

# Boards and governance in African national cricket organisations: An exploratory study

M. Jansen van Rensburg, P. Venter & H.S. Kriek

## ABSTRACT

Sport organisations face escalating performance pressures from various stakeholders, which places increasing demands on the governance structures of such organisations. However, little research has been undertaken to understand sport governance of national sports organisations within the African context. This paper will focus on the roles and structures of the boards of African national cricket organisations to enhance the understanding of board involvement in strategic planning and implementation. This study used a sequential mixed method design to gather empirical data from 23 cricket associations affiliated to the International Cricket Council's (ICC) African Cricket Association (ACA). The research reports on the composition of the boards of African cricket organisations as well as the perceived roles and responsibilities of boards in the strategic planning process and implementation thereof. It explores the perceived influence of the ICC on the governance compliance of African National Cricket organisations, and lastly indicates the strategic management activities performed by such boards.

Key words: governance, national sport organisations, boards, strategic management

## Introduction

In recent years, the sports industry has been subjected to increasing commercialisation, alterations to geopolitical boundaries, technological advancements and greater competition (Amis, Slack & Hinings 2004: 158). As a result, sport organisations face

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escalating performance pressures from a variety of sources, including the public, the members of the organisation, sponsors, international affiliations and government. These pressures include issues related to increased revenue (e.g. the pressure to increase revenue and the associated pressure of having to deal with increased budgets offered by global sport organisations, such as the ICC, attracting higher membership numbers, and the provision of more member services while at the same time producing world champion athletes or teams (Yeh & Taylor 2008: 33). In addition, changes in sport management (e.g. the shift from predominantly volunteer committees to modern boards of directors, the introduction of paid executives, player compensation, increases in income and expenditure, media scrutiny and a wider range of stakeholder interest) have presented major strategic issues to those responsible for governing sport organisations (Ferkins, Shilbury & McDonald 2005: 198). Recent research (Ferkins & Shilbury 2012: 67) goes so far as to suggest that in “the sport management domain, governance is also considered to be one of the most influential elements for the success of a non-profit sport organisation”. This study focuses on the governance of sport organisations, especially the strategic management function of boards of such organisations. More particularly, the study considers the importance of the governance of sport organisations on the African continent.

Extant research recognises that governance is a critical component of effective management of sport organisations (e.g. Hoye & Cuskelly 2007: 26), yet little research has been undertaken to investigate governance in sport organisations (Forster 2006: 72; Ferkins, McDonald & Shilbury 2010: 603; Yeh & Taylor 2008: 33) or the specific role of the boards of national sport organisations (NSO) (Ferkins, Shilbury & McDonald 2009: 245). NSOs are the agencies responsible for the direction and coordination of a particular sport code at a national level (Ferkins et al. 2009: 245). Furthermore, governance research in sport management seems to be limited to documenting the compliance, practices and performance of sport organisations in developed countries (e.g. Ferkins et al. 2005, 2009, 2010; Michie 2000; Michie & Oughton 2005; Shilbury 2001). This concurs with an observation by Brief and Cortina (2000: 1) that, although “the less privileged” would also benefit from research on topics such as corporate governance, they are underrepresented in the field’s research agenda. Indeed, a comprehensive literature search on sport governance conducted within the African continent revealed that, with the exception of one South African study (Burger & Goslin 2005) and guidelines on governance best practices contained in the National Department of Sport and Recreation White Paper (Tshwete 1998), no other published research on sport governance in Africa could be found.

The aim of this paper is to enhance understanding of sport governance of NSOs within the African context. This paper will focus on the structure of boards of

African NSOs and aspires to enhance understanding of the role these boards play in the strategic planning and implementation processes of governing affiliates of the African Cricket Association (ACA). As an exploratory study, this study used a sequential mixed method research design to gather empirical data from NSOs across Africa. It is hoped that the findings of this study will attract attention to the state of governance of an African sport and could act as a source of information about sport governance and board involvement in strategy on the African continent.

### **Sport governance in Africa**

In most counties, non-profit sport organisations are central to the development of athletic talent and the provision of organised sport participation opportunities. These organisations not only facilitate competitions and stage events, but are also involved, and often manage, coach development, the identification of talent, the training of volunteers, as well as marketing and sponsorship activities at provincial and national levels (Hoye & Doherty 2011: 272). According to Hoye and Doherty (2011: 272), it is important that these organisations have effective governance systems and structures in place. Sport governance is defined 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 its members” (Hoye & Cuskelly 2007: 9). Sport governance is therefore concerned with issues of policy and direction for the performance of sport organisations. The board is a critical mechanism in a governance system, because its main responsibility is to ensure that the activities of the organisation are carried out in the best interests of the organisation, its members and society (Yeh & Taylor 2008: 33). Ferkins et al. (2005: 195), however, assert that the strategic role and performance of the board is a weakness in many sport organisations. The authors also highlight that the strategic role of the board is underdeveloped in the sport management and governance research literature.

The literature suggests that although there are various governance theories that are useful in building the knowledge base of the roles of boards in sport organisations, there is no grand governance theory covering all board roles, as different theories focus on different roles of board members (Miller-Millesen 2003: 522). Leading theories include agency theory, resource dependence theory, institutional theory, organisation theory, stakeholder theory, stewardship theory and managerial hegemony theory (Ferkins et al. 2005: 197–198; Ferkins et al. 2009: 254; Hoye & Doherty 2011: 274; Miller-Millesen 2003: 522; Yeh & Taylor 2008: 39–40). A discussion of these theories

falls outside the scope of this paper; the intent is rather to focus on board roles associated with strategy, as well as board structures of African sport organisations.

