



DRIVINGFORCES

Adding peak performance to business practice

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2007

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Sport infrastructure - is it time to change the game plan?

Sport infrastructure

In order to win a game, a sports team must be flexible. A team changes whatever is necessary to gain momentum and with it, ascendancy. Those that don't make such adjustments are doomed to failure. The All Blacks recent World Cup showing comes to mind.

Because this is a much-discussed facet of sport, you might have thought the organisations that administer regional sport would also be fast on their feet and adaptable. Unfortunately many have shown a remarkable reluctance to keep up with the times and re-mould themselves as their environments change.

New Zealand sport needs a strong, capable and professionally managed regional delivery system. Failure to achieve this will have serious implications for the future well-being of sport in the numbers who participate and future international success.

What are the alternatives?

Sport needs to consider every model and every option.

For instance in the area of adaptability, successful community social service health organisations in the not for profit (NFP) sector such as the Family Planning Association and Banardos, have much to teach sport (the same also holds true for the trade and industry association sector).

The two sectors – sport and NFP -have much in common. They share a make-up that is a blend of paid and volunteer workers. Both provide services and get money from similar sources – people who use their services (clients and members), the government, trusts and sponsors. They both operate in highly competitive markets against a raft of organisations from health, education, science and the arts.

They have also undergone similar evolutions. Decades ago both operated out of small national offices reliant on their local regional groups to deliver services. These were generally semi-autonomous entities that set the agenda and basically ruled the regional roost. The national office, such as it was, had minimal resources and even less influence on those for which they were (notionally) responsible.

And yet many community organisations are light years ahead in their regional structure and delivery.

Why is this?

A significant reason is that the community groups are ingrained with a culture of

service. Their core business is to deliver services to clients.

This has helped determine the way they have structured their 'businesses. (Every NFP is a business in that in return for money, they provide services and are expected to return a profit/surplus, however it is measured). In this respect their service delivery structures are designed to meet the conditions of the 21st Century.

Essentially the structure employed by most successful community organisations comprises a head office (for sport read national office) and branches run by professional staff and volunteers.

The branches do not operate as they do in sport – that is, as separate legal entities with their own rules and boards - but are run as an extension of the national office. They are responsible for delivering services to regional and local clients and are accountable for results.

Should sport do the same?

There is no simple answer to that question. Time and again people in sport have told *Drivingforces* of their concerns about shrinking membership, declining volunteer base, reluctance on the part of young people to do administration, inadequate capability, lack of resources, difficulty in meeting members' expectations and so forth.

Apart from a few pockets of excellence, evidence shows that regional sport infrastructure is, in the main, struggling to perform to the level expected of it by members, national office and funders.

The challenge: does it have to be this way?

In a word, no. Sporting organisations could relieve themselves of much of their burden by looking at the way their community social service cousins structure themselves

and employ professional people at every level of their business.

Why some sports organisations are not stepping up to the plate to make these changes is a mystery. It could boil down to a lack of awareness about the benefits of alternative models. Or it could stem from an inability to present the case for change coherently and imaginatively, resulting in a failure to get member buy in. Often a lack of money is cited but players' levies ought to be sufficient to off set the cost of a new and improved professionally run system.

Adapt, or fade out of existence

A book by Bill Bryson called "[A Short History of Nearly Everything](#)" illustrates two critically important points that apply to every kind of organisation.

The first is that nothing on this planet – from organisms to organisations – has a god-given right to exist in perpetuity. The second is that everything becomes extinct unless it is capable of adapting to changing times.

In every sport there are examples of regions and clubs who have restructured and developed new, innovative and exciting ways of doing their business. But for the most part, they remain isolated examples.

Sport infrastructure - a "Model T" system originally designed for simple works or a Formula One Ferrari of the 21st Century?



"A desire for Peak Performance is the force that must drive any successful organisation."

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