The impact of strategic management on the competitive performance of Ethiopian premier league soccer clubs

Impacto de la gestión estratégica en el rendimiento competitivo de los clubes de fútbol de la primera división etíope

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Abstract

Introduction: Sport governance encompasses the strategic direction and organizational functioning essential to the success of sport entities worldwide, including clubs, national bodies and professional teams.
Aim: This study examines the relationship between strategic management practices and the performance of Ethiopian men's soccer premier league clubs.
Methods: The study employed a correlational research design with a sample of 118 participants, including managers, coaches, administrative personnel, and Ethiopian Premier League (EL) players. Data were collected via stratified random sampling and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (e.g., regression, ANOVA, Pearson's correlation).
Result: Results indicate that strategic management practices significantly impact organizational performance, explaining 37.8% of variance in club revenue (R^2 = .378) and 43.5% of variance in customer satisfaction (R^2 = .435).
Conclusion: Strategic management practices are positively and significantly correlated with organizational performance, highlighting the importance of governance in terms of enhancing revenue and customer satisfaction among soccer clubs.

Keywords

Governance practices; performance; sport governance; strategic management; strategic practice.

Resumen

Introducción: La gobernanza deportiva abarca la dirección estratégica y el funcionamiento organizativo esenciales para el éxito de las entidades deportivas de todo el mundo, incluidos los clubes, los organismos nacionales y los equipos profesionales.
Objetivo: Este estudio examina la relación entre las prácticas de gestión estratégica y el rendimiento de los clubes etíopes de la primera división de fútbol masculino.
Métodos: Este estudio empleó un diseño de investigación correlacional con una muestra de 118 participantes, incluidos directivos, entrenadores, personal administrativo y jugadores de la primera división etíope (EL). Los datos se recogieron mediante muestreo aleatorio estratificado y se analizaron utilizando estadísticas descriptivas e inferenciales (por ejemplo, regresión, ANOVA y correlación de Pearson).
Resultados: Los resultados indican que las prácticas de gestión estratégica influyen significativamente en el rendimiento de la organización, explicando el 37,8% de la varianza en los ingresos de los clubes (R^2 = .378) y el 43,5% de la varianza en la satisfacción del cliente (R^2 = .435).
Conclusiones: Las prácticas de gestión estratégica se correlacionan positiva y significativamente con el rendimiento organizativo, lo que pone de relieve la importancia de la gobernanza en la mejora de los ingresos y la satisfacción del cliente entre los clubes de fútbol.

Palabras clave

Prácticas de gobernanza; Rendimiento; Gobernanza deportiva; Gestión estratégica; Prácticas estratégicas.

Introduction

Sports management encompasses various responsibilities, including coordinating events, overseeing teams and athletes, addressing potential risks, and handling financial matters. This discipline highlights the crucial role of organizational culture, effective communication, and innovative approaches in boosting productivity and performance within the sports sector (Navarro et al., 2024). According to Tošić (2023), management in sports organizations is essential for establishing goals, synchronizing efforts, and upholding order. It enhances the distribution of resources, draws in sponsors and supporters, and secures financial stability, ultimately leading to athletic performance and business.

One of the core issues in sport management is strategic management. Strategic management encompasses deliberate balancing and acquisition of resources across multiple domains, including player development, community engagement, profit maximization, and competitive success (Hoye et al., 2015). The process involves aligning organizational objectives to achieve superior performance across these areas. Alexandru et al. (2023) emphasized that strategic management fosters a competitive advantage in sports organizations by promoting innovation, optimizing resource utilization, and ensuring alignment between organizational vision and goals. Such practices address stakeholder expectations and market demands, which are critical for enhancing productivity and operational efficiency.

Further study is required to explore how strategic management practices vary between financially constrained and resource-abundant Ethiopian soccer clubs and whether these differences influence the competitive dynamics of Ethiopian soccer. Effective strategic management in sports requires not only the allocation of adequate resources but also the integration of leadership insight, innovation, adaptability, and commitment. Beech and Chadwick (2013) emphasized the importance of identifying areas for operational or strategic adjustments while ensuring consistency in core objectives. Delarestaghi et al. (2017) outline three key benefits of strategic management in sports: organizational benefits, including improved innovation, streamlined processes, and enhanced efficiency; individual benefits, such as improved managerial competencies, increased job satisfaction, and employee motivation; and social benefits, encompassing consumer value creation, employment stability, and stronger community relationships. Together, these dimensions highlight the multifaceted role of strategic management in fostering organizational growth, individual development, and social value. Future research could explore how Ethiopian soccer clubs balance sustainability and community engagement dimensions.

