

# 'Good' governance in sport strategies

## Reforming organisations by adapting management competencies to governance functions

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### Introduction

The corruption scandals that have affected the world of sports since the late 1990s have profoundly changed the processes and structures of international and national sport organisations, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the *Fédération Internationale de Football* (FIFA), National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and National Sport Governing bodies (NSGBs). Influenced by the expectations of their internal (e.g. members) and external (e.g. European Commission) stakeholders, these sport organisations are being asked to comply with many and varied principles of 'good' governance<sup>1</sup> (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019), such as democracy, transparency, accountability, solidarity and checks and balances. Although legal proceedings against former or current executives or senior managers of International Sports Organisations (ISOs) are still being launched (e.g. Jérôme Valcke, former Secretary General of FIFA) and the media report evidence of off-the-field corruption, such as the recent case of the United World Wrestling (UWW) with the dubious payment of 6.5 million EUR to the former president and the German Table Tennis Federation (DTTB) case, which raises concerns that World Table Tennis (WTT) has violated principles of good governance, the results of benchmark analyses show a relatively positive and encouraging picture of compliance with recommended principles. As an illustrative example, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) highlights in its third governance analysis of its member federations that almost all its members perform rather well and have improved since the last evaluations with a significant increase in the area of transparency (ASOIF 2020).

The first 15 years of investigation into the good governance of sports, beginning with the Salt Lake City scandal in 1998, have been devoted to the creation of a conceptual and normative bridge between the expectations of diverse groups of stakeholders within the sport system, namely European institutions, and sport organisations regarding the way they should perform to avoid further corrupt activities. This has been illustrated by numerous initiatives to conceptualise,

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deconstruct and operationalise the concept into a series of measurable and relatively comparable principles, such as democracy, transparency and accountability. Primarily, defining good governance for sports and developing a shared understanding has been the focus; however, for the past few years, the analytical focus has shifted towards more explanatory and consequentialist investigations on the factors that may influence compliance with recommended good governance principles. Although ISOs and NSGBs are often compared to monopolistic organisations (Forster 2006) because they have no equivalent in the system with regards to their aim, objectives and degree of specialisation, they still have to position themselves in a competitive environment by attracting material and immaterial resources and by creating value for their stakeholders. The systemic stress and the legitimacy crisis that some of them have undergone, combined with the plethora of principles and indicators, have led them, with variable geometry, to rethink their good governance strategy. From a systemic perspective, the attributes of the stakeholder (groups)—whether they are made by specialised organisations (e.g. the Institute of Management Development or I Trust Sport) or by multi-stakeholder groups (e.g. the EU Expert Group 'Good Governance')—the complexity of the sets (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019) that often include a very broad and wide range of principles and indicators (e.g. 50 recommendations in the case of ASOIF) or policy mechanisms, such as steering, monitoring or sanctioning and emphasising the role of EU or national law (Geeraert 2016; Mrkonjic 2019), have led sport organisations to apply, adapt or block the recommendations to propose their own. From an internal perspective, studies show that the degree of autonomy (Geeraert, Mrkonjic & Chappelet 2015), the (organisational) culture (Ghadami & Henry 2015), the size (Parent & Hoye 2018) and the capacity, knowledge or expertise of the persons involved in the process (Král & Cuskelly 2018; O'Brien et al. 2019) can play a crucial role in the quest for a successful good governance strategy.

During and after a crisis, many sport organisations, with the IOC at the forefront, have included good governance as a fundamental principle in their statutes, have created ethics commissions or have adopted specific regulations. Consequently, the sport system has experienced the emergence of newly associated functions<sup>2</sup>, such as 'Ethics and Compliance Officer', 'Governance and Compliance Officer', 'Head of Ethics', 'Ethics Officer', 'Governance Manager' and 'Head of Governance', and a stronger control over managerial functions and processes (Chappelet 2017). In 2015, as recommended by the Olympic Agenda 2020, the IOC created the position of Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer. In 2020, the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) appointed former US Assistant Federal Judge Holly Shick as its first Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer. These new functions can be executive or managerial and strategic or operational and can be integrated into different organisational units. Performing a function within a sport organisation requires specific and general, technical or social competencies. The competencies-based view of the board has already attracted the attention of scholars by pinpointing, for instance, that a strategically capable non-profit sport board is determined by people who can make decisions impartially, have knowledge of the

