Designing a Business Model for Educational Institutes (Chess Schools)

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Abstract

Proper instruction is essential to ensure the required infrastructures, talent discovery, providing a sustainable instructional context, tapping the existing talents, and meeting the needs of enthusiasts. In this regard, chess schools are the responsible authorities for the qualitative and quantitative development and promotion of this sport. The purpose of this study is to design the components of a business model for chess schools and to examine the status quo. Using the qualitative research method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 chess school managers and trainers. Afterward, the required concepts were extracted through open coding and then by using the axial coding the categories were determined based on the dimensions of the Osterwalder's model. Following the interviews, the obtained data were analyzed and ultimately, in the form of ontology, a bigger picture of the business model for chess training institutes (chess school) was offered.

Keywords: business, business model, chess schools.

Introduction

Like any other sport, one could view chess from two perspectives: professional and general. However, in spite of these two perspectives, people of different ages experience a general system of personality growth playing chess. This sport is one of the best and most effective instruments in preparing children for encountering the world out there. It rises higher, day by day, in an immense pool of information putting children in situations where they need to make ever harder decisions. In order to achieve that, it
is essential to increase skills needed in playing chess and this requires a mix of competencies that can be developed through proper and committed education. Understanding the significance and effect of education and more importantly its correct implementation urged a number of countries to found sport schools dedicated to chess. The considerable demand for and interest in learning chess by the children, the adolescent and their families encouraged the government to found chess schools for those age groups and to provide the required context for special and professional training.

Proper instruction is essential to ensure the required infrastructures, talent discovery and culture development providing a sustainable instructional context, tapping the existing talents, and meeting the needs of enthusiasts. In this regard, chess schools are the responsible institutions for the qualitative and quantitative development and promotion of this sport. Chess schools in the world, in general, and in Iran, in particular, face insufficiencies, problems, limitations which preclude a chess school manager from viewing their school as a business and hence their unawareness about the advantages of a business model. This is while business models are being increasingly used and appreciated today because strategies are repeatable and easy to imitate. Moreover, with the economic changes, increased business competitions, emergence of novel technologies, etc. many of the older business models have proved to be inefficient and thus, some business models give way to newer and more innovative ones. Therefore, it is crucial to acquire the knowledge on all types of business models in order to achieve success.

The present research could provide a scholarly context for developing awareness among the authorities so that they may direct more attention and consideration to the quality and quantity of the educational services and offer business models for chess training institutes so that by choosing the right business models they would be able to implement their due strategies. It would also allow them to better know their businesses and this provides the grounds for assessing, changing or even modifying their business models. Therefore, the present research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What value(s) should the chess training institutes (chess schools) foster?
2. Who constitutes the chess training institutes’ target market and what are the criteria for selecting them?
3. What are the distribution links and channels of chess training institutes (chess schools)?
4. What are the communication mechanisms in chess training institutes (chess schools) and how do they communicate with customers?
5. What are the key resources of chess training institutes (chess schools)?
6. What constitutes the key activities of chess training institutes (chess schools)?
7. What characterizes the key partnerships in chess training institutes (chess schools)?
8. What determines the pricing and revenue models of chess training institutes (chess schools)?
9. What characterizes an appropriate cost structure in chess training institutes (chess schools)?

Literature Review

1. Business Model

Entrepreneurship has received a lot of attention in the body of literature; however, this is not the case when it comes to business models. Therefore, there does not exist any general consensus on the definition, structure, and evolution of business models (Morris, Schindehutteb and Allen, 2005; Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2002). The diversity of the existing definitions poses a major challenge in narrowing down the essence and components of a model and determining what constitutes a good business model.

In their research, Torbay, Osterwalder and Pigneur (2002) argue that modeling helps with the development of business horizons and strategies, determining and evaluation of business opportunities, redesigning of business operations, sharing of knowledge about a business, and the authentication of business decisions by delegating them to team members.
The definitions that have been offered for this concept encompass different dimensions. For instance, Timmers (1998) considers a business model as a kind of architecture for the stream of product, service or information (inside an organization or a distribution chain) that includes a description of actors and their role in the business, a description of potential benefits for the actors, and a description of the sources of income. Linder and Cantrel (2000), on the other hand, define business model as the organisation's core logic for creating value”.

According to Sharma and Gutiérrez (2010), a sustainable business model specifies the relationship between technical input (product/service) and economic output (business value, profit, and price). Therefore, the key question that need to be answered is as thus: “how should we make money?”

