

# Customer-oriented strategy in Greek sport business sector: The case of the sport enterprise “Holmes place Glyfada”

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## Abstract

The primary objectives of this research were: (a) to determine the extent to which the customer oriented strategy (customers' perspective) is implemented to Greek sport business sector and more specifically in sport enterprise “Holmes Place Glyfada”, and (b) to investigate if differences exist between the customer oriented strategy (according to its members' evaluation) and demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, work experience and educational level of the participants).

The particular research project is an on-going research and up to now data has been gathered from a random sample of 200 members of a large sport enterprise in Attica. For the purpose of this study a 43-item questionnaire, was used (developed by Whiteley 1991) focusing on customer oriented strategy and demographic characteristics of the participants, using a five point Likert scale. The reliability of the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .95$ . Descriptive statistics and Pearson chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistics were used to examine variables relationship using SPSS software (version 22).

The results highlighted the strong and weak points of customer oriented strategy application by the sport enterprise and significant differences between the customer oriented strategy and demographic characteristics of the participants.

This study is useful in extending the concept of customer oriented strategy to the sport business sector. The study will be useful in helping managers to their further understanding of the customer oriented strategy process in their respective organization.

## Keywords

Customer oriented strategy; sport business; customers

## 1. Introduction

In order for a company to have a competitive and dynamic position in the market, customers have to be satisfied and delighted with the service provided. To produce that result, service organizations should work hand in hand to enhance their customers' satisfaction and loyalty. In this regard, one of the most powerful tools to achieve this is the customer orientation which can create competitive advantage by generating product value that is rare, difficult to imitate and of superior quality (Narver Slater, & MacLanchlan, 2000). This creation of value occurs by increasing benefits to customers while decreasing costs (Gladson Nwokah and Maclayton, 2006).

Brady and Cronin (2001) claimed that a customer orientation philosophy emerges as one of the most important practices in the marketing field. Moreover, the literature has also highlighted the importance of customer-orientated behavior through making the customer's interest the first priority and concern for employees. As a result, long-term, mutual, and profitable relationships can be established between all parties (Hartline et al., 2000; Kim et al., 2004) A customer-oriented firm has a greater chance of satisfying its customers than do firms that lack a customer orientation approach (Dia Zeglat, Mohammad Aljaber, Wasfi Alrawabdeh, 2014).

Customer orientation has been defined as "the set of beliefs that puts the customer's interests first, while not excluding those of all others stakeholders such as owners, managers and employees, in order to develop a long – term profitable enterprise (Deshpandé, Farley and Webster, 1993, p.27). In addition, Bartley, Comibuchi and Mann (2007) stated that customer orientation is the company's interest in the customer needs (past, present and future) and expectations and its commitment in understanding and fulfilling them, aiming at long – term development. Moreover, customer orientation has been defined as an integral orientation of the organism towards developing skills and broadening the services that satisfy customer needs and expectations (Korunka Scharitzer, Carayon, Hoonakker, Sonnek, & Sainfort, 2007; Oberg, 2011).

Customer orientation can be viewed as a bridging strategy to gain access to critical information about customer needs (Salomo Steinhoff, & Trommsdorff, 2003). According to the literature customer orientation is the core of business success and everyone in the organizations needs to understand and know about its importance, while if the firm has greater understanding of customer preferences it can construct financially profitable offerings (Brännback, 1999; Dawes, 2000). In other words customer orientation is believed to be foster a number of positive marketing outcomes. Customer orientation is widely considered a research priority and the implementation of customer oriented strategies is subject to extensive study (Bharadwaj, Nevin & Wallman, 2012). Although there is emerging consensus that becoming more customer-focused is a strategic imperative, how it can be achieved is not fully understood. According to the literature, an issue that is not answered yet is the extent to which customer oriented strategy is implemented in the organizations (Bharadwaj, Nevin & Wallman, 2012). Generally, research has found customer orientation to be related positively to employee performance (e.g. Boles, Babin, Brashear, & Brooks, 2001; Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002; Swenson & Herche, 1994). Moreover, empirical research on customer oriented strategy and organizational performance has been conducted in small, medium and large businesses (Tajeddini, 2011), in many sectors such as construction, food, telecommunications, using different performance indicators (financial and non-financial), and with different direct or indirect factors to influence it (Brockman, Jones & Becherer, 2012; Tajeddini, 2010; Williams & Naumann 2011). However, research regarding customer oriented strategy in the sport business sector is still limited, even though maintaining and increasing the clientele contributes significantly to the company's success (Hurley, 2004).