On the African continent, good governance practices (extending beyond but including sport organisations) that focus on structural and formal institutional arrangements have been advocated by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and in the Washington Consensus treaties. However, according to Chabal (2009: 1), the nearly 30 years of various forms of structural adjustment have not reached far enough into all domains of governance. Poor governance practices therefore contribute to the constant tension between the neo-patrimonial political practices (still dominant in much of Africa) and prescribed norms of accountability, transparency and formal institution rules that characterise good governance. South Africa might be regarded as an exception to this general assertion, as the country opted to adopt the King Code of Governance Principles that stipulate corporate governance standards and expectations. The most recent version of the code, the King III Report (IoD 2009), applies to all entities regardless of the manner or form of their incorporation or establishment and whether they are in the public, private or non-profit sector, and therefore includes local sport organisations. Legislation in South Africa (i.e. the new Companies Act, Act No. 71 of 2008) furthermore makes adherence to governance standards legally binding (Wyngaard & Hendricks 2010: 5). Yet, despite these laws and codes, incidences where the negative impact of poor governance structures and practices of sport organisations is operative are visible in South Africa as well. In response to one such incident, the South African Sport and Recreation Minister, Minister Fikile Mbalula, was quoted as saying (Moholoa 2011): "We have a responsibility to protect the code of cricket, like we would with any other sporting codes. We have a responsibility to protect the sponsors and taxpayers' money invested in the sport. As a minister, I don't want to be associated with any wrongdoing." This statement followed media allegations of mismanagement and corruption plaguing Cricket SA (Sport24 2011). Thus, although the King Code is legally binding in South Africa, the country's sporting bodies seem to be struggling with governance issues in the sporting codes. The seemingly limited role of good governance practice or failure to adhere to governance principles within the African continent highlights a fundamental need for further research in this field. In particular, the role that boards of such organisations play in their strategic function seems to be an area that needs research scrutiny.

## Board involvement in strategic management

Ferkins and Shilbury (2012: 68–69) provide a comprehensive review of the research periods reflecting interest in board strategic function. They identify initial interest questioning the desirability of a board's involvement in the strategic function; a subsequent period influenced by agency theory and focusing on “matters of conformance” and structure; and finally a third period with a move towards pluralism in the debate and an emphasis on context and process. In an earlier study, the researchers found “general consensus” that boards have a “performance” role (i.e. a forward-looking role) as well as a “conformance” role (i.e. the monitoring and accountability role) (Ferkins & Shilbury 2009: 272–273). It is the former that is addressed in the current study, as it highlights the role boards have to play in the strategic management of their organisations. Ferkins et al. (2010: 606) found that board members perceive their contribution to the strategic development of the organisation as central to their role. In fact, according to Ferkins et al. (2009: 245), greater board involvement in strategy can advance the board's ability to perform its strategic functions. These authors also propose that further investigation into the ongoing contribution by board members to strategy development would be critical to the understanding of governance. This is echoed by Winand, Rihoux, Robinson and Zintz (2012: 5), who indicate that the involvement of board members of such organisations in strategic planning is a key performance driver. Edwards and Cornforth (2003: 187–201) provide three categories to map a board's strategic contribution, namely inputs (i.e. compositional features), processes (i.e. organising and running the board) and context (i.e. institutional influences). An overview of research in this field reveals limited attention to these categories broadly, and in particular in the African environment. It seems that the structure and composition of such boards has not received much research attention (Ferkins et al. 2005: 212), and secondly that empirical investigations of the roles that board members actually fulfil in their sport organisations are equally sparse (Yeh & Taylor 2008: 40; Hoye & Doherty 2011: 273). No research was found on the role of African sport boards (and in particular in relation to global sport organisations), which reveals limited attention to the third category of ‘context’ as well. Thus, the input, process and context of the boards of African sport organisations will be placed within the larger body of work according to each of these categories.

Ferkins et al. (2005: 212) suggest that sport researchers have not specifically dealt with the structure and composition of sport boards. However, recently this is changing with demographic characteristics such as board composition being linked with outcomes associated with good corporate governance (Rutherford & Buchholtz 2007: 580). Size also attracted attention in studies regarding board size; Taylor and

O'Sullivan (2009: 688) report the optimum size to be between five and 12 members. Given the use of board demographic characteristics as proxy measures for board vigilance (Rutherford & Buchholtz 2007: 576), the composition of the boards of sport organisations should be considered to gain further insight into governance. Finally, governance practices and board composition may also be influenced by requirements set by global sport organisations (GSOs) that control sporting codes globally. Understanding the board composition of ACA affiliates could enhance the knowledge of this characteristic of an NSO's board operation.