Examining the definitions offered by authors in the field of business model, it can be inferred that a business model is how an organization creates, provides and also receives value (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010).

The research in this field has mainly focused on the analysis of the business model to the end of decomposing it to its main fundamental constructs. Although, it is only recently that the constituents of the business model were studied making us truly appreciate its importance. In view of the various definitions presented above, it can be justifiably concluded that there would also be different expert viewpoints regarding the components. Table (1) offers an outline of these elements. However, it should be mentioned that the most thorough research has been done by Osterwalder which is a study of all the theories in this field.

Table 1: A comparison of studies concerned with the components of a business model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Mahadevan 2000)</td>
<td>The components are a combination of three very critical and valuable sources of income and support for the business</td>
<td>Attention has been paid to two main elements of a business i.e. value and income.</td>
<td>Attention has not been paid to two components of customer and product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Afuah and Tucci 2001; 2003)</td>
<td>Customer’s value, field, price, income, relevant activities, implementation, capabilities and competencies, sustainability and support. From his viewpoint a business model consists of four parts: core strategy, strategic resources, value network, and customer interface.</td>
<td>Contingent model and there is a relation between components and relations.</td>
<td>The components are unclear or in other words inadequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hamel 2000)</td>
<td>Argues that the elements (components) forming the business model include six elements of mission, structure, processes and income, legal and technology issues. According to Stähler, the business model is comprised of four elements: offered value, product/service, architecture (integration), and revenue model.</td>
<td>The elements and the relationship between them are distinctly clear.</td>
<td>Attention has not been paid to product and the income factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Alt and Zimmermann 2001)</td>
<td>Value set, market environment, proposition, resource system, and financial model</td>
<td>Attention has been paid to the legal (external) and mission (internal) factors.</td>
<td>Attention has not been paid to customer and product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stähler 2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attention has been paid to the product, income, and structure factors.</td>
<td>Attention has not been paid to the element/factor of customer directly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Rayport and Jaworski 2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only the financial or revenue model has been considered among the main elements of a business.</td>
<td>Attention has not been paid to the three other main elements or components of business namely customer, product, and infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: A comparison of studies concerned with the components of a business model - continued

| (Chesbrough and Rosenbloom 2000) | Customer, value network, network capacities and pricing, competitors, output, management.  
1. product/services (offered value)  
2. customer interface (target market, distribution channels, relations)  
3. infrastructure management (value configuration, capabilities and capacities, collaboration)  
4. financial aspects (the cost structure and revenue model) | Taking into account the customer, output or distribution channels, capacities and infrastructures.  
The financial, product/service elements have not been taken into account. |
| Osterwalder (2010) | Has considered all the main elements of a business and the relations between them.  
With regard to the business components, it suffers from no inadequacy and it has all the four main elements of a business and it also considers the nine elements of the business model core. |

1. Chess

*Shatranj* (=chess) is a Persian word translated into Arabic. Its original Persian equivalent is *Shatrang*. There are many accounts with regard to the meaning and interpretation of this term among which one is more accepted than the rest. It states that *Shatranj* is *Chatrang* translated into Arabic which is a Hini term. In Indian Chatr means four wang again meaning member because it implies that the King and Queen have four pillars: Bishop, Knight, Rook and Pawn.

Although, extensive research has been done particularly in the present century about the origin of chess and how it was invented, no researcher in Iran or abroad has been successful in coming to a clear or definitive conclusion. However, examining documents on the historical background of chess, it becomes evident that Iranians played chess before the Sassanid dynasty i.e. nearly two millenniums ago. In his book “A History of Chess”, Harold J. Murray (1913) claims that chess came into existence in India and then spread from there to the other parts of the world.

Navabi (1999) introduces Iran as the creation cradle of the game of chess and believes that Iranians played chess before the Sassanid dynasty nearly two millenniums ago. He further states that there isn’t any recorded piece of evidence suggesting chess was popular in any other region in the world.

Drawing on some accounts, Yektaie (1971) has made some references to the origin of chess. By comparing the chess terminologies used in different countries, he concludes that they are generally of Persian origin.

Studies on the students that were taught the game of chess show that chess has had an impact on the power and speed of calculation (analysis), memory enhancement, logical thinking, better understanding of the theory of sets and numbers, etc. It also comes to the aid of people in their daily life, instances of which includes increased decision-making power, patience, and greater concentration. The reason for the successful reception of chess training in schools is because of its attractiveness for students which make them happily spend their time doing an intellectual activity in the form of a game.

