

# Linking Human Resources with Internal Marketing in Football Management

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## **Abstract**

*Facing a highly pressurized environment, football managers have to innovate to secure high levels of competitiveness. Being the central figure of a club, a manager can choose to link traditional human resources practices with internal marketing strategies. This inductive research tries to construct new theories about internal marketing applied to the field of sports. The relationship between the manager and several of its key stakeholders in the club (footballers, staff, board of directors and other employees) is analyzed. Discussion results show that using marketing tactics inside the club can improve the human relationships between the members of the organization and, as a consequence, the entire performance of the club. The paper also shows how each stakeholder group impacts on the wellbeing of the football club, with the manager being portrayed as the main relational knot.*

**Keywords:** *internal marketing, football management, sports marketing, human resources*

**JEL classification:** M12, M21, M31, M5

## **Introduction**

Traditionally, the marketing done by football clubs focused on the external market of the organization, targeting the club's fans. Few managers seemed to be aware of the capacity that internal marketing held to develop the structures of a club, as well as the relationship with fans. Nowadays, however, internal marketing is gaining importance even in football, especially after researchers have launched the hypothesis that internal marketing has to precede external marketing: keeping a positive relationship with employees and satisfying them is the prerequisite for delivering value to customers (Pitt, Foreman, 1999). Sports marketing is no exception from this rule. Successful fan relationships can be fostered not only through external marketing, but also through added value coming from within the organization and delivered to the market. Due to the increased competitiveness for attracting or retaining fans, clubs may have to look at internal marketing as a solution for better relationship marketing, the latter one being defined as a dealing that a club

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has with its stakeholders (Roşca, 2012). Overall, internal marketing is seen as a factor of change that can benefit the organization which adopts it as a managerial philosophy (Năstase et al., 2012).

This research is being based on an inductive approach, starting from the researcher's own observations about the managerial environment in professional football. The main problem identified is that internal marketing receives little attention in the management of football (or, to be more precise, little attention when compared to the amount of external marketing that is done).

Therefore, the purpose of the research is to construct new theories about sports-specific internal marketing. While researches exist about internal marketing in the financial, accounting, or educational services, few to none investigate how internal marketing applies in sports, particularly in football. To achieve its purpose, the research launches a global hypothesis which claims that adopting an internal marketing philosophy can bring added value to football management.

What this paper tries to construct is one of the many accounts of the football management world that can exist at the same time. One does not claim that the ideas here have to adapt in all footballing environments, but such ideas can at least invite to reflection for searching solutions to improve man-management in this sport. To this constructivism relates one of the paper's limitations: the research does not start from real, objective, (quantitative) data, but from own interpretations. Therefore, in some instances, the ideas expressed here may contradict real cases or not find wide-spread applicability, but they still maintain validity: what might not apply to a situation may do so in another managerial instance.

## **1. Theoretical Background**

Over the last decades, human resources management and internal marketing, key humanistic competences of an organization (Dima, Vlăduţescu, 2013; Năstase, 2010), have been strongly linked. Functions traditionally attributed to HR departments have been made subject to internal marketing, with the aim of improving utility (Rafiq, Pervaiz, 1993). Collins and Payne (1991) point out that human resources managers have to face trends which demand better qualification and skills, and that concepts from marketing can provide means to help managers increase their operational effectiveness. One of the most dangerous problems which has been identified in organizations is the misunderstanding of messages, which leads to ineffective communication (Vlăduţescu, 2013, 2014). Nevertheless, as harmonious cooperation is the goal in organizations and in society as well (Enăchescu, 2013), such communication problems have to be overcome. For surmounting communicational barriers, researches have pointed towards investing in human capital and towards using innovation in human resources management as a process that can improve efficiency (Bărbulescu et al., 2007; Enăchescu, Damasaru, 2013). One such pathway is transferring internal marketing know-how to human resources processes.

Schultz (2004) identifies three approaches to internal marketing, which he calls streams of implementation. The first of them belongs to Berry, who, in his seminal works on internal marketing proposed that jobs should be thought as products and that employees should be treated as internal customers (Berry, 1981). Berry was among the first authors to relate internal marketing to the degree of business success derived from the services provided by employees to customers. He encouraged not only viewing jobs as products, but employees as internal customers. This step being made, the role of the management was to satisfy the needs and wants of internal customers without losing sight of external customers and organizational objectives. Once motivated, personnel would do whatever it took to manage a good relationship with external customers (Berry, 1984).