Organizational performance in sports is often evaluated by the extent to which an organization achieves its objectives, particularly regarding operational efficiency, resource utilization, and stakeholder satisfaction (Leeann, 2020). In highly competitive environments, organizations are compelled to continuously enhance their performance to remain viable. Hitt et al. (2020) argued that strategic management significantly enhances competitive positioning and financial outcomes. Indra et al. (2020) stated that performance indicators in sports organizations include customer satisfaction, financial performance, internal process efficiency, and opportunities for growth and learning. Similarly, Kamila (2018) emphasized the importance of key performance indicators (KPIs), which integrate financial and non-financial measures to align strategic objectives with actionable goals, motivate employees, and improve operational efficiency. Further investigation is needed to determine which KPIs are most relevant to Ethiopian soccer clubs and how these indicators can be tailored to reflect the country's unique socioeconomic and cultural context.

Financial performance and customer satisfaction consistently emerge as critical metrics for measuring the success of sports organizations. Mohammad and Hamideh (2016) argued that financial performance directly impacts organizational sustainability by enabling investments in high-caliber athletes, which enhances competitive outcomes. Similarly, Jose et al. (2019) emphasized the role of customer satisfaction in influencing service quality, customer loyalty, and organizational efficiency. Lilia and Olga (2017) highlighted the positive correlation between strategic management and customer-focused innovations and stated that clubs that prioritize customer satisfaction gain a competitive edge. Future studies could examine how Ethiopian soccer clubs balance financial and customer satisfaction priorities and whether one metric outweighs the others in driving long-term performance.

Several studies have examined the relationship between strategic management and financial outcomes, although they have produced mixed results. Obonyo et al. (2016) found that Strategic Planning

Intensity (SPI) significantly improves financial performance in sports federations, whereas Joao et al. (2018) reported inconclusive findings in Brazilian soccer clubs, suggesting the need for contextual considerations. Matieu (2012) proposed that strategic management enhances financial performance by enabling organizations to measure, monitor, and control their financial processes, thereby ensuring informed decision-making and optimal resource allocation. Further research should assess whether SPI plays a similarly significant role in Ethiopian soccer clubs and explore whether factors such as market size, governance structures, and resource availability moderate its impact.

Customer satisfaction is increasingly recognized as a core alternative measure of organizational effectiveness. According to Wahid et al. (2015), strategic management practices that emphasize customer satisfaction create value, foster loyalty, and improve the organization's reputation. These practices include a systematic evaluation of customer expectations and the incorporation of feedback into operational improvements. For Ethiopian soccer clubs, enhancing customer satisfaction could involve strategies such as improving fan engagement, enhancing match day experiences, and addressing stakeholder concerns. Future studies could delve into the specific strategies that Ethiopian clubs employ to measure and improve customer satisfaction and investigate how these efforts translate into greater competitive performance.

Ethiopian soccer clubs, particularly those in the Premier League, face several types of pressure from stakeholders, including fans, government entities, and sponsors. These pressures range from generating higher revenue and increasing membership to achieving competitive success at national and international levels. Addressing these challenges requires the adoption of effective strategic management techniques that are tailored to the unique needs of the local context. However, research on strategic management practices in Ethiopian sports organizations is scarce. Most studies in this field have focused on financial institutions or sports organizations in developed countries, leaving a critical gap in understanding how such practices can be adapted to developing nations. Future research should examine how governance practices such as transparency, accountability and community engagement influence the performance and sustainability of Ethiopian soccer clubs.

To address these gaps, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of strategic management as a governance practice on Ethiopian Premier League soccer club revenues?

2. What is the impact of strategic management as a governance practice on the customer satisfaction of soccer club stakeholders?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study comprised managers, administrative personnel, coaching staff, and soccer club players who participated in the 2023/2024 tournaments of the Ethiopian male soccer Premier League. From the total of sixteen Ethiopian soccer premier league clubs, 13 that have participated in the championship for two consecutive years were included in this study. A total of 207 participants were included in this study. This research employed a proportional-stratified random sampling technique to select respondents from coaching staff, players, and administrative workers. Additionally, club managers were selected using a convenient nonrandom sampling technique. A minimum of 118 individuals were sampled from the study population.