Given the popularity and growth of chess across the world and the increasing dynamism of this scientific sport and understanding the significance of the effect of instruction and more importantly the correct method of instruction, a number of countries began launching schools especially dedicated to the game of chess.

Due to the great demand for learning chess and the great reception it has got on the part of children and the adolescent and families, the government became encouraged to found chess schools for these age groups and thus providing the grounds for special and professional training. Chess schools are very diverse and widespread and each school is specialized in particular activities and seeks
to offer special values. Yet, all of them generally offer the same value propositions and have chess training and counseling as their core objectives. On the other hand, their customers are determined based on different categorizations among which “categorization by age” is the most frequently used standard. Concerning the infrastructure, these schools are in contact with country’s Federation and other organizations and commercialize their capacities through them. It should be noted that the revenue and cost streams in these schools are varied and each school follows its own particular revenue and cost model.

The full and comprehensive promotion of chess – this invaluable combination of science, sport and art and considering its increasing reception among children and adolescents – requires some necessary promotion tools. One of the most important tools of qualitative-quantitative promotion is the chess schools. The promotion of championship in this field requires the discovery of existing talents and potentials.

Chess schools were first founded in 2001 in the Iranian provinces of Tehran, Mazandran and Kerman. By the end of 2011 there were 78 chess schools founded in Iran. Proper instruction is essential to ensure the required infrastructures, talent discovery, and culture development in order to create a sustainable instructional context, tap the existing talents, and meet the needs of enthusiasts. Thus, it justifies, more than ever, the qualitative and quantitative development of chess schools as one of the authorities in promoting this sport. Therefore, in light of the importance of rules and regulations and adopting uniform procedures throughout the country and given the special conditions surrounding this sport in comparison with other sports, the Chess Federation felt the urge to introduce the chess schools regulations (for granting the establishment license and approving the continued activity of the existing schools) embracing type and classification of school, school fees, etc. in 2010.

Due to its comprehensiveness in identifying the elements of a business model, Osterwalder’s model was used as the basis of the present research. It is worth mentioning that this model has been the basis for numerous studies (e.g. Zott et al. 2011, Watson et al. 2011; Robb and Jacob 2010; Al-Debei et al. 2008). Considered as a prop, this model can be exploited by various firms. Therefore, the research’s theoretical framework follows the fashion of the Osterwalder’s model and the required research data has been collected based on the same framework.

The research attempts to design a suitable business model according to the Osterwalder’s framework in the field of chess training institutes. Thus far, no business models have been offered in the field of sport, in general; and in the field of chess in particular. Therefore, the present research is innovative in designing and developing a business model for chess training institutes (chess schools). This model has four main components and nine elements as illustrated in table 2 and figure 1.

Table 2: The conceptual model of the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Business model elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Value proposition: is a general overview of the products/services of a company which have a value for the customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target customer</td>
<td>Targeted customer: is a segment of the customers to whom the company intends to offer a value. Distribution channels: is an instrument for connecting with the customers Relationship with the customer: describes a type of connection that a company establishes with its clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure management</td>
<td>Key activities: describes the arrangement of activities and critical resources for the purpose of creating a value for customers Key resources: describes the resources that are necessary to create value for the customer. Key partnerships: involve a voluntary agreement between two or more companies to the end of creating value for the customer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aspects</td>
<td>Cost structure: describes all the monetary measures employed in a business model Revenue streams: describes the way a company makes income from different income sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology
In light of the main purpose of the research which is designing a business model, the research employs the qualitative research method. As a result, the data were gathered by reviewing the scientific evidence and documents in scientific databases and also library resources in the first stage. Then, by analyzing the previous research the components of the business model were extracted in the second stage. The outcome of this stage is the selected reference business model and the designing framework of the business model.

In the second stage of the research, the field research method has been used. Therefore, the interview questions were extracted based on the components from the selected business model and semi-structured interviews were conducted with chess schools’ managers and trainers and also the Iranian men and women national team members.

In the third stage, following the analysis of the interviews (open and axial coding), the data were organized and finally analyzed and the final model was obtained.

The research population consists of four groups: the managers of existing chess schools in Iran, men and women national team members, active trainers in schools, and chess schools committee in the Chess Federation. Given the diversity of the business fields, the research employed the purposive sampling method until it reached the saturation level.

