

# SPORT GOVERNANCE IN A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

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## Abstract

### Aim and Background

The aim of this research is to explore sport governance practice from the lived experience of one informant spanning a 30 year period in the governance of two sport organisations (basketball and cricket). The breadth of this experience spans boardroom practice at club, state, national and international level and in so doing provides a viewpoint from multiple levels of governance. To date, there has been no research that has explored the lived experience of a sport governance practitioner. This presentation will focus on the international dimension of this practitioner's involvement in the International Cricket Council (ICC) as a former Chief Executive Officer.

Historically, the governance of professional sport has received little empirical attention, and has been regarded in relatively simple terms (Hassan & Hamil, 2010). Moreover, Hassan and Hamil (2010) contend that professional sport has "mostly operated within systems of governance that have presented sports as something of a deviation from normal business practices ..." (p. 343). Interest in international governance models for professional sport is attracting growing attention (Hamil, Walters, & Watson, 2010) recognising the range of critical issues that many sports confront. The transition of many international sport organisations from volunteer administered entities anchored in an amateur ethos, to professionally managed bodies in an increasingly commercialised global marketplace accounts for these deviations from normal business practice.

### Method

The methodological framework used for this study is "hermeneutic phenomenology". Hermeneutics is about life experience and seeks to grasp the everyday, "inter-subjective world of the respondents and how that life-world is constituted" (Schmidt & Little, 2007, p. 227). It recognises that history determines the background of our values and cognitions, and may even determine our critical

judgements. In this study the lived experience of one informant coincides with the transition from an amateur to commercial culture in the governance of international sport. The methods used to collect data were a series of interviews (totalling six hours) with one research participant, whose experience of sport governance spans three decades. Document analysis was also used to support interviews.

In drawing on the philosophy of hermeneutics, "which recognises that one can only understand the experience of others through the lens of one's own historical being in the world" (Smyth, 2007, p. 20), the researchers engaged an interpretative lens to present interview findings in relation to current theory. The exploration of this life experience was integrated with key theoretical concepts derived from the literature in relation to sport governance. This integration and analysis took place through the viewpoint of the researchers. Gadamer (2004) urged that pre-understandings are the very conditions by which we understand. "The challenge is not to set them aside but rather to work with them in the quest towards understanding" (Smythe, 2007, p. 20). The researchers' understanding of sport governance arises from their own practical and educational journey in sport management, and as members of sport boards. From this, the researchers drew on major governance concepts that, for them, inform the theoretical foundations of international sport governance practice.

### Results

International sport governance is, in the case of the ICC, complicated by historical structures and the diverse cultural interpretations of the governance systems and meanings directors give to the legitimacy of the ICC. The following extract from the interviews exemplifies this complexity, and the focus of this presentation on the balance between the performance and conformance governance functions and the interplay between old and new structures and cultures.

"The president and the chief executive are directors but don't have a vote. When there is a vice president, he's also a director but doesn't have a vote, he's appointed now two years in advance, in those days it was one year in advance. So there would be 13 sitting around the table with a vote, three of us sitting around the table who had the same duties and obligations as directors but didn't have a vote. There was another strange requirement that for a resolution to pass at a board meeting, seven of the full members had to vote in favour of it, so any four could block any resolution. So there was an immediate filter, a barrier to straight forward decision making and that it needed a large majority for relatively simple matters to be approved by the board" (Interviewee, 16 August, 2010).

In addition to the above, major themes and sub-themes to emerge from the interviews to be discussed include international governance structures, stakeholder relationships, board dynamics, shared leadership and chair/CEO relationships.

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