recruitment process, in order to quantitatively and qualitatively improve the human capital, so that it could match the development needs of the organization.

## **2. Reasons that led to the decision to organize a human resources selection process**

As in a chain effect, the expectations of the participants which were previously mentioned led to managerial needs and obligations which proved to be impossible to fulfill without having a more solid (quantitative and qualitative) organizational team. To be more precise, these were the main desires or needs that led to the decision of recruiting volunteers who to offer their help in the organization of the football championship:

a) The desire to capitalize development opportunities of the competition which were finding themselves in a latent stage, like for example the use of online-based discussion forums and social media networks as communicational channels which to help improve the publicity and the visibility of the competition;

b) The need of a „Logistics” department. As the competition developed, its logistics became more complex and demanded more attention. Volunteers who to book the playground for each day of games (the playground is rented from a privately-owned business which operates 7-a-side football pitches in the city), to pay the rental-fees or to make sure that the medical equipment exists at the ground, were needed;

c) Referees were also needed. The rise in importance of the championship was followed by higher stakes on behalf of each team. Teams publicly demanded a more professional refereeing. As the competition belongs to the Academy of Economic Studies and its players and organizers are members of this institution, it was decided that the referees should also be students of the Academy. Thus, referees needed to be recruited;

d) The desire of the participants and of the stakeholders to have more interactivity in the league. That meant that more pictures and videoclips from the games, as well as news, reports and interviews which were to be posted on the official website of the competition, were demanded;

e) The desire of the participants and of the managerial board to assure more marketing promotion for the league.

### 3. The recruitment of personnel

Because it is organized by volunteers, Liga Economistului is characterized by a participative and flexible management. The hierarchical structures of the organization are flat, few differences being made between top, middle and low management: once in the managerial board of the league, everyone is invited to come up with new ideas and everyone can do anything, provided that his or her's ideas can lead to the development of the championship.

Still, in order to have a structure which to facilitate the management and the identification of eventual problems and their solutions, the following departments have been created:

- Refereeing and Laws of the Game (R&L)
- Logistics
- Marketing promotions
- Press
- Multimedia
- Statistics

The same flexibility met in the organization of the competition was met in the recruitment process. The management of Liga Economistului (which was formed by students who have helped with organizing the championship in the previous years and who have chosen to offer their support in the season to come as well), didn't show severity in recruiting the personnel. Everyone who manifested his or her's intention to get involved was accepted in the management of the league.

In order to inform the students that they could get involved in the management of the competition, word-of-mouth marketing and online marketing promotions were used. If word-of-mouth marketing was implemented spontaneous, with players, fans or organizers of Liga Economistului letting other fellow students know that they could get involved in the competition, online marketing needed more organization, but it also proved to bring better results. With matches set to start on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the first recruitment announcement was launched on August 4<sup>th</sup>, on the official webpage of the competition.

The announcement started with the information that in the 2010-2011 competition season, the management of the league will be structured in departments, as compared to the previous editions, when departments did not exist. Next, the invitation for volunteers to join the management team was launched, with each of the departments being briefly presented, in order to inform the candidates about what they would be doing if they decided to join. Following the job descriptions, the statement was made that the interested persons had to write an e-mail at the official contact address of Liga Economistului, containing their name and surname and the options for the departments. The volunteers were asked to choose the departments depending on their preferences, because, according to the managerial theory, the expectations of the volunteer have to be correlated with the ones of the organization. Finding out what preferences the volunteers had helped

the management of Liga Economistului to better integrate the recruited people in the structure of the organization.

The same principles were used during October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, when an announcement saved in a PDF-file and promoted through an online banner was placed on the individual webpage of each student. The individual webpage is an online communication tool between the Academy of Economic Studies (the administrator of the page) and its students (the users of the page). The individual webpage offers personal information about the student's educational situation, his assessments or his exam programmings, as well as other news and information about the campus life in the academy. Liga Economistului placed the recruitment announcement on the individual webpage of each Bachelor student. The Bachelors were chosen as target group because, compared to MBA students, they had more time ahead of them until graduation. If they got involved in Liga Economistului, they could manage the league over the long run, not just the short one. For example, a freshman has three years of academic life ahead of him. If his integration process in the sporting organization runs well, he may choose to extend his volunteer work to the following study years, thus guaranteeing the long-term organization and existence of the competition.

In the PDF-file, the members of the target group were informed that they could be part of the managerial team of Liga Economistului. All they had to do was to list the departments in the order that best suited them (from the most desired department first to the fewest desired last) and send the list via e-mail, next to their name and contact address.