An attempt has been made to select heterogeneous individuals, as far as possible, so as to avoid the uniformity of answers and to achieve diversity in concepts. As a result, 11 manager and trainers were interviewed and the required concepts were obtained using open coding. Then, using axial coding, the categories were determined in light of the Osterwalder’s model dimensions.

Research Findings
In the analysis section, while analyzing and coding the qualitative data, we carried out the content analysis of the interviews, categories, and concepts. The interview questions were selected based on the Osterwalder’s model (2004). Table (3) depicts the descriptive statistics pertaining to the gender distribution frequency, education, career, field of study, and age of the interviewees.
Table 3: The demographic characteristics of the interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>row</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>education</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Type of interview</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Owner &amp; manager</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>An employee of the Vocational and Technical Department, has referee and coaching level 3 certificates and 22 years of experience in playing chess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Manager &amp; trainer</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>A national team member; level 3 referee certificate; Level 2 coaching certificate; has begun playing chess since 1999 and started training since 2000 as a member of chess players who are blind or have low vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>trainer</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>A national team member; has level 3 referee certificate; level 3 coaching certificate; has played chess professionally since 2000. Has level 2 referee and coaching certificates; the Chess Director of the North East region of Tehran, and Chess secretary of Tehran municipalities. An employee of the Physical Education Department; Has level 2 referee and coaching certificates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Manager &amp; trainer</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Has level 2 referee and a level 3 coaching certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Has level 2 referee and a level 1 coaching certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Manager &amp; trainer</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>An employee of the Social Security Department; has a level 2 referee and a level 3 coaching certificate. Have a level 2 referee and a level 1 coaching certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>trainer</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Have a level 2 referee and a level 1 coaching certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>trainer</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Have a level 3 referee and a level 1 coaching certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Manager &amp; trainer</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Have no referee certificate; a level 1 coaching certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Manager &amp; trainer</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Have level 3 referee and coaching certificates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Manager &amp; trainer</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Have level 3 referee and coaching certificates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answering the Research Questions

Value Proposition

**Question one:** what value proposition(s) does the chess training institutes (chess schools) offer? The following are considered as the major value of a school chess are:

i. Instruction: teaching chess, training referees, coach trainers, telephone training.

ii. Counseling: actual clients (counseling and planning, telephone counseling), and potential clients (placement test, assessing the amount of interest, telephone counseling).

iii. Accessories sales: chess accessories, and complementary accessories and teaching aids (handouts and books, software, downloadability, package of services and products).

iv. Side activities: promotional activities (holding competitions and camps, introducing the product and service packs).

As can be observed, the frequency of the types of value propositions does not differ significantly from one to the other and they are almost equally stressed.

Target Customer

**Question two:** what comprises the target customers and what are the customer’s criteria for selecting a chess training institute? Generally, chess schools categorize their customers based on different criteria:

i. Based on social class: upper class, middle class and lower class.

ii. Based on level of awareness: aware, and unaware.

iii. Based on age: children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged, and older adults.

iv. Based on special features: hyperactive children, the blind, etc.
According to the obtained frequencies, chess schools choose their customers primarily based on their age and alternatively they may also segment their customers according to their level of knowledge.

**Distribution Channels**

**Question three:** what may comprise the connections and distribution channels in a chess training institute (chess school)? Distribution channels are identified as the following:

i. Advertising channels: internet advertising, local ads, ads in magazines, newspaper campaigns.

ii. Personal channels: databases, talent discovery schemes in schools, attending classes, organizations: Social Welfare and the Blind Board, Chess Board of the province, municipalities, and other institutions, holding competitions and presentation sessions.

Indirect channels: telephone, Internet calls, SMS calls, and postal channels.

A review of the frequencies reveals that personal channels have mainly been used by chess schools and next afterward, advertising channels are considered. Thus, it can be inferred that less attention has been paid to indirect channels.

**Relationship Mechanisms**

**Question Four:** How do chess training institutes (chess school) employ relationship mechanisms and how do they communicate with their clients? In this context, two types of relationship mechanisms that were identified:

i. Based on a specific profile: face to face relationships, building trust and loyalty, attracting and retaining customers, reward systems, appraisal systems, incentive systems, recreational programs, improving the quality of products and services, variety of products and services, after sales service, and holding sessions introducing successful people.

ii. Based on an unknown profile: Introduction meetings, counseling sessions, attracting and retaining customers, building loyalty and trust, and face to face relationships.