sport, have the necessary skills to monitor progress toward a strategic direction or who think and act with a 'big picture' mindset (Ferkins and Shilbury 2012). At the management level, the competencies that people within governance functions should be equipped with to help the organisation meet the standards is still under-investigated, while the literature on sport management competencies shows that expectations of sport managers are increasing in light of systemic and environmental variations, such as digitalisation or professionalisation (Retar, Plevnik & Kolar 2013). Today, sport managers from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in an ISO to the project manager in a NSGB should be equipped with a broad set of competencies, such as planning skills, organisational skills or the will to succeed, as identified by Wohlfart and Adam (2019).

This contribution puts the organisation at the centre of attention and goes beyond board-focused sport governance investigations. It calls for a rethinking of the sport organisation by investigating the types of governance structures and functions and questioning the management competencies needed to reform a sport organisation to meet a good governance strategy. The first section presents empirical evidence on the encompassing value and process-oriented quality of good governance recommendations. The second section offers a new approach to analysing current practice based on sport management competencies. The third section reviews a series of examples that emphasises the importance of this approach for good governance strategies. The conclusion proposes concrete recommendations for practice and follow-up research.

### **The creation of new good governance structures and functions in sports**

Since the 1980s, organisational theory has made a significant contribution to a better understanding of sport organisations, particularly regarding aspects of change, effectiveness and efficiency, professionalisation and organisational performance. It has also informed work on organisational governance understood as "the structure and process used by an organisation to develop its strategic goals and direction, monitor its performance against these goals and ensure that its board acts in the best interests of the members" (Hoye & Cuskelly 2007, p. 9). Much work on sport governance has largely focused on the strategic direction, role, composition or structure of the board (Parent & Hoye 2018) as the body that oversees the activities of management. This is due to the strong theoretical and cultural influence of the Carver doctrine and corporate governance (i.e. the ways in which an organisation/a firm is directed and controlled) in the 'codification' of governance (Walters & Tacon 2018) and the compliance mechanisms installed by National Sports Agencies (NSAs) to monitor the activities of their NSGBs in counties such as England with the 'Code for Sports Governance' (Sport England and UK Sport, 2017) or Australia with the series of '(Mandatory) Sports Governance Principles' (Australian Sports Commission 2015, 2020). This suggests that the only governance structures and functions within a sport organisation would be those associated with the board, chairman, elected member or

independent member, whose appointment modalities may vary according to the context (De Bosscher & Sotiriadou 2019). Other approaches extend the analysis to the integration and role of the function of the CEO, particularly decision-making power (voting or non-voting rights) and the transmission of information from the board to management and vice versa.

However, a good governance structure, such as a standing strategic structure, does not guarantee successful compliance as many other factors are involved (Crawford & Carter 2011). An overview of the different good governance principles and indicators proposed in the literature shows a more nuanced picture of the importance of the role and logics of the board. In 2008, when the IOC proposed its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance for the Olympic and Sports Movement, the composition of the executive board only appears in a limited way, on selection criteria based on their capacities, skills, leadership, integrity and experience (theme 3.1) and the formalisation of their responsibilities compared to those of the General Assembly and the administration (themes 2.6 and 4.1) (IOC 2008). The principles and indicators proposed by researchers over the last 10 years follow the same logic. Of the 63 basic indicators for better governance in international sports proposed by Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2013), only five specifically target the board on issues of financial transparency, term limits and age limits as well as the representation of women and geographical representation. Of the 36 indicators of the 2015 Sports Governance Observer (SGO) by Geeraert (2015), only seven are directly related to the activities of the board in relation to the publication of decisions and information, remuneration, term limits, regularity of meetings and gender equity—not to their strategic capability. The same applies for the model proposed by the ASOIF Task Force and the 2018 version of the SGO (Geeraert 2018); of the 50 principles proposed by the former, 15 relate to the board. Just as a sport organisation needs structures and processes to achieve its objectives, good governance also comes with a host of new structures, systems, processes or rules, such as term limits, age limits, a system of anonymous whistle-blowing, clear election rules, rules for managing conflicts of interest, a risk management system, the publication of activity or financial reports and the empowerment of the legislative body. From there, a good governance strategy is undeniably driven by the board and its members through their strategic function, but the heterogeneous and ambiguous nature of the recommendations implies that to meet the expectations placed upon it, it must transform the organisation as a whole from the strategic apex to the management and support functions.