The second approach belongs to Gronroos and is a development of Berry's theory. The two concepts are not much different, considering that Gronroos also sees employees as internal customers. Constructing on Gronroos' theory, the employee who faces the customer is essential for the firm (Barnes et al., 2004). Thus, each employee should be marketed and trained (Schultz, 2004). The reasoning behind training is that the employee must understand and, moreover, adhere to the culture of the organization, so that, when facing the customer, he can present and market his company, product or offer enthusiastically and as well as possible. Without internal marketing, the impact an employee has on customers will be low, while services may lack quality, which will lead to the customers sailing away from the firm (Gronroos, 1994). In Gronroos's view, internal marketing means selling the firm to the employees, by using marketing-like activities internally (George, Gronroos, 1991, p. 86). This approach is important because an interaction between supplier and customer has a functional quality, which consist of elements that add value to the consumer experience (Barnes et al., 2004, p. 595).

Finally, a third approach was developed in the 1990's by Rafiq and Ahmed (2000), who argued that internal marketing was difficult to implement because of differences between departments and because of the firm's resistance to change, which requires implementation of internal marketing to be preceded by an overcoming of organizational inertia (Schultz, 2004, p. 113).

## **2. Internal Marketing in Football**

Hence, internal marketing is closely associated with human resources management as employees are seen as customers to whom the firm has to deliver value (Năstase et al., 2012). The relationship between human resources and internal marketing has been given much credit in literature, but not particularly so in the field of sports, especially because researchers such as Hirschmann (1983, p. 45) argued that the marketing concept first proposed by McKitternick (1957), according to which businesses are customer and profit-oriented, is not applicable to artists and ideologists, as the values and social norms that guide their existences are different from the ones of a business. However, a football club, as an institution, may be both customer and profit-oriented. Its players will run both for glory and profits. Thus, a

new approach, which to consider the needs of players, of employees and of the organization altogether must be adopted in the club. In this respect, Johnson et al.'s (1986, p. 140) definition of internal marketing as a firm's effort „to provide all members of the organization with a clear understanding of the corporate mission and objectives”, should be carefully taken into consideration by club managers. This is important because, as in service-based industries, football teams interact with their fans through its employees: the level of fan satisfaction will depend on how well footballers will perform on the pitch. The players' performance, in turn, is a function of how well the other employees of the club prepare them for the game.

Therefore, the human resources of a sporting organization can be made subject to internal marketing. Moreover, footballers and other employees of the football club are part of the value-added chain of the organization (Lings, 1999), and thus contribute to the creation of value which is sold to the external market, hence to the fans, with whom the organization has to develop a relationship marketing. In such conditions, internal marketing can be defined as an action which most of the times is launched by the football club's management, and which is directed at employees and stakeholders in order to motivate them to work for accomplishing the organizational goals (Schultz, 2004).

As can be seen, an important role in internally marketing the sports organization is held by the team manager. If football players want to perform well and deliver winning matches to the fans, they will need good management and leadership. A club can only be as good as its manager, players, employees and strategy. Therefore, human resources management is probably the main issue of internal marketing, which, at its turn, is the key to a successful market or network-oriented management of a football club. Marketing can only be done by human resources (Enăchescu, Căce, 2010), and having the right resources in the right positions will bring success closer to the team.

### **3. Methodology**

This issue has been chosen for research for several reasons. Once, football management in itself is a relatively new scientific research topic, which would use to have more insights for the development of the field of study. Hence, one of the first motivations for taking football as the applied background for a study on internal marketing was to contribute to the enrichment of the literature on football business. In the context of the current transformations of football, where the sport becomes increasingly globalized and business-oriented, having sounder academic literature can prove a milestone for the further developments of the game.

Second, another motivation was to have a study that combines topics to whom less attention was granted by academia: internal marketing and football management. The curiosity of finding out what theories might develop from putting the two together was another lead for proceeding with the research, while, last but not least, personal interest has also had a major role.

The interpretations of the roles of internal marketing in football are put on paper after having been run through the perceptual filters of the researcher. Therefore, this desk research grounded on secondary data is a “becoming” theory. After the research problem and mission having been discovered, theories are constructed with the help of a heuristic procedure: the researcher tries to answer the problem after entering his own opinions in a reflective process. This phenomenological inquiry is done with the aim of discovering interpretations that may not have been expressed before. From such interpretations might arise new theories and practices.

#### **4. The Football Manager and his tasks in the club**

The football manager is, probably, the central figure of a club (Roșca, 2010a, 2010b). Although it has existed since the very beginnings of the game, the role of the football manager is believed to have gained importance in the inter-war period, once with the raise of a managerial middle class in business Europe (McKibbin, 1998). As the game developed, a set of issues far larger than the simple coaching of players emerged in football. The creation of scouting systems and nursery clubs, the improvement of radio broadcasting, the demand from the press, the increased bureaucratization of football or the higher involvement of clubs in societal life, were all activities of the club which needed to be carefully coordinated. Because of the attention that press paid to football in the 1930's, the performance of the club was linked closer and closer to the manager. As in other businesses, the football manager is a leader who has to transpose his vision into strategy (Năstase, 2009a, 2009b).