Instrument

The study employed a questionnaire to collect data from managers, administrative personnel, coaching staff, and football players participating in the 2023 and 2024 (2015 and 2016 E.C) tournaments of the Ethiopian Male Football Premier League. The questionnaire was structured into sections. The initial part captured general information about the respondents and subsequently solicited specific information related to the research questions. The questionnaires were self-administered to the respondents, who were instructed to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "Strongly Disagree," 2 represented "Disagree," 3 represented "Neutral," 4 represented "Agree," and 5 represented "Strongly Agree."

Procedure

The researcher collected data from the selected respondents after obtaining approval from the Hawassa University College of Natural and Computational Science, Ethiopia soccer Federation, and the relevant clubs. During the visit, the researcher informed the officials about the study objectives and scheduled appointments for data collection. Questionnaires were administered to all managers, administrative personnel, coaching staff, and players of each Ethiopian Premier League club. After a familiarization process, data were collected from respondents using the aforementioned instrument.

Data Analysis

The study used descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, and frequency distribution. This research employed several inferential tests, including correlation, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and regression. Pearson's Product Moment correlation and regression analysis were used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between strategic management practices and organizational performance of Ethiopian football premier league clubs, focusing on financial and customer satisfaction indicators. SPSS version 27 software was employed for data analysis.

Results

Demographic Information

This demographic information session presents the descriptive statistics and demographic and general data derived from the questionnaires. The following information was included: respondents' position held in the club; respondents' age; level of education; and respondents' work experience.

Table 1. Position of the respondent in the club

		Frequency	Percentage
Specialization	Manager	8	6.8
	Coach	38	32.2
	Physiotrapist	9	7.6
	Player	35	29.7
	Administrative worker	28	23.7
Age	21-25	20	16.9
	26-30	37	31.4
	31-35	22	18.6
	36-40	31	26.3
	Above 40	7	5.9
Educational background	High school	40	33.9
	Diploma	47	39.8
	Degree	25	21.2
	Master	6	5.1

According to table1, the study sample consisted of various stakeholders within Ethiopian football clubs, including managers (n = 8, 6.8%), coaches (n = 38, 32.2%), physiotherapists (n = 9, 7.6%), players (n = 35, 29.7%), and administrative workers (n = 28, 23.7%). Regarding age distribution, the majority of participants were between 26 and 30 years old (n = 37, 31.4%), followed by those aged 36 to 40 years (n = 31, 26.3%), 31 to 35 years (n = 22, 18.6%), and 21 to 25 years (n = 20, 16.9%). A smaller proportion of participants were above 40 years old (n = 7, 5.9%). In terms of educational background, the highest proportion of respondents held a diploma (n = 47, 39.8%), followed by those with a high school education (n = 40, 33.9%). Participants with a bachelor's degree comprised 21.2% of the sample (n = 25), while a small percentage held a master's degree (n = 6, 5.1%).

Comprehensive Strategic management and Organizational Performance

This section presents results for the assessment of comprehensive management's impact on the organizational performance of Ethiopia's male soccer premier league and the effect of comprehensive management on organizational performance as measured by revenue and customer satisfaction.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Comprehensive Strategic Management

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your soccer club describes its strategic plan.	118	3.98	1.013
Your soccer club has approved a long-term strategic plan.	118	3.81	1.064
Your soccer club will implement strategic decisions.	118	3.86	1.104
Your soccer club controls and evaluates its strategic decisions.	118	3.98	.978
The board of your soccer club will make strategic decisions.	118	3.97	.947
The board of your soccer club can empower management	118	4.08	.808
The board of your soccer club works as a team.	118	4.03	.876
Total	118		

Source: field survey 2024

This study analyzed the mean and standard deviation of the components of comprehensive strategic management. Table 2 shows the mean for “their football club formulates its strategic plan” (M = 3.98, SD = 1.013), the mean for “their football club approves long-term strategic plan”, (M = 3.81, SD = 1.064), for mean “their football club implements strategic decisions” (M = 3.86, SD = 1.104); the mean for “their football club controls and evaluates its strategic decisions” (M=3.98,SD=.978), for the mean of “the board of their football club is involved in making strategic decisions”(M=3.97,SD=.947), the mean of “ The board of their football club empowers the management”(M=4.08, SD=.808) and the mean for item “ The board of your football club works as a team” (M=4.03,SD=.876)