Compliance with good governance recommendations is usually driven by external stakeholders that need to convince, either reactively or preventively, that individual or collective actions, if left unchecked, can damage the image and reputation of the organisation and as a result lead to mistrust of current and potential partners. Whether rooted in corporate governance or not, it involves several mechanisms, including the creation of new ad hoc structures and related roles and functions. In 1998, the IOC created the Ethics Commission (Chappelet 2005) and the IOC 2000 Commission Executive Committee, including former United Nations General Secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali and United States of

American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In 2012, the European Commission created the EU Expert Group on Good Governance, including a broad panel of experts and decision makers in the field of sports. In 2011, the President of FIFA appointed an independent body—the Independent Governance Committee (IGC)—and asked criminal law expert Mark Pieth to establish a group of independent governance experts and stakeholder representatives to overview and support FIFA's reform process. The purpose of the IGC is to oversee the creation and implementation of a framework of good governance and controls to ensure the organisation's integrity with the goal of restoring confidence amongst all stakeholders of FIFA, with the power and authority necessary to discharge its purpose, and if appropriate, to recommend further investigation (IGC 2014). In 2015, the same ISO created a Reform Committee chaired by former IOC Director General Francois Carrard. The same year, ASOIF created a Governance Task Force chaired by its own President, Francesco Ricci-Bitti, and composed of a group of internal and external stakeholders of the Olympics sport system, whose duty is to ensure that discussions on good governance are followed by concrete, transparent and measurable actions, to analyse the status quo and to monitor progress with regular reporting to its Council and members (ASOIF 2016). These structures, whose existence is often constrained by the duration of the legitimacy crisis and the mandate, provide recommendations that include the creation of new structures that can include non-executive/independent members, such as the FIFA Football Stakeholder Committee proposed by the Reform Committee for purposes related to the structure of the game and technical matters (FIFA 2020a), the FIFA Audit and Compliance Committee, which advises, assists and oversees the Council in monitoring FIFA's financial and compliance matters and monitors compliance with the FIFA Governance Regulations (FIFA 2020b), the FIFA Nomination Committee (now Compensation Sub-Committee), responsible for defining the individual annual compensation of executive members as well as that of the Secretary General (FIFA 2020c), and the Governance and Review Committees, being specifically assigned to support the Council on FIFA governance matters and to conduct tasks, such as eligibility checks and independence reviews (FIFA 2020d).

The more process-focused orientation of good governance recommendations that are disseminated throughout the organisation and the creation of temporary or standing ad hoc structures echo the creation of new governance functions at the management level. Interestingly, the role of management in governance reforms has often been reduced to an organisational level controlled by the board and illustrated by the role of the management/administration and the CEO/Secretary general within (e.g. non-voting member) and without (e.g. head of the administration) this structure, which is already well-documented in governance literature, and is, for example, illustrated by the driving role of Jerome Valcke during the FIFA governance reform. Evidence from ISGBs, NSGBs and NSAs shows that the good governance rhetoric has also generated new positions and more discrete specialised standing structures that assume a diverse range of roles within the organisation. In other words, management structures or functions can assume governance roles in addition to the sole CEO. UK Sport has created a Sport Governance and