Regarding board roles, a comprehensive literature review by Yeh and Taylor (2008: 37–38), based on previous empirical studies, found that boards of sport organisations have 11 different roles, namely: to (1) develop, formulate and monitor strategies; (2) formulate policies; (3) enhance the public image of sport organisations; (4) review and monitor managerial activities and performance; (5) report to members and stakeholders; (6) employ, evaluate, provide advice and reward executives; (7) ensure organisational compliance with related legislations; (8) manage financial resources; (9) develop a risk management plan; (10) conduct self-assessment; and (11) initiate board development activities. Firkins and Shilbury (2012: 69) concur and indicate that recent understanding of a board's strategic function has moved beyond compliance and monitoring, and that boards are now regarded as necessitating "involvement in all phases of the strategic decision-making process". However, no research on the roles of African sport organisations or the involvement of boards in the strategic management process could be found. An understanding of the current conceptualisation of the role of boards of African sport organisations and their alignment to developments in other contexts would be beneficial in advancing the field of sport governance *in loco*.

Global sport organisations (GSOs) are supreme organs of governance in sport, with global authority. Pre-eminent among the GSOs are organisations such as the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Rugby Board (IRB) and the International Cricket Council (ICC). These bodies are respectively the supreme governing bodies for football, the Olympic Games, rugby and cricket (Forster 2006: 72). GSOs can impose a variety of governance and administration practices on affiliated national members. Adherence often allows access to resources, funding and commercial opportunities (Hoye & Doherty 2011: 274). Exploring the relations between ACA affiliates and the ICC as a global sport organisation could help in understanding the challenges faced by stakeholders of such organisations.

The practice of good governance is thus multidimensional and the outcome of a complex set of activities, processes and relationships. This paper explores the

governance practices employed by African national cricket organisations operating within the domain of the International Cricket Council. The objective of this study was to obtain greater understanding of the ways in which sport organisation boards in Africa employ governance principles and to determine their role in the strategic management process. The following research questions thus guided this study:

- What is the nature of the composition of the boards of African national cricket organisations?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of boards with regard to strategic management?
- What are the strategic management activities performed by African national cricket boards?
- What is the perceived influence of the International Cricket Council (ICC) as an example of a global sport organisation on the governance compliance of African national cricket organisations?

This research makes a significant contribution, because these questions have started to attract research attention elsewhere, for example, in New Zealand (Ferkins & Shilbury 2012) and Belgium (Winand et al. 2012), but studies of African sport organisations could not be found in the literature. Thus, since sport boards act as the core decision-making authorities, which approve organisational strategies and manage the risk faced by sport organisations, improved understanding of governance is crucial for the continued effective delivery of sport opportunities to participants and spectators (Hoye & Cuskelly 2007: xv), internationally and particularly in Africa. Given the limited literature on this topic on the African continent, this exploratory study will consider the composition of national cricket boards, the roles and responsibilities of these boards in strategic management activities (including planning and implementation) as well as the influence of a GSO on governance compliance.

## Research methodology

Given the limited literature on this topic on the African continent, this is an exploratory study, in which a sequential mixed method research design was employed of quantitative and qualitative methods with the emphasis on the latter method (quan → QUAL). Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) identify local grounding and richness as reasons to employ qualitative research. Given the paucity of research on sport governing bodies in Africa, the design of the present study was motivated by the need for local grounding of the research. The case of the African Cricket Association

was used to provide answers to the 'how' and 'why' of governance in cricket on the African continent, focusing on the contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context (Yin 2003). Structured questionnaires were also used to gather quantitative data, thereby allowing a comparison between data items as well as between member countries or groups.

## **Sampling**

The members of the African Cricket Association (ACA), representing the Africa region of the International Cricket Council (ICC), provided a convenience sample for the research. The sampling was based on the population of associated bodies within this organisation. Cricket was chosen, as the increased commercialisation (e.g. a multi-million dollar sponsorship from the soft drink manufacturer Pepsi) and professionalisation (e.g. the appointment of full-time CEOs or managers) of the sport requires the development of corporate governance structures and practices and is consistent with ICC development and training drives in this regard (e.g. courses at the World Academy of sport in the United Kingdom and the Wits Business School in South Africa). The ACA has 22 affiliated members (African Cricket Association 2012) and conducts an annual conference with a maximum of two representatives of each of the national bodies represented. Sixteen of these members attended the 2010 and 2011 annual ACA conferences. Completed questionnaires were received from 16 of these representatives, and all were included in the research.

## **Data collection**

The data were collected using three methods, namely a focus group session, a structured questionnaire and individual interviews. During the annual ACA conference, a facilitated session on governance and leadership with the presidents of membership countries was used to gain qualitative insight. Focus group sessions were held with presidents/chairmen and executive board members of 16 ACA affiliates. These members were randomly assigned to groups of approximately five members each and asked to explain the composition of boards and their involvement in the strategic management process. During this session, participants contributed within these groups, while sessions were moderated by a trained facilitator. The focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes each, during which participants discussed the following statements: 'Describe the corporate governance practices in your association' and 'Discuss the role of the ICC on governance compliance in your organisation'. The facilitator took extensive notes during the focus groups,

and each group presented their answers to the other groups in a joint session and handed a written version to the researchers. The results of the joint session and the efforts of the individual sessions were used as data for a thematic analysis. Secondly, a questionnaire was used to obtain information from participants and was completed by 16 ACA affiliates. The questionnaire contained four sections. The first section required respondents to supply data about the leadership and staffing composition of associations; the second section dealt with the roles of the executive boards (Yeh & Taylor 2008: 37–38) and respondents had to indicate their level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale; the third section required respondents to indicate the composition of stakeholders involved in annual planning; and the final section required respondents to indicate their level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale with respect to their adherence to requirements set by the GSO and their involvement in strategic management (Edwards & Cornforth 2003: 187–201; Ferkins & Shilbury 2009: 272–273). Subsequently, as a third phase, 12 board members of the executive committees, representing different national ACA affiliates, were individually interviewed. The following questions were asked in the interviews:

