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Understanding the strategic capabilities of sport organisations

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Background

Organisational strategy should emerge from an assessment of the opportunities and challenges in the external environment and a diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment. Of key importance in the development and implementation of strategy is the concept of matching capabilities of the internal environment with the opportunities available in the external environment (Adcroft & Teckman, 2009; Finlay 2000; Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008). This encourages organisations to follow strategies that are appropriate for the needs of their organisation and within its resources, to be competitive and to develop competencies for future development (Ashcroft & Teckman, 2009; Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008).

However, the activities of many sport organisations in less developed sport systems are often determined by the availability of funds for particular programmes. For example, the Pacific Region National Olympic Committees and their associated national federations are heavily influenced by funding that is available from Olympic Solidarity for pre-determined activities. As this is the major, if not only, source of funding for these organisations this 'ring-fencing' of funding encourages managers to follow strategies which may not be appropriate for their size, level of development, or other resources. An example of this is the running of coach education programmes because funding is available despite the absence of a competition infrastructure that will enable coaches to practice what they are being taught.

Aim and objectives

In an attempt to address this, the research set out below created a framework to help managers of sport organisations carry out a structured and comprehensive assessment of their internal environment. The aim of the research was to develop a structure to help to identify the level of development that their organisation has attained and any associated organisational development needs. The objectives of the research are to identify the areas of performance that make up a sport organisation; to determine the activities and attributes that constitute these pillars; and to

determine whether these activities and attributes form a continuum of organisational development from a 'basic' organisation to an 'elite' organisation.

Methods

The research took an inductive approach where the findings of the research emerged from a series of four focus group discussions and activities held with senior staff and volunteers from Olympic sport organisations in the Pacific region. Participants in each focus group were asked to complete a number of tasks and the work of the first, second and third group formed the basis of the activities undertaken by the following groups. The resulting framework was subsequently tested on the national federations of two Pacific Island countries: Fiji and Vanuatu.

Results

Content analysis of the research evidence led to the development of an initial framework made up of eight organisational pillars which are constituted by a continuum of activities and attributes. The 'pillars', with examples of their constituent attributes are: Governance (rules, policies); Management (structure, administration); Sport Activity (competition, events); Communication (methods, technology) Finance (budgeting, planning); Physical Resources (equipment, facilities); Human Resources (type, diversity) and Values (cultural, behavioural). Subsequent work on the framework has led to the removal of the Values pillars.

The framework has allowed sport managers to audit the internal operations of their federation in terms of levels of organisational development and then to compare this to the attributes that need to be in place to deliver certain sport activities. This internal diagnosis has identified areas of development for the organisation which can then be incorporated in the strategic plan.

References:

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