Organisational Health unit, whose head is namely responsible for working with the CEO and assuming day-to-day responsibility for the agency's own governance, including ensuring ongoing compliance with the Code for Sports Governance (UK Sport 2018). In 2013, UEFA created the function of Corporate Governance Officer (transformed to Corporate Governance and Compliance Officer and recently Governance and Compliance Officer), whose current tasks consist of overseeing and coordinating UEFA policies in the sphere of governance and compliance as well as ensuring that it takes all reasonable organisational measures required to build and implement a modern corporate governance and compliance programme and framework and to strengthen its ethical and compliance culture (UEFA 2020) in the Executive office. In 2015, as recommended in the Olympics Agenda 2020, the IOC created the position of Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer, a senior position within the Ethics Committee, whose mission is to ensure compliance with ethical principles and good governance and is run by Paquerette Girard-Zappelli. FIFA hired financial governance programme managers, who are responsible for defining and implementing an audit and compliance framework for FIFA development programmes (Think Sport n.d.). In June 2020, the US Olympics and Paralympics Committee appointed former US Assistant Federal Judge Holly Shick as its first Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer. As part of the Executive team, it will lead the compliance team in establishing, implementing and enforcing standards and operations to champion a culture of oversight and accountability (Team USA 2020). Accordingly, [Table 18.1](#) presents an overview of structures and functions associated with a good governance reform.

This critical review suggests that to remain on the right track set by diverse stakeholder expectations, the transformative value of good governance reforms penetrates the organisation through different processual, structural and functional channels. Hence, good governance should not be viewed as the classical top-down view of directing and controlling the organisation, and management performs its financial or moral duties. It also needs to be analysed as the contribution of a diverse group of internal and external stakeholders that assume different roles and functions. The shift from a board-oriented perspective to a more processual and incremental approach of a good governance driven organisation therefore gives more weight and value to the personal competencies of the employees involved directly or indirectly in the reform than the sporting excellence and outstanding track record that characterise the very few chief reformers mandated by the IOC or FIFA or chairs of standing advisory and monitoring structures.

### **Sport management competencies**

Current trends, such as globalisation, professionalisation and digitalisation, have transformed the ways in which a manager is expected to perform duties within an organisation. The salience of competencies and skills related to planning, organising, budgeting, staffing, controlling or evaluating within the context of an organisation that applied yesterday is—for some—no longer relevant, especially in the future. For instance, Gallardo et al. (2018) show that the knowledge of a second

Table 18.1 Structures and functions associated with a good governance reform

<i>Structures</i>	<i>Standing strategic structure</i>	<i>Temporary steering structure</i>	<i>Standing advisory and monitoring structure</i>	<i>Management structure with governance roles</i>	<i>Management sub-structures with governance roles</i>	<i>Management functions with governance roles</i>
<b>Role</b>	Lead the governance reform from the inside	Steer the governance reform from the outside	Support the governance reform from the inside <sup>3</sup> and monitor specific processes	Disseminate governance reform throughout the organisation	Support governance reform from the inside and monitor specific processes	Support governance reform from the inside and monitor specific processes
<b>Typical functions</b>	President Member	Chair Expert	Chair	CEO Secretary General	Head of	Officer Manager
<b>Example</b>	IOC Executive Board	Independent Governance Committee	FIFA Audit and Compliance Committee	FIFA Secretary General	UK Sport Governance and Organisational Health	UEFA Governance and Compliance Officer

language and the ability to use big data are the most important areas of competencies development within sport organisations in the future. The field of study concerned with the analysis of competencies that are needed for a career in the sport industry emerged in the 1970s in light of the first curricula development and education programmes in sport management. Beginning with the assumption that sport organisations' aim is primarily to identify and to recruit skilled persons who contribute to meeting their strategic and operational objectives through the execution of allocated tasks, it was necessary to develop competency frameworks for students that meet the expectations of employers in the sport industry. The importance of these instrumental studies have been boosted by national (e.g. Apitzsch 2016; Emery, Crabtree & Kerr 2012) or European (e.g. Petry, Froberg & Madella 2006) sport labour market studies, and more specifically, by the specificities of sport management functions, such as a manager of a sports facility, a NSGB or a sports club.

The acquisition of competencies is a means to achieve employability and prosperity (European Commission 2016). They are acquired by individuals throughout their life trajectories (e.g. primary and secondary socialisation) and are a vector for strategic positioning, competitiveness, growth and innovation. As such, they constitute an important strategic dimension for national, European and international employment policies, where the challenge is to identify competencies related to an occupation, to structure them hierarchically or to question the relevance of competencies to each other (European Commission 2016). This instrumental approach has given rise to numerous analyses on the key competencies that an individual must have to carry out the tasks entrusted to him or her, which have fuelled the debate on the universality, immutability and transferability of these competencies. One of the main aims of sport management competencies research is to generate categories, such as current and future, core and special, technical and vocational, personal and methodological, that are embedded in curricula development.