1. How long have you been part of the board of your cricket association?
2. During your tenure, what are the major changes you have observed with regard to:
  - the manner in which your board operates?
  - the external environment?
  - sport management in general?
3. Describe the strategic management process within your association:
  - Who is involved and what are their respective roles?
  - Are there specific timeframes that you need to adhere to?
  - Inputs considered to formulate strategies.
4. In terms of leading and managing the association, what is the role of:
  - The board?
  - The management of the association?
  - Volunteers?
  - The ICC?
5. What do you think can be done to improve the strategic management process?
6. When you consider your current strategic management process, what works well and what are you proud of?

7. When you consider your current strategic management process, what keeps you awake at night (key challenges)?
8. How involved are you with the day-to-day running of the association?
9. Do board members undergo training to equip them for their board roles?
10. Do you offer a board orientation for new board members? (If yes, what does it cover?)
11. How does the role of a board member differ from that of a paid executive in your association?
12. Are board members paid for their services? (If yes, for which services?)

Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and was conducted by the researchers. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and used for a thematic analysis of data provided by the respondents.

## **Data analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed through SPSS, and the results provided descriptive data presented in graphs and schematic form. Although the small sample limited the range of analysis, non-parametric bivariate correlation (Spearson coefficient) was used to examine the relationships between certain scale variables.

Content and thematic analyses of the focus groups were performed to identify patterns and themes. The researchers reviewed the transcriptions of interviews and marked meaningful units for analysis. Categories were created according to themes that conveyed particular meaning for the researchers. Two researchers did the coding independently, and where disagreement arose, consensus was reached through the assistance of the third researcher. The results from the three sets of data were analysed for consistency and presented to describe themes and trends.

## **Results**

The presentation of results is structured according to the research questions. The results are presented as a combination of quantitative data in the form of graphs, and qualitative data in the form of verbatim quotes. Where verbatim quotes are used, countries and interviewees are anonymous to protect the identity of respondents.

## Board and staff composition

The ICC does not provide specific guidelines on board size and composition. The results of the research regarding the composition of African cricket organisation boards and staff reveals a variance in the number of board members ranging from 4 to 17 (mean of 8.4 members). As far as the staff complement is concerned, African cricket associations make extensive use of volunteers, as the study indicates that the average composition of staff includes 63 per cent being volunteers, 18 per cent full-time staff and 19 per cent part-time paid staff.

Board members are generally elected officials that are chosen into these positions by virtue of their involvement in cricket. This involvement can include roles as ex-players in the national side, coaching involvement in youth development programmes or administrative involvement with club sides. The current election practice poses several challenges, as illustrated by the following responses:

*... the strong point of the board is that those people are very dedicated, they know cricket, but the weak point is that the election of the office bearers are too involved with other clubs, in other words there's too much conflict of interests, club board relationship. (Interviewee 1)*

*...because we are so small, the board and cricket is actually in numbers so small in [country], and most other sports are like that. Players and board members come too close together. It's too integrated. I mean, there's a side that the players must be the players and the board must be the management and there's too much interference across sections and I think that's one of our problems. (Interviewee 7)*

The ICC appoints the CEO and paid officials of the country cricket boards. In general, the appointment of a paid CEO is seen as a positive development, although some respondents questioned the relationship between the CEO and the board, as illustrated by the following responses:

*... ok, that's also part of the development of cricket that we've identified now. Under the ICC structures, each associate country has to have a full-time office with a CEO and various other staff members. So that's a big development. (Interviewee 1)*

*... a paid system of CEO was introduced. What a positive thing. The problem that most people will face initially is that the CEO become[s] everything, while in reality it is the board which is answerable and which has the weight of the association in terms of [which] it's an affiliation with an international body, it is the board, which is democratically elected. (Interviewee 9)*

Despite board members' agreement that the appointment of a CEO and paid officials benefits the association, it was found that the appointed CEOs expressed concerns about the relationship between them and the board. Statements supporting this notion include:

*... as CEO, I set myself timeframes, and I set the board timeframes but one of the things one must*

*also realise is that all those board members are people who have a love for the game, and they get themselves involved, but they also have full-time jobs. So one must understand also those are some of the issues within our organisation. (Interviewee 7)*

*... things like I don't have a contract yet, I don't have executive powers, I have continual interference and it's very frustrating and I've got to such a stage that I'm withholding information so I can get on with the job. I just do things now, which is not being transparent and not in the interest of cricket in [country]. (Interviewee 1)*

The respondents reported that, between them, they employ 24 managers (average of 1.5 managers per association). However, four respondents indicated that they do not have any managers at all. In two associations, the number of managers exceeds the number of full-time staff, suggesting that part-time staff members are sometimes required to act as managers. Non-parametric bivariate correlation analysis of the responses with respect to staff complements and board size reveals a significant relationship between the number of board members and the number of managers ( $r_s = 0.483$ ,  $p = 0.068$ ). Thus, the more managers there are, the more board members there are likely to be.

