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## Organizational structure and management challenges of athletics clubs in Ethiopia: Policy perspective

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study is to identify the organizational structure and management challenges of athletics clubs in Ethiopia from the perspective of the country policy. This research was conducted to provide an answer for the basic research questions what does the athletics club structures and management challenges look like. The research design used to this study is survey method. The study is conducted on athletics clubs found in four regional states and one city administration athletics' federation. Stratified sampling technique was employed to select the sample clubs by formulating strata based on their administration (n=25) and purposive sampling for interview participants. Questionnaires, interview, observation and document are used as primary and secondary sources of data. The result of the analysis discloses that the athletics clubs have undetermined organizational structure and club strategy, environment, resource, decision making and line of communication (related management challenges). Managers need to design an organizational structure based on the club strategy, environment, resource, decision making and line of communication which would be implemented in the coming future. In this modern life research informs, the gap to be filled, new theories, principles, and proper systems of management. One of the implications of this study is informing policy makers to adjust their club structure by considering the club management challenges which may appear in the coming future to put the structure in to practice.

**Keywords:** Management, organizational structure, athletics, club, challenges, policy

### 1. Introduction

The sports industry is one of the fast-growing organizations throughout the world and it is becoming more complex. The athletics industry is not an exceptional sport. Athletics is one of the oldest sporting activities throughout the world. This has been practiced with different ups and downs in its structures as a part of an organization, like the other organizations with different challenges.

Wolfe *et al.* (2005, p. 184) [32] described as a “sport is a social institution which provides a scientific observation, which helps to examine values, socialization, bureaucracy, and stratification to give a name for a structure and processes that exist at the societal level.” Acimovic *et al.* (2013, p.251) [1] also described “sports clubs as a social institution in the sporting arena. Those social institutions need proper management to as it was intended to get results. The managers are also expected to plan and manage personnel policy that confronts the future results of the club. Sports clubs need proper structure for proper management “an organizational structure is a framework that outlines how tasks are divided, grouped, and coordinated in an organization. It is also important to define the responsibility of staff and volunteers “fit in” with each other in terms of work specialization, decision making, and flow of collaboration, responsibility, and mechanisms of reporting.”

Mentioned in a similar situation that “an organizations structure is important because it defines where staff and volunteers fit in terms of work tasks, decision-making procedures, the need for collaboration, levels of responsibility and reporting mechanisms. In other words, the structure of an organization provides a roadmap for how positions within an organization are related and what tasks are performed by individuals and work teams within an organization.” Hoye & Cuskelly (2007, p. 35) [15] also describe the “organizational structure in terms of governance, governance structure of non-profit sports organizations have been conceptualized and

analyzed largely from different perspectives: organizational theory and governance models. Each of these perspectives provides us a useful lens to examine significant and recurring issues in the governance structure of non-profit sports organizations. The organizational theory perspective analysis governs issues through the process of formalization, centralization, specialization, departmentalization and structural isomorphism.” As it has already been mentioned, organizational structure is very important to show the duties and responsibilities of the paid staff and volunteers in sports organizations, specifically in athletics sport. This is also important to show the line of communication between different stakeholders in the athletics club.

In a similar situation, the definition is given to organizational management working for athletics sports management. Because athletics sports management needs a system to stand as an organization. Athletics sports organization management is the science and art of putting the function of management and skills of the manager into the practical situation for the advancement of the organizational performance through the people in it, based on the structure of the sport organization. This is also stated as “management is the coordination of human resource, materials, technological and financial resources needed for the organization to achieve its goals and leads towards the improvement of an organizational performance”. Management and sports management are almost the same. The principles, skills, and functions of management practice under the pure management practiced again in a similar situation in managing sports organizations, specifically in different sports clubs management.

“Managing sports organizations at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves the application of techniques and strategies evident in the majority of modern business, government and non-profit organizations.” Egea *et al.* (2007, p.182) [6] this day “sports clubs have been affected by different challenges to be effective in their performance and to be efficient in the proper utilization of resources. Clubs follow different directions and demands for a rationalization of their organizations, revenue generation opportunities. These social institutions also demand commercial and marketing strategies to exploit them.” Managing different athletics sports organizations need different ways of structuring the tasks and responsibilities of the concerned leaders for specific positions based on the situation. Athletics organizational structure is very important to control every body’s activity in the organization based on the duties and responsibilities given to the specific position. Tran and Tian (2013, p. 229) [30].” the factors which could affect organizational structure and management has been under the researchers focus for many years and their impact on the overall organizational efficiency.”