Relationship mechanisms that are based on a specific profile have received more attention that those that are based on unknown profiles. This implies that there is a need for focusing more on potential customers in order to attain market development and schools could gain competitive advantage implementing these mechanisms.

**Key Resources**

**Question five:** What are the key resources (capabilities) of chess training institutes (Chess School)? Based on the finding from the analysis of interviews, the key resources /capabilities include:

i. Tangible capabilities: human resources, physical resources, financial resources, and educational resources.

ii. Intangibles capabilities: reputation, brand, specialized knowledge, and location.

Based on the research findings, the tangible and intangible capabilities have received almost equal attention. Nevertheless, more attention has been paid to tangible capabilities and it appears that it is possible to get advantage for chess schools by exploiting the intangible capabilities.

**Key Activities**

**Question six:** What are the key activities of chess training institutes (chess schools)? To identify key activities, the interviews were analyzed and placed in the following categories:
i. Enforcement activities: individual-based programs, Internet and postal services, student assessment, evaluation of professional chess players and competitors, chess training, setting mutual expectations, and counseling.

ii. Management activities: marketing and advertising, cost management, deciding and holding the required competitions, and dispatching trainers to competition events.

iii. Infrastructural activities: introducing services and products, determining the customer’s required package, determining the level of interest, and providing the required supplies.

According to the research findings, the majority of school activities are related to enforcement activities and as for the infrastructural activities, they are in second place. Thus, management activities account for the lowest levels of activity. An optimum combination of these activities is needed for the management of the chess schools and which depends on the life stage of the school and other such factors.

Key Partnerships

Question seven: How are the key partnerships of chess training institutes (chess schools)? In order to realize how chess schools find their partners, the respondents were asked some questions. The results indicate the following:

i. General partners: Chess Board, the Welfare Organization, the Blind Board, municipalities, and the Federation

ii. Private partners: business partners, sponsors, advertising websites, supermarkets, schools, child care centers, advertising companies, and sport shops.

iii. Interestingly, the majority of key relationships and partnerships of chess schools are with the private partners. In general, we can say that an optimum combination of these partners is required to improve the business model chess schools.

Revenue Model

Question eight: How are the pricing and revenue models of chess training institutes (chess school)? Several questions were asked of the respondents in order to identify the revenue model of chess schools. The results are shown below:

i. Revenue from services: Dispatching a trainer, training services, holding competitions, and holding camps.

ii. Sales Income: Sales from buffets and selling accessories.

iii. Rental Income: Renting classes and suites.

iv. Other sources of income: providing CD’s, sponsors, corporate contracts, and receiving awards in competitions.

The major source of income for chess schools is gained by offering services and after that by making sales. This indicates that schools focus on these two categories of income and neglect or pay little attention to other models of income. Furthermore, the rental income comes in third place, but the absence of other income models is clearly felt, nonetheless.

Cost Structure

Question nine: How is the cost of chess training institutes (chess school)? Based on the results from the analysis of the interviews, the cost structure of these schools is as follows:

i. Equipment: The cost of transportation, the cost of purchasing capital goods, and the cost of purchasing supplies and equipment.

ii. Services and operations: The cost of advertising, content production costs, current costs, rent costs, wage costs, and the Internet costs.

Based on the research findings, service and operation account for more than seventy-five percent of the costs, and the equipment have sustained lower costs. This indicates that schools focus on
maintaining the status quo, and the increase in the equipment costs can be interpreted as the school's development fostering perspective.

Finally, according to the research findings and recommendations, the final business model for chess training institutes (chess school) is presented in figure (3):

**Figure 3: The business model for chess training institutes (chess school)**

As discussed in the previous sections and based on the present research findings, the research recommendations are offered as follows:

1. **Practical Recommendations**
   - Developing a business outlook and approach in chess schools using the business model instrument.
   - Using the offered business model to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing chess schools business models.
   - Developing innovation in the existing chess schools business models.

2. **Policy Recommendations**
   - Developing policies that promote the business outlook toward chess schools.
   - Developing administrative policies to improve income generation in chess schools.
   - Enforcing the required rules that improve the interactions shown in the business model of chess schools.
3. Recommendations for Future Research

- Developing more dynamic business models (desirable models) for chess schools.
- Reviewing the nine elements of the business model and offering development strategies for the business model of chess schools.
- Pursuing comparative studies in order to find successful business models for chess schools.

Bibliography