Application of AHP Method to Personal Trainers’ Performance Appraisal Systems - The Case Study of World Gym in Taiwan

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This year, Time Magazine listed fitness instructors as one of the 20 hottest occupations in the world, and it noted there were 400,000 personal trainers, and the figure is rising in the United States alone. This trend is also apparent in Taiwan, where health clubs and fitness centers have begun to aggressively promote the services of personal trainers (Wu, 2006). In addition, inappropriate performance appraisal of personal trainers may lead to an wide array of issues, including from members’ and health clubs’ perspective a mismatch between members’ needs and fitness courses, and from instructors’ perspective a distrust in the club’s management which would lead to a decrease in service quantity and quality, and thus, the profit margin of the club. Consequently, it is essential for health clubs to design an effective personal trainer performance appraisal system to ensure that they are providing the best possible service to their clients. As important as proper evaluations of personal trainers are, a review of the existing literature showed that no reliable methods of personal trainer appraisal are currently in use in Taiwan. This research seeks to take the first step in providing a study of an effective and comprehensive personal trainer appraisal system.

A personal trainer is required to fulfill many different roles, including roles of a teacher, a trainer, a consultant, a supporter, and a nutritionist (Chen, 2006). Courses with personal trainers can be priced at USD 50-60 per hour, and the quality of the service can significantly influence the reputation of fitness centers. To further highlight the importance of instructors, the CEO of World Gym in Taiwan pointed out that personal trainers bring in one-third of his firm’s total gross profits (Dai & Chiu, 2007). An examination of the two of the largest health clubs in Taiwan shows that while the details of their appraisal systems are different, California Fitness Center and World Gym both focus on three performance dimensions: achievement results, teaching results, and service results.

The main objective of this research is to apply the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to personal trainers’ performance appraisal systems. The results of this study are intended for the empirical application of health clubs in evaluating their personal trainers’ performance. There are two steps in building the appraisal system: literature review and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP). This research first develops a preliminary structure and standards of the personal trainer evaluation based on the literature review; the appraisal includes three dimensions and 15 detailed items. In terms of the AHP, the process is a widely used solution procedure for uncertain situations with numerous evaluation criteria. This research will first apply the AHP to the opinions of the research subjects (described below) with regard to teaching results, achievement results, and service results; it will then use the AHP to consider the relative importance of the individual components of each dimension. This study applies the AHP theory and method and conducts interviews with seven experts in the field, including four personal trainer managers, one Federation of International Sports Aerobics & Fitness (FISAF) personal instructor examiner, and two university professors.

This research applies the AHP methods to the survey data to acquire the weights of the various dimensions and their components for the evaluation of personal trainers. The summary of the procedure are presented below:

(A) Personal trainers’ performance appraisal system structure analysis: The analysis shows that achievement result is the most important dimension. The criteria, in the order of importance, are achievement results (0.637), teaching results (0.258), and service results (0.105).

(B) The weight analysis of the personal trainers appraisal criteria: In terms of the achievement result criteria—course sales (0.919), team achievement (0.914), course schedule arrangement (0.688), marketing and communication skill (0.687), recruitment of new clients (0.655). Among the elements of the teaching result criteria, in the order of importance, are client work out result (0.261), client instruction and interaction (0.260), course design and arrangement (0.256), course innovation (0.145), and quality of course (0.078). The analysis of the service
result criteria: administrative management (0.254), providing related information (0.203), people interaction (0.194), participation in related activities (0.187), improve center image (0.162).

The analysis clearly shows that the achievement result is far more important than the teaching and the service results with regard to personal trainer performance appraisal. The duties of the instructors in the fitness center have changed greatly since the 1990s, and the multi-functioned instructors of today not only lower human resource expenses, they can also bring much more profits to the club. This corresponds to achievement result as the most important appraisal system index. The application and research methods used in this study are suggested as a reference in future works. Despite the importance of the achievement result found in this study, it should be noted that fitness centers cannot ignore service quality and should continue to adapt to meet clients’ needs. Moreover, this study takes the first step in constructing a performance appraisal system of personal trainers. Future research can take a step further in applying the methods of this research, even using fuzzy AHP method, to the various types of fitness centers for studying the difference in the appraisal of the personal trainers across different types of fitness centers.