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Performance of Revenue

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your club is financially sustainable now and into the future.	118	3.68	1.053
Your club generates sufficient revenue to achieve its operational and strategic goals.	118	3.38	1.233
Your club maximize its revenue from sponsoring.	118	3.57	1.173
Your club maximize its revenue from the day of the competition.	118	3.65	1.057
Your club maximize its revenue from its merchandise.	118	3.47	1.217
Your club maximizes its revenue through social activities.	118	3.34	1.126
Your club maximize its revenue from fundraising events.	118	3.38	1.212
Your club maximize its revenue from membership.	118	3.45	1.144
Your club maximize its revenue from grants.	118	3.36	1.259
Total	118		

Source: Feild Survey 2024

This study analyzes the mean and standard deviation of the components of organizational performance of revenue. Table 3 shows the mean for “their club is financially sustainable now and into the future, (M = 3.68, SD = 1.053), the mean for “their club generates sufficient levels of revenue to achieve its operational and strategic goals”, (M = 3.38, SD = 1.233), for mean “their club maximizes its revenue from sponsorship” (M = 3.57, SD = 1.173); the mean for “their club maximizes its revenue from competition day attendance” (M=3.65,SD=1.057), for the mean of “their club maximizes its revenue from club merchandise”(M=3.47,SD= 1.217), the mean of “their club maximizes its revenue from social functions.”(M=3.34, SD= 1.126), the mean for item “their club maximizes its revenue from fundraising events (M=3.38, SD=.1.212), the mean for item “their club maximizes its revenue from membership. (M=3.45, SD=.1.144), and the mean for item “their club maximizes its revenue from grants (M=3.36, SD=.1.256).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Organizational Performance of Customer Satisfaction

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Implementing the club strategic plan	118	3.66	1.006
Implementing club objectives	118	3.81	.942
Club board decision-making quality	118	3.81	1.021
Club board members and management skills and experience	118	3.87	.902
Club heritage and tradition	118	3.97	.852
Financial payment for work performed	118	3.88	1.103
Openness to criticism and suggestions for club changes	118	3.74	.973
The level of cooperation between athletes	118	4.06	.766
Help level of the athlete to ease the adaptation of the new joining athlete	118	3.98	.816
Prospective team success	118	4.02	.978
Team performance	118	4.03	.779
Total	118		

Source: Field survey 2024

This study analyzes the mean and standard deviation of the components of organizational performance for customer satisfaction. Table 4 shows the mean for “The implementation of club strategic plan, (M = 3.66, SD = 1.006), the mean for "The implementation of club objective", (M = 3.81, SD = 0.942), for mean "Club board decision making quality" (M = 3.81, SD = 1.021); the mean for "Club board members and management skill and experience" (M=3.87,SD=0.902), for the mean of "Club heritage and tradition"(M=3.97,SD= 0.852), the mean of "The financial remuneration for the work carried out."(M=3.88, SD= 1.103), the mean for item "The openness for criticism and suggestions for changes in the club (M=3.74, SD=.0.973), the mean for item "The level of the athlete's cooperation with each other's" (M=4.06, SD=.0.766) and the mean for item "The helping level of the athlete to ease the adaptation new joining athlete" (M=3.98, SD 0.816).), the mean for item "Prospective team success" (M=4.02, SD=.0.978) and the mean for item "Team performance" (M=4.03, SD 0.779)

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

This study attempted to establish the impact of comprehensive strategic management on the dependent variable constructs of club performance of revenue and club performance) on satisfaction.

The effect of comprehensive strategic management on club revenues

Multiple regression models were used to test whether comprehensive strategic management significantly predicted club revenue performance. The results are presented in three tables: model summary (Table 5), ANOVA (Table 6), and Coefficients (Table 7).

Table 5.Regression model for variance in revenue

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R^2 value	Std. Error in Estimation	Durbin-Watson
1	.615[a]	.378	.372	.762	1.774
a. Predictors: (Constant), SM					
b. Dependent Variable: CPR					

The model summary results in Table 5 Indicate that 37.8% of the variance in club performance in revenue was explained by comprehensive strategic management (R^2 =.378).

Table 6. Regression ANOVA for predicting revenue

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.919	1	40.919	70.394	.000[b]
	Residual	67.429	116	.581		
	Total	108.348	117			
a. Dependent Variable: CPR						
b. Predictors: (Constant), SM						

As above table of ANOVA result in table 6 depicted, comprehensive strategic management statistically significantly predicted revenue, F (1,116) = 70.394, p <.05.