Anaza and Rutherford (2012) comment on the positive impact the alignment between employees and customers has on the marketing mechanism and the fulfillment of their needs. Customer oriented behavior from the employees' part results in emotional commitment from the part of the customers that might lead to their membership being renewed (Kim & Ok, 2010).

Tajeddini (2010) explored the relationship between customer orientation, entrepreneurship and innovativeness with business performance (i.e., profit goal achievement, sales goal achievement and ROI achievement) in hotel industry. The data was collected through personal questionnaires. The sample of the particular study was 156 hotel managers and owners from German and French speaking cantons located in Switzerland. The findings supported that customer orientation, entrepreneurship and innovativeness in the hotel industry significantly affects both profit goal achievement, and sales goal achievement, as well as ROI achievement. Hence, it appears that, generally, the owners and managers of hotels who believe customer needs and satisfaction are the priority of an organization are able to achieve their profit, sales and ROI goals.

In addition, Davis, Babakus, Danskin Englis, and Pett, (2010), in their study examined the effects of CEO gender on market orientation and performance (growth and profitability) among a sample of small and medium-sized service businesses. Gender was found to have significant indirect effects (via market orientation) on both market performance (growth) and financial performance (profitability). That is, female-led service SMEs perform significantly better due to their stronger market orientation relative those led by males. The findings further suggested that female-led firms were slightly better than their male-led counterparts in transmitting market performance into financial performance, although the differences were not statistically significant (Davis et al., 2010).

Moreover, in another study was explored the market orientation-performance link among Ghanaian SMEs using a survey to collect data on 191 firms. The results revealed that the development of market orientation in this sector rests more on the attitude of owners/managers and, more importantly, the repeatedly reported performance implication of market orientation does not elude Ghanaian SMEs. More specifically, market orientation leads to superior performance under ceaseless competitive conditions (Mahmoud, 2010).

As far as the fitness clubs are concerned, Oliver (2003) highlighted the importance of commitment to Quality by strategically establishing a high – quality service environment around the customer, who – himself and his needs – should become the center of attention. This commitment contributes to customer satisfaction, which creates positive financial results compared to the antagonism (Schneider, Macey, Lee, & Young, 2009). Customer satisfaction can be achieved by acquiring as much information as possible regarding the customer's needs, focusing on their fulfillment and developing new services and ideas that create additional value for the customer (Öberg 2011). Malladi (2011) comments on the creation of a positive personal experience for the customers by participating in the creation of something innovative or through their interaction with the personnel and the managers. The experience provided by the fitness club is improved by setting up a caring and welcome environment to its customers, since it magnifies the satisfaction they get from exercising (Brown & Fry, 2011).

In addition, in another study was placed under investigation the extent to which customer oriented strategy is implemented in Greek basketball Clubs (fans' perspective) on a professional level and the role that customer oriented strategy plays on performance, using a questionnaire. The sample of the particular research was 800 fans of the 4 most popular Greek basketball clubs which competed in the first division of the Greek league (A1). The results showed that the customer-oriented strategy is applied to a mediocre extent by Greek professional basketball clubs. Also, the results pointed out that there was a strong and positive relationship between customer-oriented strategy and organizational performance of

professional basketball clubs (fans' satisfaction) The researchers argued that their findings add credence to the argument that customer oriented strategy is a major factor for sport business activity, because it provides the Greek professional sports with a better understanding of its fans, which subsequently leads to enhanced fans' satisfaction and organizational performance (Asikhia, 2010; Papaioannou, Macheimari, & Kriemadis, 2016).

Furthermore, Papaioannou, Kriemadis, Kapetaniou, Yfantidou and Kourtesopoulou (2017) in their study, on the one hand examined the extent to which customer oriented strategy is implemented to four and five-star hotels, and on the other hand investigated the relationship between customer oriented strategy used by four and five-star hotels and business performance (profit, ROI, sales volume and market share), through a 40-item questionnaire(developed by Whiteley ,1991). Responses were received from 98 managers of 98 four and five-star hotels. The results indicated that customer oriented strategy is applied to a great extent from four and five-star hotels. Moreover, the results showed that there were significant and positive relationships between the customer oriented strategy and business performance (profit, ROI, sales volume and market share) of four and five-star hotels (Papaioannou, et al., 2017).