#### **4. The integration of the volunteers in the management staff**

By sending the e-mail, the volunteers were practically selected for the managerial team. The next step was the integration of the volunteers in the management staff. The integration was done considering the desires and the competences of each volunteer. Each volunteer was distributed to a department where he/she could use his/her's knowledge at the best. The most relevant example comes from the referees. The two referees the league had in the previous seasons opted to continue as volunteers. Because the two of them had more expertise in refereeing than the other organizers (both of them were referees in professional football), they were given full control of the „Refereeing and Laws of the Game” Department. Among others, as managers of the R&L Department, they had following duties:

- Recrute other referees and build a referee team for the league;
- Nominate the referees for the football matches;
- Centralize the results of the games and the standings of the teams;
- Judge indiscipline cases which were met during the games and take actions, if necessary.

Through integration, the newly recruited volunteers are „being placed in the situation to accommodate themselves with the elements which characterize the organization where they are going to work in” (Dumitrescu, 2004, p. 152). The first step of integration was done with about two weeks before the 2010-2011 competition season of Liga Economistului was due to start, when a meeting with the volunteers took place. The volunteers were informed about what they were going to do during the season and how they could contribute to the improvement of the competition. Afterwards, during the season, managerial tasks were communicated to the volunteers via e-mail or telephone, in order to fasten the implementation of the organizational needs. Still, meetings (where volunteers met and discussed ideas, problems or solutions) remained an important managerial tool. In the beginning, the work of the new volunteers was supervised by former volunteers. After making sure that the newly arrived volunteers understood what they were supposed to do and that they did it properly, the former volunteers granted them freedom in doing organizational jobs for the competition. As an example, the official website of Liga Economistului was launched in the second competition season (2008-2009), with just one person – who was also the project manager of the competition - having access to it. In the following season two more persons were granted access to post news, reports, photographs or other types of information on the site, while in the fourth season, three other organizers became administrators of the webpage. Currently, the Internet page is managed by six volunteers. Broadening the access to the administration of the site was reflected in a better quality and a higher quantity of the information presented on the site, as well as through more attractive graphics. As a consequence, the number of visitors is constantly rising, as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1 Monthly number of views of the official website of Liga Economistului, between December 2008 and October 2010**

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2008												832
2009	97	757	6,909	4,942	2,529	494	424	424	792	9,585	28,509	3,654
2010	2,262	10,457	36,171	8,298	12,290	5,163	2,009	1,595	2,240	11,579		

Table 1 shows the number of monthly views of the official website of Liga Economistului. The site was launched in December 2008, having one single administrator. The low number of views between June and September is due to the competition break which finds place in the summer. By the beginning of the year 2010, three persons were already running the site. The site was better updated, and the fact that the number of administrators increased is reflected by the differences in the number of views per month from year 2009 to year 2010. For example, in

March 2009 the site had 6,909 views. Exactly one year later, having three administrators, the site attracted nearly five and a half more views: 36,171.

### **Conclusions**

Recruiting and integrating personnel are important steps in the human resources management of any type of organization (Burduş, 2005; Nicolescu, Verboncu, 2008), including a sporting organization, especially when the latter one targets sustainable development. Because it does not produce hard, tangible goods, but football matches – which can be seen as intangible goods – the most important resources for a championship as Liga Economistului are the human resources, which consist of the football players, as well as of the persons who are in the organizational structure of the league and who stage the competition. The paper tried to present a model of how personnel can be recruited/selected and integrated in the management of a sporting organization, on behalf of the practical example offered by the 2010-2011 competition season of Liga Economistului. It has to be clear that, in sport, as well as in business, no general success model exists. A successful model in an organization can fail when applied into another organization, because of the different influential factors. The paper presented a recruitment and integration model which proved to be successful in Liga Economistului.

As main findings of the research, the following can be mentioned:

- The development of many sporting organizations leads to the appearance of more complex needs and duties. In order to accomplish those needs and duties, the management of the organization may find itself in the situation of growing the number of employees/volunteers, as happened in Liga Economistului, so that it has more persons to whom to delegate the administrative tasks, and thus to cover the administrative requirements as much as possible;
- When finding itself in a situation which demands a growth of the number of organizers/employees, a sporting organization may skip the classic methods and techniques of recruiting personnel – as for example evaluation tests or screening (Kazanas, Rothwell, 2003) – and open its doors to every candidate who shows willingness to work within the organization.

Further research in the field of human resources management in sport could concentrate on the managerial processes of forming and developing the resources, evaluating and promoting the humans in the organization, or career development. Entering the field of leadership, papers about motivating personnel in sports can be written.

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