Football is a results-driven industry, which means that managers are assessed by the results they achieve with their teams. Due to intense competition, the jobs of managers who do not deliver results are highly insecure (Turner, White, 1993). Moreover, as Bridgewater (2010) observes, football managers are doing their jobs in the spotlight. Every decision is analysed by pundits, and every mistake will be shown on TV or presented through the Internet or via radio. Mass-media is the new business model not only in post-modern society, but in football as well, with the emergency of new technologies highly influencing managerial and consumption practices (Pelău, Zegreanu, 2010; Pop et al., 2012; Stavre, 2013). Audio-visuals shape human behavior (Stavre, 2004), but not only mass-media has an eye on the managers, but fans and boards of clubs as well. In such a pressurized environment, managers will be the first to be accused in case of defeat, as individuals praise or blame their models on behalf of what they perceive in their daily lives (Drămnescu, 2010).

What a manager has to do in a club is to educate and to direct the members of the club towards a common goal (Roșca, 2010c). In trying to do so, he will be aided by his staff of assistants (Roșca, 2010d). An important aspect of the managerial job is the coaching of players, but, then, the manager also has to coordinate the non-playing members of the club, so as to approach sporting success. Therefore, the club manager has got responsibility for the sporting performance, as well as for the marketing of the club. Hence, having good leadership and management in the club

are critical for both sporting and business performance. The quality of a performance depends much on the leadership, as several researchers have demonstrated for the wider business market (Mannion, 2009).

In a comprehensive study, Perry (2000) identifies the most important roles football managers have had after the implementation of the Bosman Ruling in 1995. Many tasks a manager has to accomplish are stipulated in the contract with the club, but however, most of them are only implicit, as they are considered to be unwritten laws of football management.

Thus, the tasks of a football manager are (Perry, 2000, cited by Kupfer, 2006, pp. 113-114):

a) Main tasks:

- deciding the starting line-up
- decisions regarding tactics and their implementation
- establishing a long-term plan for developing teams
- decisions regarding training methods and strategies
- developing individuals
- preparing matches in advance, scouting opponent teams
- integrating foreign players in the squad
- building a managerial staff
- taking part in the meetings of the board
- accomplishing PR activities round football matches, such as press conferences.

b) Additional tasks:

- contract and wages negotiations
- correspondence regarding footballing matters
- contributions to the club's public relations, club's brands and club's image development, as well as relationships with the sponsors
- plan specifications (to internal or external partners)
- developing and managing the club's scouting strategy
- developing and managing the club's youth scheme (academy).

c) Possible additional tasks:

- contact nursing with officials, referees and other stakeholders
- budgeting and financial management, mostly in what concerns the sporting department of the club
- logistic tasks, such as trip planing, bus loans or accommodation.

d) Further tasks, through adding special knowledge units (such as doctors, rehab experts, psychologists etc.) to the club.

## **5. Relationships of the manager with the human resources of the club**

In doing their tasks at the football clubs, managers interact with the other human resources in the organization. According to the internal marketing paradigm, a manager has to satisfy both players and employees of the club, as well as fans.

Amongst the most important relationships a manager has in his football clubs are with the following stakeholders:

### **Players**

Players do marketing for the club by acting upon the product policy. Considering that the main product a club offers is the football match bought by the fans, it is the players together with the manager and the staff who are directly involved in the production process. The higher the satisfaction of players, the better the performance they will deliver on the pitch, and the higher the satisfaction of the fans. In such conditions, players are themselves internal marketers of the club, as they deliver a product which impacts upon fan satisfaction. If the fan is satisfied with the team's performance, he will rebuy football matches: he will either return to the stadium and buy tickets to watch more games, or he will follow the team more intensely through mass media. In the first situation, financial streams of the club will be developed, while in the second one brand awareness will be built and the fans' loyalty to the club's brand will be formed.

Player satisfaction is a reason which speaks for board members to be patient with managers and to offer them long enough tenures to prepare the team for success. The higher the frequency of managerial change, the faster player satisfaction will drop. If managers are changed too often, players will become confused, and their game will suffer. The quality of the football matches delivered to the fans will also drop, as will fan satisfaction. This example shows what an influence managerial tenure has on the marketing of the football club. In most of the cases, if a club wants a good marketing, then it would be appropriate not to change managers very often and to wait for a successful relationship to be built between manager and players. The authority of a leader is, in general, a motivator for its followers (Drămnescu, 2014). Time is a factor in building authority, hence the need of longevity for football managers.

Football players, as other individuals, may be inconsistent in the tasks performed. Internal marketing serves to reducing inconsistency and improving sporting output quality, both at training and in matches, by implementing better designed practice sessions and by providing better man-management and other resources management. However, this can only happen if the manager is granted enough time to implement his ideas, thus if his tenure is long enough to allow him to work with his players on a long-term strategy.