Table 7. Significant impact of strategic management on revenue

Coefficients								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.513	.360		1.425	.157	-.200	1.226
	SM	.749	.089	.615	8.390	.000	.572	.925
a. Dependent Variable: CPR								

The multiple linear regression results of the study showed that comprehensive strategic management has a significant impact on club performance of revenue β= .615, t (118) = 8.390, p < .05. This means that a unit increases in comprehensive strategic management practice would increase club revenue by 0.749 units. This result is show in table 7.

The effect of comprehensive strategic management on club stakeholder satisfaction

Multiple linear regressions were used to test whether comprehensive strategic management significantly predicted club customer satisfaction. The results are presented in three tables: model summary (Table 8), ANOVA (Table.9), and Coefficients (Table 10).

Table 8. Regression model for variance in customer satisfaction

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted value	Std. Error in Estimation	Durbin-Watson
1	.659[a]	.435	.430	.548	1.793
a. Predictors: (Constant), SM					
b. Dependent Variable: CPS					

According to the model summary table in Table 8, the multiple regression results indicate that the inclusion of comprehensive strategic management practice can predict 43.5% of the variance in club satisfaction (R2 =.435).

Table 9. Regression ANOVA for predicting revenue

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	26.850	1	26.850	89.279	.000[b]
	Residual	34.885	116	.301		
	Total	61.735	117			
a. Dependent Variable: CPS						
b. Predictors: (Constant), SM						

ANOVA Table 9 shows that comprehensive strategic management practice statistically significantly predicted club performance on customer satisfaction (1, 116) = 89.279, p < .05).

Table 10. Strategic management significant impact on customer satisfaction

Coefficients								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.494	.259		5.768	.000	.981	2.007
	SM	.606	.064	.659	9.449	.000	.479	.733
a. Dependent Variable: CPS								

The multiple linear regression results showed that comprehensive strategic management practice had a positive significant impact on club customer satisfaction, β = .659, t (118) = 9.449, p < .05. In general this means that units increase in comprehensive strategic management practice would increase club customer satisfaction by 0.606 units. The results are presented in Table 10.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of comprehensive strategic management practices as governance practices) on the organizational performance of Ethiopia's premier league soccer teams. This study selects comprehensive strategic management from the governance perspective as an influential factor on cub performance of revenue and customer satisfaction. By building a conceptual model to link together comprehensive strategic management as governance practice and organizational performance of revenue and customer satisfaction, the study provides the answer to the research questions of to what extent comprehensive strategic management has an effect on the organizational performance of clubs' revenue and customer satisfaction.

The result analysis of this research depicted that the strategic management activity done in sport organization like soccer club has a positive strong correlation with their organizational performance in terms of revenue sustainability and customer satisfaction. In general the organization performance should be influenced by its strategic management practices. The results of the different studies are supported. For instance the research result done by Monye & Ibegbulem (2018) shown organizational performance is enhanced by strategic plan practice, and in the long run, it has an impact on its profitability. A random-effects meta-analysis by Bert George et al. (2019) revealed that strategic planning has a positive, moderate, and significant impact on organizational performance. Moreover, other studies (Aboramadan & Borgonovi, 2016; Petkovic et al., 2016) have confirmed that strategic management has a significant impact on organizational success variables (effectiveness, performance, knowledge management, etc.). As study revealed in Adegbuyi et al. (2015) performance of organization is positively and significantly influenced in strategic management and has a significant effect on financial and non-financial performance (Aboramadan & Borgonovi, 2016). Ouche et al. (2016) asserted in their result that strategic planning has a positive and significant influence on the annual income of National Sports Federations in Kenya.

Galariotis et al. (2018) study reported that the financial performance of soccer clubs impacted sports results. According to this result, sports organizations should focus on strategic management to sustainably manage club revenues. Barajas et al. (2005) confirmed that sporting revenues are the best-explaining variable for explaining team performance. This result is similar to that of Carmichael et al. (2010), implying a positive correlation between revenue and sporting performance. Studies show that there is a sweet spot for sporting performance that examines economic outcomes. As revenue increases depend on the strategic management practices of clubs, according to the reviewed literature, the competitive performance of a sports club depends on strategic management practices.

Conclusions

This study aimed to assess the impact of strategic management as a governance practice on the revenue and customer satisfaction of Ethiopia's premier soccer clubs. Based on quantitative analysis of multiple regressions the results indicate that comprehensive strategic management practice is positively and strongly correlated with organizational performance of revenue, and the result significantly predicts revenue change in an organization. Moreover, as the research result of the regression depicted that comprehensive strategic management practice is positively and strongly correlated with organizational performance of customer satisfaction, in other ways, the result significantly shows customer satisfaction change in an organization.

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