The heavy reliance on volunteers is a double-edged sword, with volunteers being dedicated to the sport and wanting to contribute, but perhaps not contributing as much as might be expected of them:

*...it's a lot of people wanting to say their say but few of them wanting to actually do anything. (Interviewee 2)*

*... some may say why don't you co-opt a few members but we'll only end up with more people doing nothing. (Interviewee 2)*

Furthermore, the number of board meetings held annually is negatively correlated with the number of full-time staff members ( $r_s = -0.783$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In other words, the more full-time staff members, the fewer board meetings per annum were held. This finding suggests that, in the absence of qualified full-time staff members, board members will take up the slack to effectively run the organisation and will thus meet more regularly. Further support is expressed in the following statement:

*The board has taken a real step back since I've come on board, less hands-on, less involved on a day-to-day basis. Which I think is right basically. I think you employ professionals to do a professional job. [The board has] started taking a backseat now and will obviously still approve policy and make sure that we as executives implement policy. (Interviewee 6)*

As indicated, there are various contradictory perspectives about the strategic role that a board should play, and the strategic responsibilities that it should have, which

begs the question of what roles and responsibilities African cricket association boards fulfil with respect to strategy.

## Roles and responsibilities of boards with regard to strategic management

From the previous section, it emerged that the composition of the board influences their roles and responsibilities (e.g. the number of meetings they have to attend). In this regard, the ICC does not provide specific guidelines on the number of board meetings, resulting in variance in frequency of board meetings, ranging from three meetings per year to 52 times per year, with a mean of 13.2. Half of the respondents indicated that they have board meetings once a month or more often. This appears to be a function of the absence of paid officials, where boards are required by necessity to step in and do the day-to-day work. This observation is supported by the qualitative data, which indicates that there is some uncertainty about the roles that boards are supposed to play (as opposed to the role of the CEO) and a real need for board development. The following quotations from interviews serve as examples to illustrate these observations.

*They need be told that this is what you do and that's why you've been selected on a board for. Then they need possible terms of reference so that you can say this is what you should be doing and then measure them against that ... (Interviewee 2)*

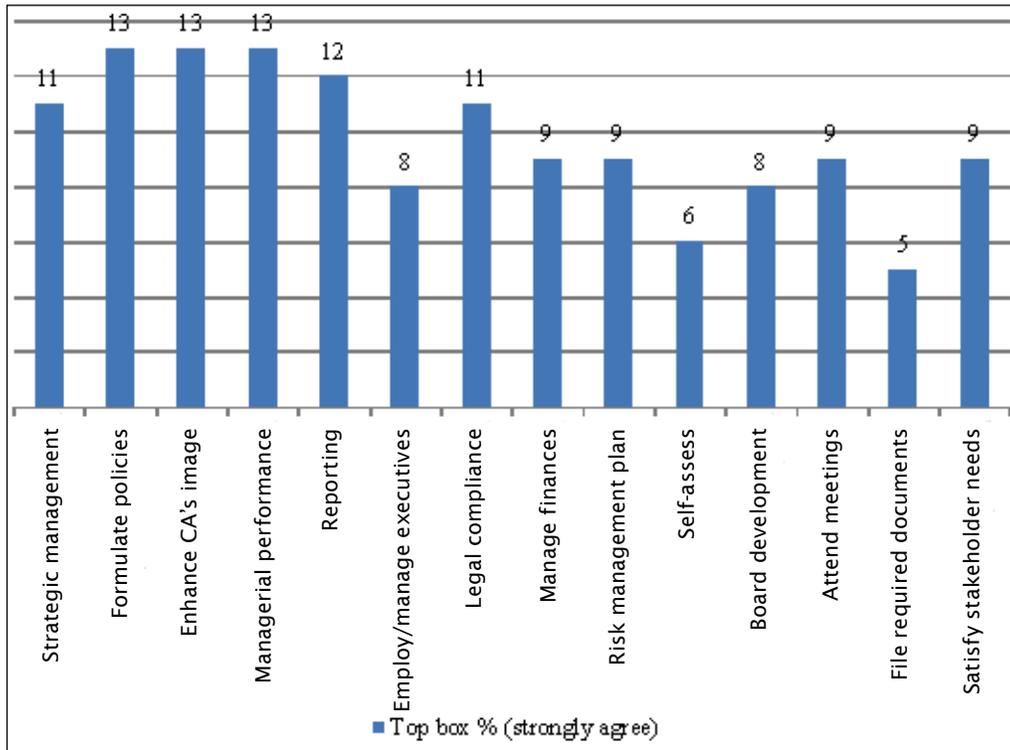
Therefore, the current study also examined the perceived strategic roles and responsibilities of boards. This was done by evaluating the roles boards need to fulfil, as proposed by Yeh and Taylor (2008: 38). The results are summarised in Figure 1.

