

# Effective management of national sport organisations (NSOs)

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## Aim of paper and research questions

To begin to understand the factors that lead to the management of well performing national sport organisations.

Questions: Are there features that are common across the management of NSOs that are perceived to be performing well? Are these considered to contribute to organisational performance?

## Literature review

An appreciation of organisational performance requires a multi-criteria approach and most relevant approaches to organisation performance in the sport management literature (e.g. Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000; Bayle & Madella, 2002; Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Rapilla, 2008) have identified a number of areas of performance which appear important for in order for organisations to perform well. In addition, work done by De Bosscher et al. (2008) has empirically tested the critical success factors of elite sport policy – which most NSOs are responsible for delivering.

What is lacking is an understanding of whether there is a set of management practices that provides a framework for the organisation to perform at a high level. Limited research in this area (Robinson, 2004; Bohlke, 2007) has shown that effective management requires an organisational culture that supports organisational performance, and a set of clear procedures and processes. In addition, research into board effectiveness (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003) suggests that the performance of NSO boards impacts on the way the organisation operates. Thus, the research set out below is an initial attempt to identify management factors that may facilitate the performance of NSOs.

## Research design and data analysis

This case based research is part of an ongoing programme of research investigating performance in national sport organisations. This particular project is an attempt to identify if there are management characteristics that are common to NSOs that are considered to be operating well. The results presented here were obtained between 2003 and 2008 from research carried out with 18 NCOs in 5 different countries. The NSOs were chosen on the basis of stakeholder satisfaction, their perceived success at elite sport (see Bohlke, 2007 for selection criteria) and perceptions of their performance by those involved in sport in their country. The organisations studies varied across a number of characteristics, such as size, professionalism, type of sport and funding arrangements.

The data was collected by 51 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and documentary analysis of management policies and documentation. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then imported into the software NUDIST which was then used to structure and manage

the data. Based on the interview schedules, a system of categories was developed to code the transcriptions. The documents were subject to a process where the data was coded and analysed using categories that emerged from iterative reading of the documents.

## Results

The exploratory research identifies seven management characteristics that were present in the NSOs included in the research. These were:

*Strong leadership:* In smaller organisations this was demonstrated by the Chair or President – whoever was head of the organisation. In larger organisations this was demonstrated by how the Board and the paid executive worked together. However, what was most important was the strength of the Board in terms of its governance of the organisation.

*Agreed vision and strategy:* The NSO had a clear vision and strategy that provided direction for the organisation.

*Adequate and appropriate people:* NSO had enough, well skilled people carrying out tasks in an effective manner.

*Adequate and appropriate structures and resources:* The NSO had appropriate working methods for the size and purpose of the organisation.

*A learning culture:* The NSO had demonstrated an ability to respond and adapt to change and learn from previous performance.

*Internal satisfaction:* Members, staff and volunteers were satisfied with the services offered and the ways of working.

*External satisfaction:* External stakeholders were satisfied with their investment and relationship with the NSO.

## Discussion and conclusion

These results show that NSOs that are considered to be performing well have a number of management practices in common. This suggests that, like the structures that facilitate the effective delivery of sport policy factors, there are management practices which facilitate the performance of NSOs. What needs further investigation is whether these practices need to be in place for good performance or whether they evolve as organisations become better in their operations. This research provides a basis for this future work.

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