### **Staff**

The coaching staff is a body that provides assistance to the manager, being tied to the sports team. The staff does not include football players, but it assists them. The staff usually consists of the following positions:

- Assistant manager
- Goalkeeping coach
- First team coach

- Reserve team coach
- Fitness coach
- Physiotherapist
- Assistant Physiotherapist
- Club doctor
- Masseur
- Kit Manager
- Equipment manager
- Nutritionist
- Football performance analyst
- Head of scouting.

Depending on his needs or on his wishes, a manager may add further positions to the staff, but the positions earlier presented are the most common met in football and are important for the good functioning of a club. The members of the staff provide valuable knowledge to the manager, as many of them are the ones closest to the players. For example, the assistant manager and the first team coach are the persons who are often the most involved in training, and, thus, can offer information about the shape of the athletes and how they perform in training. If there are medical problems, the team doctor will generate knowledge regarding the health of the player, through the medical examination he does, and then he will offer information to the manager concerning the health state of the player.

Thus, the staff is an advice group without which the manager would find it hard to manage the team, as he would not have nor the necessary time, nor the qualifications to do all the tasks. By having a staff, the manager delegates several tasks to his assistants, who do the job for him. Each one being a specialist in the job he has to do, staff members will provide accurate knowledge to the team manager, which may prove to be decisive in obtaining sporting success.

Because the staff has such an importance, the manager will have to pay careful attention to the selection and recruitment process of the staff members, as he will seek to offer the jobs to the people who not only have vast knowledge, but who also fit the best in the philosophy of the club. The manager, as an internal marketer of the club, will also have to take care of staff satisfaction. The higher the staff satisfaction, the higher the commitment of its members, and the better the players will be trained and the deeper the attention they will receive from staff members. In such conditions, sporting success will come closer.

### **Board of directors**

In sports, the board of directors has the role of a policy board (Hoye, Cuskelly, 2007), which means it bears responsibility for developing politics for the football club. Otherwise told, the board of directors is „governing” the football club. As their employer, having the right to make decisions regarding their future in the club, the board also evaluates the work done by club or team managers.



Together with the board of directors, the manager has to develop the club's strategy. The cooperation between board and manager is essential, as in most of the cases each side has knowledge that the other lacks. The manager has athletic knowledge, but may lack managerial, marketing and economic knowledge, while the board has the business knowledge needed to run a club, but does not have the necessary sporting knowledge for football team management. The two have to share knowledge in order to build a strategy based on which the club can be run properly. The strategy must be created in such a way that the whole club can benefit from it, not only separate departments. The strategy is done for the club, and, then, the departments have to adapt in order to follow the strategy.

### **Club Employees**

Whereas the staff is closely operating to the team, the club also has its other employees. These employees help run the club and it is them who implement decisions and strategies regarding marketing and fan-relationships. Employees may find jobs in club departments such as Merchandising, Hospitality and Events, Facilities, Security, Consumer Sales, Information Technology, Media, Marketing and Communications, Finance, or Human Resources.

Each department of the club generates value for the fans. The value is obtained through the operational work done by employees. In a wider sense, the departments of the club are part of the marketing of the club, which means that the better the work done in those departments, the higher the value the fans will receive either directly from the departments, or indirectly from the evolution of the club, which will improve as a result of the extra value which can be extracted from the departments and used for development.

The manager may not have an important role in employing people, as employment may be done by other club directors or by the Human Resources department, but he will have to maintain close contact to departments and use their expertise whenever needed. Also, the manager may find it good to establish joint strategies with the departments, as he has the vision of where he wants to land his club and the resources he needs to do so, but the departments know which operations have to be done in order to cope with the wishes of the manager, and if such operations are feasible or not.

As with the staff members, the higher the employee satisfaction, the greater the commitment and the better the marketing they will do for the club, which will be better prepared for winning.

## Conclusions

As has been seen in the earlier examples, there is a snowball-effect between employee satisfaction, quality of marketing and sporting success. The higher one of them, the higher will be the other too, and so on.

In the optics of an internal marketing approach, if a sports club wants to satisfy its fans and have a good relationship marketing with them, i.e. if it wants to have a good external marketing – which was previously indicated by scientific research in the area of sports management (Roşca, 2013a) – it will also have to satisfy its employees. The main idea linked to this claim is that internal marketing helps in smoothly running the football club. A manager can delegate duties and responsibilities to his staff members or other club employees, whom, in turn, support him with actions and their expert knowledge (Roşca, 2013b). However, for good results of the delegation, a good internal marketing is also needed: the better the personal relationships between the individuals in a club, the better the chances of higher performances. Man-management, as a constant of a sporting organization, has to be done at its highest level, and applying marketing practices to internal employees can bring extra motivation to them.

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