The primary objectives of this research were: (a) to determine the extent to which the customer oriented strategy (customers' perspective) is implemented to Greek sport business sector and more specifically in sport enterprise "Holmes Place Glyfada", and (b) to investigate if differences exist between the customer oriented strategy (according to its members' evaluation) and demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, work experience and educational level of the participants).

The following research question was addressed in this study:

1. To what extent is the customer oriented strategy being used in Greek sport enterprise "Holmes Place Glyfada"?

The hypotheses to be tested were the following:

- (a) The levels of customer oriented strategy (Low-medium, Good and High) are independent of the members' gender.
- (b) The levels of customer oriented strategy (Low-medium, Good and High) are independent of the members' educational background.
- (c) The levels of customer oriented strategy (Low-medium, Good and High) are independent of the members' work experience.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Sample*

The particular research project is an on-going research and up to now data has been gathered from a random sample of 200 members of a large sport enterprise in Attica. According to the findings of this research, 111 (55.5 %) of the participants were females and 44 (44.9 %) were males; the educational level of the participants was grouped into four categories: 19 (9.5 %) had elementary/high school education, 93 (46.5 %) had university level education, 78 (39 %) had master's degree and 10 (5 %) had doctoral degree (PhD). Moreover, the work experience of the participants was grouped into two categories: 178 (89%) had more than 7 years, and 22 (11%) had 1 to 7 years work experience.

### *2.2. Questionnaire*

For the purpose of this study a 43-item questionnaire, was used (developed by Whiteley 1991) focusing on customer oriented strategy. The questionnaire was translated and modified by a panel of experts in the fields of sport marketing, business management and strategic

marketing, in order to provide information on how members/customers see their sport enterprise in terms of the customer oriented strategy process, using a five point Likert scale.

The first part of the questionnaire was consisted of seven units and 40 questions based on the following seven key factors of customer oriented strategy:

1. Vision, Commitment, and Climate
2. Aligning Ourselves with Our Customers
3. Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers' Problems
4. Using and Communicating Customer Information
5. Reaching out for Our Customers
6. Competence, Capability and Empowerment of People
7. Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products

The reliability of the scale was found to be  $\alpha = .95$ . The second part of the questionnaire included 3 questions in relation to demographic characteristics of the respondents such as: the gender, the educational level, and the work experience of the respondents.

### *2.3. Procedure*

The data collection was accomplished through questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed at the sport enterprise's premises, after their consent, via appointments that were scheduled by phone. The sequence of events concerning the whole procedure was realized as follows: members of the sport enterprise were informed of the research and their consent was requested in order to realize the questionnaire. After their consent was given, appointments were scheduled at specific dates with each and every one of the members of the sport enterprise. Dates were rescheduled whenever requested. The completion of the questionnaire lasted for approximately 30 minutes and clarifications were given to subjects when asked for.

### *2.4. Data analysis*

Additional variables and complex indicators were created for the better exploitation of the information selected, including indicators on the factors of Customer Oriented Strategy. These variables were grouped in 3 groups in order to facilitate the statistical analysis:

1. Low-medium (Mean =1 to 3.5)
2. Good (Mean =3.51 to 4.5) and
3. High (Mean =4.51 to 5)

The dividing points for each of the above variables were determined based on the logic that derived from descriptive statistics and more specifically, mean score and standard deviation.