Management challenges have a negative effect on the implementation of organizational structure in different athletic

clubs. Because the manager must anticipate the challenges may face during structuring the organizational structure of different athletics clubs and the athletics clubs structure must be adopted based on the current realities of the country not as it is.

## 2. Research methods

The researcher employed surveying/cross-sectional study design. The rationale for selecting this type of research design is due to different reasons. First, survey research describes the present affairs as it exists without any bias. Secondly, it is also a process of collecting information in order to answer questions concerning the relationship between different variables. The researcher does not manipulate the variable or arrange for events to happen. Surveys are only concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident or trends that are developing (Kothari, 2004, p.120) [19]. The researcher used questionnaire, interview, observation and documents to collect relevant data.

According to the statistical data obtained from the Ethiopian athletics competitors list of 2017 athletics championship (N=27) clubs have been participating in the Ethiopian athletics championship selected through stratified sampling technique. Creswell (2012) [5], Kothari (2004) [19] & Ruane (2005) [28], stratified sampling technique the researcher first form strata or stratify the population on some specific characteristics and then followed with simple random sampling technique to select the samples from each sub-groups (stratum) of the total population and purposive to select the interview participants. To meet the representative sample (n= 25) clubs chosen as a sample. Secondly, (n=129) athletics clubs coaches and managers were selected as a sample through census sampling.

Jackson (2010, p. 70) [17] variables of the study must be clearly defined. Defining variables of the study is a very important stepping stone in research. Five point likert scale questionnaires were used for this survey study. Pilot study was made before administered for the actual data collection to similar population to check the reliability of the questionnaires. In the pilot study, 20 athletics team leaders and athletics projects have participated. Korb (2017) [18]. Reliability is the consistency of results from a test. Split half reliability is an appropriate for Likert scale items and the lower limit is 0.80. The result of the pilot shows that the questions are consistent with the spearman brown coefficient is 0.853.

## 3. Result

### 3.1. Major management challenges of athletics clubs

The quantitative and qualitative analysis result are stated in the following in the form of tables and descriptions.

**Table 1:** Major management challenges

Management Challenges	Cumulative Percent (Disagree or Strongly Disagree)
Decisions are made based on evidence	14.4
Decision made based on the time schedule	33.9
The club takes my opinions into account when making decisions	22.9
Attentive to what each other says	21.2
Benefits from the relationship which was created through smooth communication	16.9
Sufficient physical resource to manage the athletics clubs	28
Sufficient facilities to manage the athletics club effectively	39
Responsible as a manager to keep the club equipment used by the club	11.9
Manage all the physical resources and facilities	16.9
People in the club are the most valuable resources	12.7

Take care of the club athletes and employees	10.2
Recruit and hire the qualified professionals for the benefit of the club	17.8
Sufficient budget to manage the club properly	26.3
Checking that my club does not waste financial resources	32.2
Raise funds for the club besides to the budget the club has	37.3
Clear directions (vision and mission)	18.6
Clear, measurable and understood values	15.3
The Strategy consists of clear objectives and goals	14.4
The strategy shows the relationship between a club, resource and its environment	13.6
Clear environmental management system	21.2

The cumulative percentages of the management challenges were calculated. In this situation the cumulative percentage of disagreeing and/or strongly disagree shows the level of the challenges, in another way the left or negative side of the level of measurement, measures how far the challenges negatively affect the management of athletics clubs in the Ethiopian context. From these points of view, the higher cumulative percentage shows the major challenges which hinder the management of athletics clubs and the lowest cumulative percentage shows the lower management challenges.

**Table 2:** Environmental management challenges

Management Challenges	Cumulative Percent (Agree or Strongly Agree)
Influenced by the actions of paid staff	48.3
Influenced by the actions of athletes	53.4
Influenced by the actions of service providers	50.8
Influenced by the actions of volunteers	30.5
Influenced by the actions of suppliers	50.8
Influenced by the action of the Federation	44.9
Influenced by the actions of sponsors	30.5

The higher values of the cumulative percentage of agree and strongly agree shows that, the major challenges: from these analysis actions of paid staff, athletes, service providers, suppliers, and federations are the major management challenges in athletics clubs of Ethiopia. From this, the major challenges in relation to environmental factors are actions of athletes, actions of service providers, actions of paid staff, actions of federations and actions of suppliers.