Respondents agreed most with the board roles relating to the formulation of policies, enhancing the image of the cricket association and managing and reviewing the performance of managers. They agreed least with the roles of self-assessment and filing the required documents, employing and managing executives and initiating board development activities. Some respondents expressed concern that the board simply plays a ceremonial role, and that their contribution is not always as good as might be expected:

*... there are certain matters which are the responsibility of the board. Even if they have to take a decision and even if they have to plan things, it is a board which plans and makes the policy to be executed by somebody. But since these changes have come there is a gap. The board has become ceremonial [i.e. ceremonial]. (Interviewee 9)*

*...when I say good, the attendance is good, the guys are there and they give input. I don't say the input is good input, it's based on business and experience, so, they would make decisions, pass them down...*

*So it's generally a management role they're playing but I don't think the management is good level management. If you'd mark it out of a 100, I'd say I'd give them 65 or 70 per cent. (Interviewee 1)*



Note: CA = Cricket Association

Figure 1: Top box comparison of board role acceptance

These findings also suggest that board members may be somewhat unclear about what the role of a board should be with regard to the strategic management of the organisations. African cricket boards need development and guidance on what their role should be, as the following quotation illustrates:

*I think the board needs more training and like any person, a guy off the street ... look we got two insurance agents, a farmer and a lawyer and a teacher on our board. I think they don't know what it is to be a director of a company. ... it's a gap and to walk in and to say you are now director and [they'll] never say but what are my responsibilities. (Interviewee 1)*

When it comes to strategic planning, it is curious that, despite the stated importance thereof, only 11 of the 16 respondents indicated that their association appointed an

individual dedicated to strategic planning, while ten had a strategic team in place. Inquiry into the strategic management activities performed by African cricket boards is therefore required.

### **Strategic management activities performed by African national cricket boards**

The study also explored other aspects of the strategic management process, which are summarised in Figure 2.

With respect to having strategic direction, most respondents felt that they had a clear statement of the reason for their existence. The vision and mission were seen as useful in developing strategic goals, as was information on the environment. However, not all strategic management activities were rated at the same level as strategic direction.

External environmental assessment is arguably one of the weaker areas in the strategic management process of the associations. Annual opportunity and threat assessments are not ubiquitously conducted, and relatively little exists by way of formal processes to gather and analyse external environmental information. With regard to internal environmental assessment, respondents felt confident that they know their own strengths and weaknesses, while the lack of knowledge, skills and abilities (i.e. competencies) are important concerns. Respondents were also not very convinced that they know what their critical assets (resources and skills) are.

Strategic shortcomings may lead to opportunities being missed:

*I think it's just for good sound management and setup, strategic development to identify that, sound financial stability, good fiscal policies and also, what we're lacking in is to identify marketing opportunities that haven't worked really for us, but they're there. (Interviewee 1)*

Operational frameworks for strategy implementation are generally in place, although respondents generally did not feel that technology is being used well to execute their plans. In the same vein, respondents indicated that they agree that quarterly reviews are conducted, but did not agree to the same extent that performance reviews are conducted or that they have sufficient control measures in place.

### **Perceived influence of the International Cricket Council (ICC) on governance compliance of African national cricket organisations**

The ICC provides clear guidelines on the minimum components of the strategic management process to be followed. Associations can do more than the minimum on