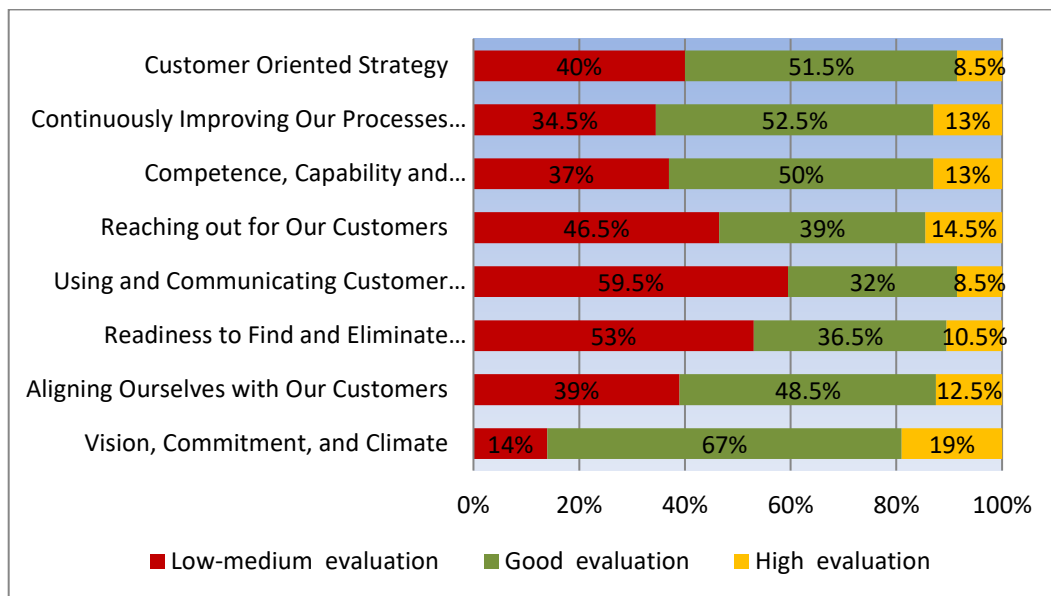
The study was a quantitative design. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the purpose of the study, and more specifically, to answer the first research question, while Pearson chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistics was used to answer the first, second and third hypotheses, using SPSS software (version 22).

## **3. Results**

Data of the sport enterprise' members responses were analyzed to gather information specific to the extent to which customer oriented strategy is applied to the sport enterprise (Figure 1.). From the analysis it is shown that the actions related to "Vision, Commitment, and Climate of the sport enterprise", "Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products" and "Competence, Capability and Human resource Empowerment" were assessed significantly higher (67%, 52.5%, and 50% respectively) according to members' perspective. Also, the data from the responders indicated that the percentages for actions regarding "Aligning Ourselves (the sport enterprise) with Our Customers" was lower (48.5%). The

actions regarding “Reaching out for Our Customers”, “Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers’ Problems” and “Using and Communicating Customer Information” were evaluated with the lowest percentages (39%, 36.5% and 32% respectively) by the members of sport enterprise. Finally, the results (percentages) indicated that customer oriented strategy is applied to a mediocre extent from the sport enterprise (51.5%), according to members’ perspective.

Figure 1. The extent of Customer oriented strategy of sport enterprise.



In addition, the results revealed that there was not statistically significant relationship between the three levels of customer oriented strategy (Low- medium, Good and High) and members’ gender ( $\chi^2=0.786$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.675$ ).

Moreover, the results (table 1) revealed that there was statistically significant relationship between the three levels of customer oriented strategy (Low- medium, Good and High) and the members’ educational background ( $\chi^2=11.701$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.069$ ) (Vision, Commitment, and Climate of the sport enterprise), ( $\chi^2=14.467$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.025$ ) (Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers’ Problems), ( $\chi^2=11.174$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.083$ ) (Competence, Capability and Empowerment of People), and ( $\chi^2=10.979$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.089$ ) (Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products). Thus, high customer oriented strategy is more probable to be evaluated by members that occupy university and post graduate education (master’s degree and doctoral degree) and less probable to be evaluated by members that occupy high school education.

Table 1. Chi-square analysis ( $\chi^2$ ) between levels of customer oriented strategy and educational background of members/customers

Key Factors of Customer Oriented Strategy		Educational Level of participants			
		elementary/high school education	university level education	Master level education	Ph.D level education
Vision, Commitment, and Climate	Low-medium	26.3%	18,3%	6.4	10.0%
	good	63,2%	66.7%	70.5%	50.0%
	High	10.5	15.1%	23.1%	40.0%
Aligning Ourselves with Our Customers	Low-medium	26.3%	43.0%	34.6%	60.0%
	good	57.9%	45.2%	55.1%	10.0%
	High	15.8%	11.8%	10.3%	30.0%
Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers' Problems	Low-medium	78.9%	58.1%	44.9%	20.0%
	good	15.8%	35.5%	39.7%	60.0%
	High	5.3%	6.5%	15.4%	20.0%
Using and Communicating Customer Information	Low-medium	63.2%	61.3%	57.7%	50.0%
	good	26.3%	30.1%	34.6%	40.0%
	High	10.5%	8.6%	7.7%	10.0%
Reaching out for Our Customers	Low-medium	47.4%	47.3%	46.2%	40.0%
	good	42.1%	37.6%	41.0%	30.0%
	High	10.5%	15.1%	12.8%	30.0%
Competence, Capability and Empowerment of People	Low-medium	31.6%	46.2%	28.2%	30.0%
	good	63.2%	37.6%	60.3%	60.0%
	High	5.3%	16.1%	11.5%	10.0%
Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products	Low-medium	36.8%	35.5%	32.1%	40.0%
	good	63.2%	52.7%	53.8%	20.0%
	High	0.0%	11.8%	14.1%	40.0%
Customer Oriented Strategy	Low-medium	42.1%	46.2%	30.8%	50.0%
	good	52.6%	45.2%	60.3%	40.0%
	High	5.3%	8.6%	9.0%	10.0%