In addition to the result found from the analysis of the questionnaires, the interviewee's result shows similar fashion. Our federation has a discussion period with the athletics clubs under our federation. During the discussion period, they raised different problems. Some of the problems/challenges are management problems. One of the problems raised during a discussion period is an external manager related problem. The external managers have been taking athletes to competitions without the recognition of the club owners. Still, many athletics clubs have complained about this issue (AAAFM1, 23/05/2017).

In our regional athletics federation, clubs face many management challenges. The challenges are also challenges of the federation. The management challenges are internal and external. Some of the internal challenges are budget and finance, human resource (professionals), facility (transportation, buildings and training centers), training experts, competition experts and festival experts (TAFM4, 3/08/2017).

I was a president of Tigray athletics federation. In my carrier, I saw different problems in the clubs but they are free from our control because most of the clubs are owned by industrial companies and corporate limited share companies. Since the clubs are almost beginners sometimes they made mistakes deliberately. We solve the problems through flexible

Based on this criteria the highest values such as lack of schedule based decisions, unable to take the opinion of the others to make decision, lake of resource, lake of facilities, lack of budget to manage the athletics clubs properly, lake of financial wastage checkup and unable to raise funds for the athletics clubs besides to the budget of the club are the major management challenges at disagree and strongly disagree. Besides to these challenges unclear directions (strategic vision and mission) of the clubs and unable to recruit and hire qualified professionals as a manager and coach are the other contributing factors.

decisions. The other challenge is the prize given to the athletics clubs during competition. Most of the clubs misuse the motto of sport to get a prize. This is a huge challenge I face in my life. This challenge also spoils the objective of athletics club organization. As a region compared with the previous we are in a better position but we remain a lot (TAFM5, 8/6/2017).

In my opinion, the previous athletics clubs were better. The betterment of the club is measured by the result of the country. In this modern life, different management challenges are hindering the practice and management of athletics clubs. In my opinion, the structure by itself is a challenge. As to me, we must change our structure to the schooling system. We can easily found many athletes in schools at a time being. Besides to this financial resource, human resource, sponsors, service providers, the action of athletes and staffs, facilities and training centers are some of the major challenges (EAFM1, 24/05/2017).

In general, the following interview response summarizes the major challenges of athletics club management.

There are too much management challenges some of these are structure gap, documentation which shows change, low preparation of training manuals, lack of proper training plan which fits with the strategy and structure of the club. In addition to this lack of knowledgeable managers, lack of clear communications period and flow, the lake of decision making on the side of club managers, lack of budget and finance, lake of understanding on the social and economic values of clubs, goals, and objectives of the sport of the countries. In my belief the organizational structure was not designed by considering, the country sport policy professionals and research (CC1, 18/05/2017, CM1, 19/05/2017, EAFM2, 22/05/2017, and OAFM6 and 7, 16/05/2017).

The observation result also shows that, there is lack of training resource, facility and transportation and offices. The result of the questionnaires, interview and observation also substantiated by the following results found from Tigray athletics federation (2016) report and Amhara regional state athletics federation documents (2016). As it was mentioned under the Amhara athletics federation strategic plan from 2016-2020 the federation mentioned the major problems were not solved during the 1<sup>st</sup> strategic plan. It starts with clubs was owned by higher institutions, developmental companies and the community. These clubs also have lack of disciplines controlling system in all clubs, lack of better training in all aspects and unable to select athlete's talent properly and selecting talented athletes to make club members. In addition to the above challenges lacks of professionals (human resource), physical and financial resources, training facilities and lack of decision making are the major challenges identified by the regional federation. Tigray athletics federation also identified weakness and challenges of their federation in the annual report of 2016. Some of the challenges are lack of follow up by the federation, lack of training resource and having loosed affiliation with schools (educational institutions) (TAF, 2016).

According to the analysis result and the document collected from the regional federations club structure, decision making, line of communication, lack of resource (human, financial and physical resources), unclear directions (strategic values, visions, missions, goals and objectives), and actions of athletes, service providers, suppliers and lack of knowledge on the social and economic value of athletics sport are the major challenges of the athletics clubs management. In addition to this the result of the interviewee shows that the athletics club structure by itself is also a management challenge. This is also substantiated by the Ethiopian sport and youth policy. This means the policy and the practice (club structure guidelines) are totally towards the opposite direction which needs to be fit each other. To there is a mismatch between the sport policy and the structure guideline.

#### 4. Discussion

The major purpose of this study is to make an investigation on the identification of organizational structure and management challenges of Ethiopian athletics clubs from the country policy perspective. Athletics clubs are parts of the sports organizations in a country. Clubs may be challenged in the process of management practice and to be managed effectively.