Studies show that the salience of the competencies expected by the labour market varies based on the organisation, position and tasks. For instance, taking on a leadership role will place more emphasis on leadership or the ability to build partnerships, while a more operational role will place more emphasis on writing skills. Based on the assumption that the expectations of a sport organisation are oriented towards communication, technology and interaction in a globalised world, Pedersen and Thibault (2014) assert that key competencies should be sought in leadership and critical thinking. In the first vein, skills are based on five types of sport management activities (marketing and sales, correspondence, public speaking, community relations and record keeping). Each of these activities refers to two clusters of responsibilities, 'organisational management' and 'communication management', which integrate respectively nine and ten competencies needed to lead an organisation effectively. In the first cluster, a sport manager needs good leadership skills to ensure that subordinates meet the requirements—not necessarily technical skills on data storage. Critical thinking enables managers to justify decisions. In their analysis of German sport organisations, Horsch and Schütte (2003) show that public

relations, personnel management and knowledge of sport are key. Their analysis also confirms the widely held view of the need for a wide range of skills. In their analysis of Slovenian sport organisations, Retar, Plevnik and Kolar (2013) show the importance of cooperation with individuals, putting knowledge into practice and developing a positive working environment. Finally, the most encompassing contribution in this field of investigation is from a research project conducted by a consortium of European universities ('New Age of Sport Management Education in Europe') that examines qualification requirements of sport management graduates in four different sectors (non-profit sport organisations, professional clubs, public sport sector and private sport businesses). Based on a large set of 72 sport management competencies, their findings show a group of core-transversal competencies, such as teamwork, planning skills, oral communication and a desire to succeed, and sector-specific competencies (from one to three), such as capacity to learn, social intelligence and problem-solving skills (Wohlfart & Adam 2019). In most cases, the samples include management positions from the first to the senior level (i.e. up to management structures with governance roles), but none aim at isolating governance structures and functions.

### **From sport management to sport governance**

People can be considered the most important element in the management of sport organisations because they have an impact on specific goals to be achieved (Chelladurai 2006). The allocation of skilled Human Resources (HR) to perform duties within specialised organisational units is key for purposeful strategic orientations, sound management processes and success. To achieve its objectives and to survive in a highly competitive sport system, the organisation must be able to rely on HR with different roles, functions and competencies. In parallel to structural and attitudinal determinants (e.g. size of the board or accountability), evidence from several studies shows that more knowledge-based determinants, such as expertise, can play important roles in the quality of governance reforms (Geeraert 2019; Král & Cuskelly 2018; O'Brien et al. 2019). From there, the composition of the board at the strategic apex of an organisation certainly has a role to play in the implementation of good governance strategies. Depending on their strategic capabilities, its members will be able to carry and to disseminate the message of the need for and usefulness of good governance throughout the organisation. That said, as evidence has shown that it can be more encompassing and process-oriented than board-centred approaches, framing and nurturing relative structures and functions with management competencies could support sport organisations in achieving a successful strategy.

Building on a descriptive analysis of good governance structures and functions of several sport organisations, such as UEFA, FIFA or the Fédération Internationale de Hockey (FIH) (e.g. FIH 2018; Think Sport n.d.; UEFA 2020), and insights from key lessons from literature on sport management competencies, [Table 18.2](#) proposes a tentative list of key sport management competencies that

Table 18.2 Key sport management competencies associated with a good governance reform