Also, the results (table 2) showed that there was statistically significant relationship between the three levels of customer oriented strategy (Low- medium, Good and High) and the members' work experience ( $\chi^2= 7.453$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p= .024$ ) (Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers' Problems). Thus, high customer oriented strategy is more probable to be evaluated by members that have a work experience of 1 to 7 years and less probable to be evaluated by members that have a work experience more than 7 years.

Table 2. Chi-square analysis ( $\chi^2$ ) between levels of customer oriented strategy and work experience of members/customers

		Work experience of participants	
		1 -7 years work experience	More than 7 years work experience
Vision, Commitment, and Climate	Lower medium	13.6%	14.0%
	good	54.5%	68.5%
	High	31,8%	17.4%
Aligning Ourselves with Our Customers	Lower medium	31.8%	39.9%
	good	59.1%	47.2%
	High	9.1%	12.9%
Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers' Problems	Lower medium	40.9%	54.5%
	good	31.8%	37.1%
	High	27.3%	8.4%
Using and Communicating Customer Information	Lower medium	63.6%	59.0%
	good	22.7%	33.1%
	High	13.6%	7.9%
Reaching out for Our Customers	Lower medium	40.9%	59.0%
	good	45.5%	33.1%
	High	13.6%	7.9%
Competence, Capability and Empowerment of People	Lower medium	22.7%	38.8%
	good	68.2%	47.8%
	High	9.1%	13.5%
Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products	Lower medium	22.7%	36.0%
	good	63.6%	51.1%
	High	13.6%	12.9%
Customer Oriented Strategy	Lower medium	27.3%	41.6%
	good	59.1%	50.6%
	High	13.6%	7.9%

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study the customer oriented strategy is applied to a mediocre extent by the sport enterprise, (51.5%), according to members' perspective. This consists a unique and original finding since there is no related supporting literature.

The sport enterprise implemented customer oriented strategies mainly, while these actions were primarily related to its "Vision, Commitment, and Climate", "Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products" "Competence, Capability and Human resource Empowerment" and "Aligning Ourselves (the sport enterprise) with Our Customers" the percentage of which was higher than 48% in the scale of Good evaluation. This finding is in accordance to the literature (Anaza & Rutherford, 2012; Bartley, Comibuchi, & Mann, 2007; Kennedy, Goolsby, & Arnould, 2003).



The factor of customer oriented strategy “Vision, Commitment, and Climate”, was considered to a “great extent” by members of the sport enterprise. This means that the primary goal of the sport enterprise was the idea of creating satisfied customers by giving them individualized services which exceed their expectations in the things that matter most to them. Also, the sport enterprise was fully committed to the idea of quality and served the customers’ needs more than its own internal needs. In a customer-driven business, management and employees remain committed to satisfying the needs and expectations of the customers. In these companies, rewards, recognition and training are all strategies for ensuring excellent customer service and constitute a major factor in determining who gets ahead in the sport enterprise (Whiteley, 1991).

In relation to the factor of customer oriented strategy “Continuously Improving Our Processes and Products” it seems that the sport enterprise worked continuously to improve its products and services and also studied the best practices of other sport enterprises to get ideas about how to improve things. Moreover, it seems that the functional groups of the sport enterprise frequently cooperated to reach shared goals instead of competing with one other. Systematically the sport enterprise tried enough to reduce its research-and-development cycle time, while it invested in the development of innovative ideas and resolved identified problems in relation to quality. Also, the sport enterprise managed information effectively, while it had a direct and personal approach towards its customers. Moreover, its employees were trained in pursuing new and innovative services for their customers (Whiteley, 1991).