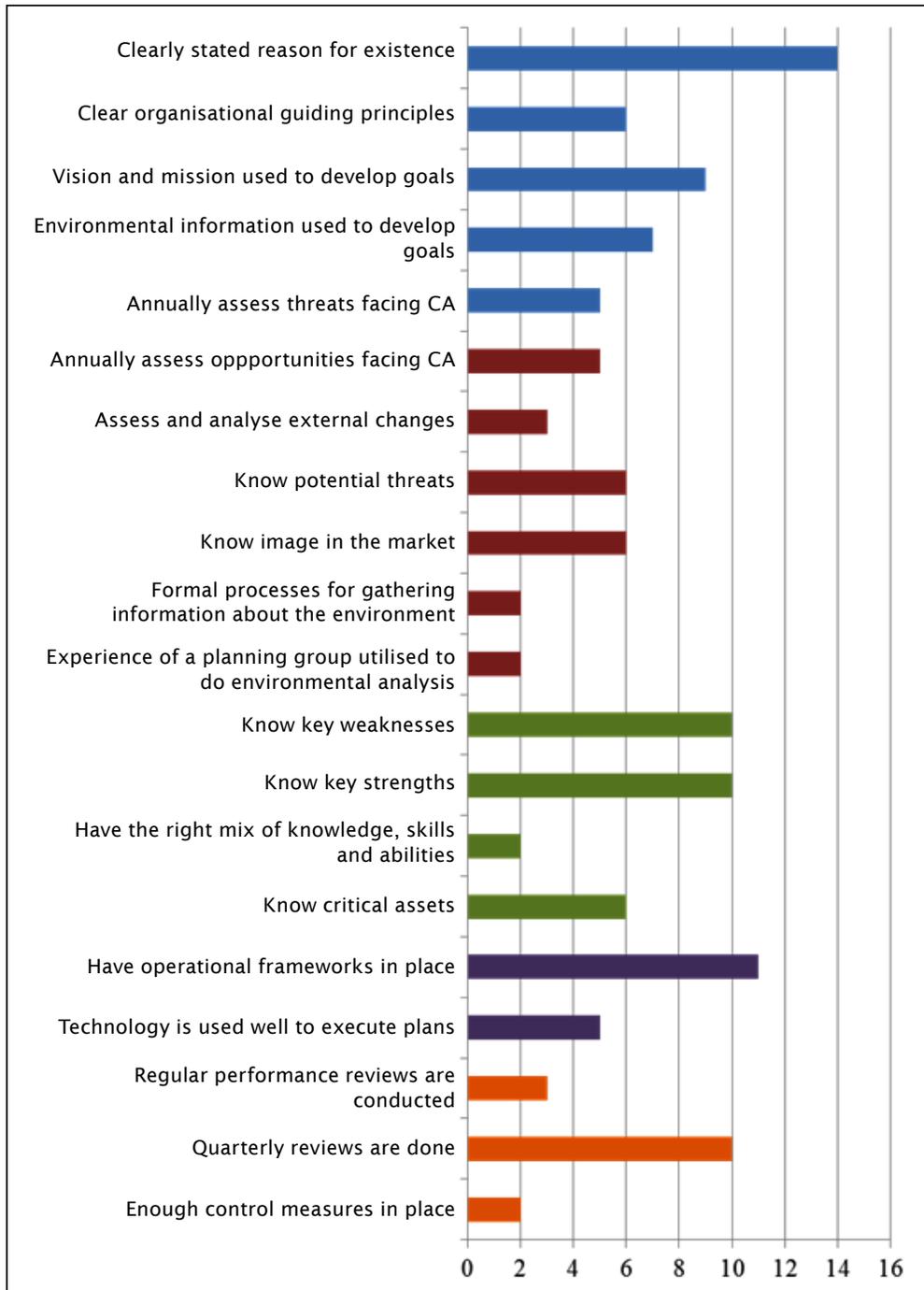


Figure 2: Strategic management activities

their own. In Figure 3, the use of ICC guidelines is compared with the enhancements made by the association beyond the template provided by the ICC.

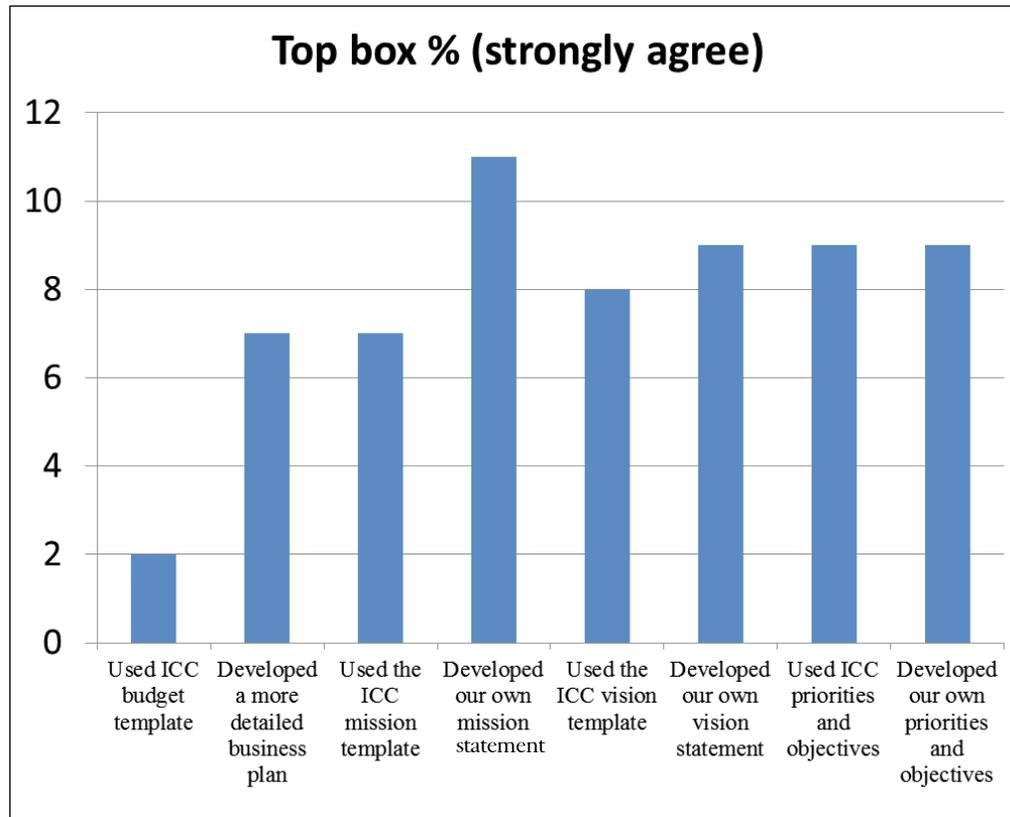


Figure 3: ICC compliance and enhancement

The findings represented in Figure 3 suggest that the ICC budget template does not provide enough of a strategic plan in its own right; thus only two respondents strongly agreed that they used only the template. However, seven respondents strongly agreed that they developed their own, more detailed business and strategic plan. Similarly, respondents generally did not use the ICC templates alone for setting mission and vision statements and identifying priorities and objectives, but also developed their own.

The findings in this section suggest that the ICC guidelines may not be perceived as particularly useful, and while the cricket boards may comply in order to keep the ICC happy, their adoption may be superficial rather than a change in governance and management practices.

*Well, you know, ICC pass a lot of stuff down to us. I think the problem with the ICC, they generalise a lot and Africa has got its own culture as has Asia and Europe. And ICC must understand that when they say but you are doing things wrong and you've got to say but we have our own culture, you must understand where I am coming from ... so I don't think they're listening. I see their problems; I mean, cricket is growing tremendously, they've got 106 countries to cope with and just to individualise one country must be very difficult. (Interviewee 1)*

In the following section, the strategic management activities of the cricket boards are examined.