<i>Structures</i>	<i>Standing strategic structure</i>	<i>Temporary steering structure</i>	<i>Standing advisory and monitoring structure</i>	<i>Management structure with governance roles</i>	<i>Management sub-structures with governance roles</i>	<i>Management functions with governance roles</i>
<b>Key sport management competencies</b>	Leadership Decision-making Strategic thinking Capacity to cope with multiple stakeholder expectations	Expertise Persuasion Independence	Capacity to work with regulations Problem-solving skills Concerns for quality enhancement	Strategic thinking Monitoring processes Communication	Cooperation with other sub-structures Communication Ethical commitment	Organisational skills Analytical skills Ethical commitment

the latter could be equipped with. Members of standing strategic structures, such as an executive committee, as a key driver for reform, should be selected on the basis of their leadership, decision-making skills, strategic thinking and capacity to cope with multiple internal and external stakeholder expectations that influence the ways in which an organisation is directed and controlled. Chairs of experts within temporary steering structures, as the custodians of an independent review, should be able to steer the reform with independence, expertise and persuasion. Chief compliance officers who lead standing advisory and monitoring structures should have the capacity to work with specific regulations and should have solid concerns for quality enhancement to solve problems related to internal processes. Secretary Generals or CEOs involved in good governance reforms should have the ability to support the board with strategic thinking and communication with board members and heads of management sub-structures and should be able to monitor the process throughout the management and operating core. To generate horizontal commitment, heads of management sub-structures with governance roles should have the ability to communicate and cooperate with other sub-structures and should show a strong ethical commitment to the cause. Ultimately, to support governance reform from the inside and to monitor specific processes, organisation skills, analytical skills and ethical commitment are key for management functions with governance roles, such as for a governance and compliance officer.

## **Conclusion**

Complying with good governance recommendations is a challenge for a sport organisation. The areas of compliance are broad and are nurtured by a plethora of stakeholders and theoretical frameworks from corporate governance to political science. Evidence shows that most of the recommendations induce a complex and thorough transformation of the organisation that affects objectives, structures, processes and people within sport organisations. As a normative concept, good governance has the potential to be embedded in the organisational culture. The strategic apex shall first recognise that it goes beyond the role of the board, and the creation of temporary steering 'super-structures' or standing advisory and monitoring structures, such as remuneration or nomination committees chaired by external and high-profile experts. This mind-set should then lead to a prioritisation of good governance within the whole organisation. It should be included as a key mission and objective that ultimately permeates the creation of specialised management sub-structures and functions with governance roles that are not only associated with controlling and monitoring duties.

However, to date, the depth of this process is still under-investigated. Parent and Hoye (2018) show that only a handful of studies have been conducted to investigate the causes or the extent to which the adoption of specific principles impact outcomes or the performance of sport organisations. Furthermore, none of the studies identified by the authors in their systematic review addresses good governance in

sports from a Human Resource Management (HRM) and competency-building perspective. An important missing-piece, if we consider that HRM contributes to matching the strategic orientation of an organisation with proper allocation and performance of tasks. Educating and equipping people with fit for purpose competencies is then key to ensure effective implementation of a good governance strategy and transform short-term and opportunistic reforms into standard practice. Unfortunately, multi-stakeholder initiatives including intergovernmental organisations, governments and sport organisations on the fight against off-the field corruption are still too much focused on the creation of a (new) conceptual reality (how is good governance defined?) and the development of a practical relevance (how can good governance be measured?). It is encouraging to see that a handful of initiatives, such as the International Partnership against Corruption in Sport (IPACS), recommend to put (integrity) awareness/education programmes in place (IPACS 2020). But such recommendations are usually hidden by the breadth of the sets and lack precision in the light of their consequence on the organisation—in terms of resource allocation the publication of statutes on a website is hardly comparable with the organisation of education programmes. Therefore, education on good governance should get much more attention in international and national multi-stakeholder groups. The creation and promotion of specific and hands-on joint education programmes built on a good governance competency-framework inspired from sport management helps future and current sport managers to achieve the good governance strategy of an organisation and, consequently, contributes to the development of a legitimate and trustworthy sport system.

## Notes

1. Quotation marks are used to emphasise the volatile (e.g. period of investigation) and normative (i.e. cultural patterns of compliance) properties of good governance.
2. This contribution focuses on off-the-field or organisational corruption. Structures and functions related to on-the-field corruption or match-fixing (e.g. integrity units, integrity officer) are not included in the analysis.
3. The hybrid composition of the ASOIF Governance Task Force suggests that such structures could also steer reform from the outside.

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