With regard to the key factor “Competence, Capability and Human resource Empowerment”, the sport enterprise has made more and better efforts toward providing its customer-contact employees with enough empowerment by increasing their information, training, knowledge, trust, (Melhem, 2004), and enriching them with the abilities and skills to fulfill customers’ requests and needs. It seems that frontline employees of the sport enterprise facilitated by explaining and providing answers to customers’ inquiries on the spot rather than waiting for their managers’ feedback and judgment because they had a good understanding of the products and services of their sport enterprise. Moreover, frontline employees had the right ability, flexibility, and power to be engaged in customer oriented behavior, as well as they had more control over job-related issues and decisions, which allowed them to have more flexibility and responsibility with respect to various customers’ needs. Also, the frontline employees were treated with respect by their sport enterprise, while they were cross-trained so that they could fill in for each other when necessary (Whiteley, 1991).

In relation to the key factor “Aligning Ourselves (the sport enterprise) with our Customers”, the sport enterprise played a consultative and partnership role with their customers during the sales of products / services to them. It also, used a customer-centered orientation in production and delivery processes, which means that the sport enterprise used information from its customers in designing desired products or services, while it applied marketing strategies (advertising and promotion methods) without promising more than it could deliver to its customers. Moreover, the sport enterprise had a good knowledge of which attributes of its products or services its customers valued most (Whiteley, 1991).

The main weaknesses of the sport enterprise as far as customer oriented strategy is concerned are the following factors: “Reaching out for Our Customers”, “Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers’ Problems” and “Using and Communicating Customer Information” which received the lowest percentage among the factors of customer oriented strategy (39%, 36.5% and 32% respectively in the scale of Good evaluation). The low percentage regarding the key factor “Reaching out for Our Customers” pointed out that the sport enterprise did not try enough to resolve all customers’ complaints and their employees were not encouraged sufficiently to go above and beyond to serve customers well. Moreover, the customers of the sport enterprise had difficulty to complain to it about its products and services, as well as to do business with it (Whiteley, 1991).

Furthermore, concerning the key factor of customer oriented strategy “Readiness to Find and Eliminate Customers’ Problem”, it seems that the sport enterprise monitored customers’ complaint partly, and infrequently asked customers to give it feedback about its performance. Moreover, customers’ complaints were infrequently analyzed in order to identify quality problems and consequently, the sport enterprise looked for ways to eliminate internal procedures and systems that did not create value for its customers to some extent (Whiteley, 1991).

With regard to the factor of customer oriented strategy “Using and Communicating Customer Information”, it seems that the sport enterprise had partly the awareness that its customers define the concept of quality and rarely provided opportunities to its employees at various levels and functions, to meet with customers. Also, the sport enterprise understood the expectations of its customers to some extent and infrequently provided information to its customers that helps shape realistic expectations. Moreover, the key managers of the sport enterprise understood its customers’ demands/requirements partly and occasionally contact with them (Whiteley, 1991).

The research findings supported the first hypothesis that the levels of customer oriented strategy are independent of the members’ gender. The results revealed that there was not statistically significant relationship between the three levels of customer oriented strategy (Low- medium, Good and High) and members’ gender. The findings of the present study are contradicting to the literature which supports that customer oriented strategy is related to chief executive officer’s gender in small and medium-sized service businesses (Davis, Babakus, Danskin Englis, & Pett, 2010), and shows that the members do not differ significantly with respect to their gender towards customer orientation.

In addition, the research findings rejected the second hypothesis that the levels of customer oriented strategy are independent of the members’ educational background. More specifically, the results revealed that there was statistically significant relationship between the levels of customer oriented strategy and the educational background of members. This result is consistent with previous studies on customer oriented strategy and educational background of women entrepreneurs (Vetrichelvi, & Vethirajan, 2016), and shows that the members differ significantly with respect to their educational background towards customer orientation.