## Discussion

The study reveals challenges that the boards of ACA affiliates face regarding all three categories of strategic contribution identified by Edwards and Cornforth (2003), namely input, process and context. In the first case, 'input' challenges relate to the variance in board size and subsequent uncertainty regarding optimal board size, both in terms of practice and description by the ICC. The composition of the board in terms of professionalism poses challenges, in that boards consist mostly of people that know and love the game, but do not necessarily know anything about being a board member. The current composition of boards poses a challenge, as international research suggest that a board's strategic capability is enhanced by members who are "big picture/long term thinkers", "highly focused, impartial and inquisitive thinkers", as well as by a "hybrid" board composition including sport knowledge (Firkins & Shilbury 2012: 76). A further hindrance is that board members lack training as directors, as well as the lack of a more comprehensive governance framework provided by the ICC and ACA. Member countries will need to move beyond an approach that focuses on 'checking boxes' to real governance.

Regarding the process of board involvement, board members tend to operate at the operational level. While it is acknowledged that there is a general 'fuzziness' between a board's strategic and operational roles (Edwards & Cornforth 2003), it seems to be compounded in the particular case through a lack of professional managers within the organisations, and the limited availability of someone to take care of operational, day-to-day responsibilities and allow boards to fulfil an oversight function. The lack of management skills creates a management vacuum, and boards will then step in of necessity, albeit temporarily. Furthermore, most board members have not been trained as directors, and are thus not clear with respect to their role and the role of the board (as opposed to the role of executives). There is accordingly considerable room for improvement to ensure sufficient distance between the board (and their governance role) and operations (and their management role). There is

an inconsistent approach to strategic management, although ACA affiliates regard it as important. Some strategic management activities are broadly accepted (e.g. developing mission statements, having operational frameworks for implementation and conducting quarterly reviews), while other activities are neglected (e.g. the processes for gathering and analysing information on the external environment).

Through guidelines provided by the ICC, African cricket associations have ostensibly adopted many good governance practices, although further research is required to examine their impact on governance and behaviour. The research suggests that much of the governance is done for compliance rather than to impact on the organisation, its members and its role in society. The guidelines are also to some extent perceived as a ‘moving target’ that may change as soon as it has been achieved. It would seem that the boards of ACA affiliates consider the involvement of the ICC towards their role in the strategic management process more from an agency theory perspective, where the focus is on compliance. However, respondents in the study suggest that an approach from a “stewardship” perspective based on “co-operation, pro-organisational, and collective actions” (Firkins et al. 2009) could be more appropriate for the contextual needs of such organisations.

In response to these problems, three key initiatives that might assist the boards of ACA affiliates can be offered: training, improvements in governance frameworks and strategic management assistance. Board members should be required to undergo training, just as the directors of business ventures are required to undergo training as directors. In addition, training in strategic management (and even, in some cases, basic management skills) would also contribute towards better management and governance. A second remedy could be to implement a more comprehensive governance framework, and boards could be assisted by facilitating strategy sessions to instil more effective strategic management processes and activities into the associations. This would give the ICC the opportunity to involve boards more in strategic processes and to provide an opportunity for interaction between the ICC and the national bodies. Furthermore, in this manner African sport boards could improve their strategic capability by “becoming more involved in strategy development” (Ferkins & Shilbury 2012: 70), and could also improve their performance and conformance roles. This would require a move towards board involvement in co-leading strategy development or integrating strategy in board processes, as proposed by Ferkins et al. (2009: 271).

## **Conclusion and further research**

The literature review suggested that there is a paucity of academic research on governance in sporting bodies in Africa, and this research takes a step towards closing

this gap. The research was conducted among African Cricket Association boards, and data were collected using a questionnaire, analysing secondary information, a workshop with association presidents and interviews with key executive board members. The study was limited by the small population (22 ACA boards) and the fact that it was limited to a single sport code.

The requirement by the ICC for the appointment of professional CEOs and other staff members appears to have gone some way towards professionalising the sport in African countries. However, CEOs seem to experience significant pressure due to board members that do not always contribute to the organisation as expected. One source of such pressure is the high level of reliance on volunteers that seem willing to contribute more by talking than by doing. Furthermore, it would seem that some board members are being selected more on the basis of their cricket affiliation and networks (i.e. political factors) than on their potential contributions as professional board members. They accordingly end up playing a ceremonial role rather than a proactive and positive governing role, and do not give sufficient attention to their roles as board members. While boards could benefit by leveraging such networks and affiliations, the ACA could lead by providing more guidelines on the selection, composition and role of boards, but perhaps more importantly providing more training and development of board members to enable them to better fulfil their governance roles.

With regard to the ICC's contribution, the perception appears to be that they are somewhat out of touch with the realities of being a small sporting body in Africa. More interaction between the ICC and ACA member countries on this specific issue could help to alleviate this problem and to develop guidelines that are more in line with African realities. However, interviewees were sympathetic to the pressure that the ICC experiences due to the growth of cricket worldwide.

The overall impression is that the governance and strategic management process is, in most cases, geared towards compliance rather than deriving real benefit for the organisation. The danger is that if compliance is the goal, the process becomes a burden rather than an asset. What is required is a culture change from mainly amateur sporting bodies (at least in spirit) to professional sport organisations that realise the benefits of good governance and professional management.

Given the paucity of sport management research in this context, there is ample opportunity to conduct similar studies in other sporting codes. In addition, more in-depth qualitative research could be conducted in specific countries or regions to gain a deeper understanding of the functioning of sporting bodies and their boards. This seems essential in order to develop a better understanding of the effect of professionalising sport in developing countries.

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