

# **Origins of Institutional Practice and Institutional Work Perspectives on Performance Management of National Sport Organisations**

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## **Introduction**

Performance management (PM) has become important to National Sports Organisations (NSO) as they operate like business entities that control the achievement of their objectives (Perck et al., 2016). NSOs administer sport and deliver sport services to communities where they exist (Shilbury & Moore, 2006). Their increasingly competitive operating environments makes the need to build their organisational capacity through PM apparent (O'Boyle & Hassan, 2014). Research into organisational performance of NSOs spans three decades however, much of the interest has been directed towards establishing ways to measure organisational performance as opposed to establishing ways to improve organisational capacity through PM (O'Boyle & Hassan, 2014). To fill this research gap, the aim of this study is to explore the extent to which NSOs have adopted and implemented PM as an institutional practice. To pursue this aim, the objectives that guide the study are; to establish how coercive, mimetic and normative pressures influence the development and use of PM systems among NSOs; and, to establish the role that individuals within NSOs play towards creating, maintaining or disrupting PM as an institutional practice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research uses stakeholder, (Freeman 1984) resource dependence, (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) institutional (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) theories to develop a theoretical base for the study. The stakeholder and resource dependence theories are used to explore the susceptibility of NSOs to stakeholder influence because of their dependence on stakeholder resources. The institutional theory's institutional isomorphism is used to explore the extent to which NSOs are influenced through coercive, mimetic and normative pressures to adopt the practice of PM. The institutional work theory is used to explore how individuals within NSOs work towards creating, disrupting or maintaining PM as an institutional practice.

## **Methodology**

The research employed qualitative approaches and the study was conducted in Botswana, a developing country in Southern Africa. Prior studies on organisational performance of NSOs have been conducted among developed countries where bigger NSOs with numerous and lucrative resource streams were studied (O'Boyle & Hassan, 2015; Perck et al., 2016; Winand et al., 2010). Therefore, this study offers a perspective into NSOs that exist in different social, economic and cultural contexts than those experienced by NSOs in developed countries. Investigating NSOs in a different context contributes to our understanding of how NSOs operate and how they implement PM. A total of 14 out of the 37 NSOs affiliated to Botswana National Sports Commission (BNSC) were selected for this study. To ensure diversity, participating NSOs were selected based on their categorisation of the BNSC's Affiliates Empowerment Policy that categorises NSOs according to geographical spread, national appeal, popularity, level of activity, equity, social responsibility, focus on development, elite sports performance, numerical strength and quality leadership. Further selection was based on whether NSOs were an Olympic or Non-Olympic Sport, Team Sport or Mixed Sport.

Data was collected through semi structured interviews with board members (n = 9) and operational staff (n=12). Additionally, (n=16) NSO representatives participated in three focus group meetings. Questions discussed in the interviews and focus groups probed into institutional pressures that led to the adoption of PM practices among NSOs. Further questions explored stakeholders' influence on the use of PM systems among NSOs. Furthermore, the response of individuals to institutional pressures and the roles they play towards the creation, disruption or maintenance of PM as an institutional practice, were explored. The data collected was transcribed verbatim, open coded and analysed through thematic analysis.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results revealed that PM was not perceived as an institutional practice, however, coercive, mimetic and normative pressures led to the adoption of practices that could be considered as PM. For instance, funding stakeholder expected periodic reporting on the extent to which their needs and expectations were met. This prompted implementation of processes that include goal and objective setting, performance measurement and feedback, which are phases of the PM process (Ferreira & Otley 2009). The individuals within NSOs engaged in processes and activities that include leadership, communication and creating an organisational culture that facilitates PM to improve service delivery and the achievement of organisational objectives. Engagement in these processes leads towards the creation of PM as an institutional practice.

## **Conclusion**

The methodological approach used in this study limits the generalizability of the findings, as such, future studies could employ quantitative methods to enable generalizations to be made to the various contexts studied. However, this research contributes to sport management literature on PM of NSOs specifically on how institutional pressures influence the development and use of PM systems among NSOs. Furthermore, the study offers insights into the roles that individuals in NSOs play towards creating, maintaining or disrupting PM as an institutional practice. The study has practical utility because it informs sport managers on ways to develop and use PM systems in their organisations.

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