Eventually, the research findings rejected the third hypothesis that the levels of customer oriented strategy are independent of the members’ work experience. The results revealed that there was statistically significant relationship between the levels of customer oriented strategy and the members’ work experience. The members with 1 to 7 years of work experience assessed the customer oriented strategy with greater scores compared to the members who have more than 7 years of work experience. This result is consistent with previous studies on customer oriented strategy and experience of women entrepreneurs, (Davis, et al., 2010), and shows that the members differ significantly with respect to their work experience towards customer orientation. It is not clear whether this stems from their better understanding of the customer – oriented actions taken or if it is a marketing scheme in order to create a picture that is better than reality. Regardless, it could be a consequence of a lacking Knowledge management mechanism that hinders information flow and – subsequently - decision making (Markey, Reichheld, & Dullweber, 2009).

According to business literature, the customer oriented strategy is a major factor for sport business activity, because it provides the sport enterprise with a better understanding of its customers, which subsequently leads to enhanced customers’ satisfaction and business performance (Asikhia, 2010), as well as illustrates the competitive advantage of sport organizations that undertake customer oriented strategies (Asikhia, 2010; Papaioannou, et al., 2016). Our study implies that customer oriented strategy is applied to a mediocre extent by the sport enterprise. Considering that customer oriented strategy plays a crucial role in ensuring that sport organizations will survive and prosper, the managers of the sport enterprise can be encouraged to implement it in a greater extent. This could happen by developing a customer focus culture based on principals such as (Brooks, 1997; Whiteley, 1991; Galbreath and Rogers, 1999; Bartley et al., 2007):

(a) Leadership - Customers drive organizational direction and actions where the vision, mission and values have a strong customer focus and are well communicated, and the senior leaders individually show their commitment through customer centred behaviours, including participating in the development of customer relationships. Moreover, the business strategy is driven by customer and market knowledge and the organization is structured to meet customer needs. Also the senior leaders ensure their people/ processes are responsive to customer needs and a strong focus is on customer retention and building long-term relationships.

(b) Listening – customers’ views are actively sought and it is easy for them to make contact/do business. A wide variety of mechanisms for customers to contact the organization easily and effectively (for example, special number, e-mail and web site) should be available, a wide variety of mechanisms for seeking and learning customers’ needs and expectations (for example, focus groups, customer surveys, customer visits and reviews) should be in place, a complaints process and

guidelines should be established and the complaints should be properly recorded as well as customer relationships and partnerships should be encouraged.

(c) Analysis and understanding – customer expectations and their key requirements are understood. This means that the performance of product and service delivery processes should be measured, a system for capturing and storing customer information should be in place, surveys, customer information and complaints, including the trends of results should be analyzed, the key customer requirements should be identified and comparative or competitive data should be used.

(d) Integration and deployment – customer’s expectations are acted upon. Integration and deployment practices where the product or service design, development and delivery are based on meeting the needs of the customer. Furthermore, the plans are made and action is taken based on customer surveys or customer information with a focus on agility and flexibility. Moreover, the customers are kept fully informed of the on-going development of new or improved products and services and actions are internally communicated within the organization, as well as the service standards and a published “service promise” are defined and communicated.

(e) People – customer-focused culture is understood and embedded throughout the organization. The recruitment processes, the communication and training processes and the performance appraisal (including reward and recognition) emphasize customer focus, while the employee objectives and goals are aligned to meet the organization’s customer-focused strategy.

(f) Review and improve – customer-focused strategies, procedures and processes are frequently reviewed and improved. This means that customer-focused strategies and approaches are continuously reviewed for further improvement and key processes which impact the customer are continuously monitored and improved.

A rather obvious action involves the education and further training of the personnel so that they develop and improve their customer oriented behavior, along with their organizational commitment and the representation of their sport enterprise.

The study was delimited to the sport enterprise. Data for this study were only collected from the sport enterprise and there was no attempt to generalize this information to all sport organizations. The study was also delimited to a questionnaire designed to collect data regarding customer oriented strategy according to Whiteley, (1991).

The following were acknowledged as the limitations of the study:

- The honesty, accuracy, and objectivity of the respondents when completing the questionnaire.
- The respondent’s level of understanding of the customer oriented strategy vocabulary.

Furthermore, research needs to be done to the same population (sport enterprise) to assess qualitatively the extent of customer oriented strategy. Qualitative case studies rely upon data obtained from interviews, and observations. Some of the interview and observation issues would address members of the upper management and the type of leadership behaviour which appears to be needed to ensure the success of the customer oriented strategy process.

Areas of further research could also include measuring the impact of customer oriented strategy on business performance and customer loyalty.

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