From the above analysis result and the document collected from the regional federations decision making, line of communication, lack of resource (human, financial and physical resources), unclear directions (strategic values, visions, missions, goals and objectives), and actions of athletes, service providers and suppliers are the major challenges of the athletics clubs management. Besides to this as the result of the interviewee shows that the structure and lack of knowledge in understanding the social and economic values are the other management challenges. This is also substantiated by the Ethiopian sport and youth policy (1998) [23]. This means the policy and the practice (club structure guidelines) are totally towards the opposite direction which needs to be fit each other.

Besides to the descriptive analysis result, the results found through document, observation and interview analysis on management challenges are: budget and finance, human resource (technical professionals, training experts,

competition experts and festival experts), facility (transportation, buildings (office), training centers), the structure in practice, documentation, lack of training manuals, lack of knowledge on the social and economic values of the athletics clubs. In the opinion of the researcher there is a mismatch between the club structure and state formation. From this the state formation is another challenge of athletics clubs management.

The Ethiopian athletics clubs owned by different types of structure, directly or indirectly as profitable and/or non-profitable clubs. Club structure depends on the resource, environment, strategy and state formation of a country. Ethiopia is one of the developmental states and developing countries. Sport (athletics) is not a priority of developmental state and developing countries, because sport needs huge capital investment. The athletics club formation and organization must goes to schooling system as it is clearly illustrated in the Ethiopian youth and sport policy (Wolde and Gaudin, 2007) [31].

Hannan and Freeman (1977) [13] & Miles, *et al.* (1978) [22] in recent years the result of the research shows that the effect of environment on the organizational structure has a central place in organizational theory. This idea shows that if the organizational structure of an organization is not organized based on the environment (external and internal) it will face many problems in its effectiveness. Successful managers are able to buffer their organizations from the environmental disturbances or to arrange smooth adjustments that require minimal disruption of organizational structure. Numerous challenges currently faced to the voluntary Greek sports clubs. These challenges emerge not only from their changing external environment but also from the newly passed sport. Papadimitriou also mentioned in his study the challenges stated in the legislation (2725/99 Greek government, 1999) includes the following challenges: the pressing need for employing highly specialized technical staff and coaches for the successful implementation in the various sports clubs, the increased demands of resources in the clubs and the increased complexity in bureaucratic sports systems developed by the state agency for sport. In their investigation on the title "scarcity of resource in German non-profit sports clubs" find out the result which shows the challenges for non-profit sports management. Human resource, financial resource, networks, and infrastructural challenges are the major challenges in the management of sports clubs. It is a very important issue to club executives and sports federations to have an improved understanding of the clubs resource structure and the ability to use resources. Volunteers and employees in sports organizations are the mixes which make them distinct from many mainstream organizations as many sports organizations rely on volunteers working with paid personnel (Colyer, 2000) [3]. Mintzberg (1979, 1980 & 1981) [24-26] also strengthen the issue of organizational environment can vary from time to time and place to place based on its degree of complexity. And also depends on how it is static or dynamic in nature. Traditionally organizational structure described as a formal characteristic of an organization and has been used in numerous studies from many different perspectives (resource, institutionalism, strategic choice). Similarly, the organizational structure affects the individual working in the organization following the variation in individual experience. Stated that in his study the internal pressures in the club associated with staff's size or budgetary growth has failed to encourage the acquisition of a more formal structure.

Best practice management assists those managing sports

competitions to minimize the potential for legal challenges against the decision. It also helps avoid unnecessary exposure by board members to personal legal liability for their actions taken as a board member (Horvath, 2008) <sup>[14]</sup>. In order to realize the major challenges encountered to sports clubs, it is imperative for club executives and sports federations to have an improved understanding of the clubs resource structure and ability to deploy resources. The empirical result of this research shows that the clubs are characterized by the scarce resource. Those challenges place demands on future organizations (Laegaard and Bindslev, 2006) <sup>[20]</sup>. Sports organizations are a social entity involved in the sports industry. It is goal-directed, with a consciously structured activity system and relatively identifiable boundary (Eksteen, 2014) <sup>[7]</sup> Wolde and Gaudin (2007) <sup>[31]</sup> stated that, the federation is under the close political supervision and the management structure of the federation or the sport is divided into two levels. These are political and technical management structures. However, athletics clubs didn't give much attention and interest for long decades and athletics remained a programme of training and coaching than working for athletics development.

As it is clearly presented in the Ethiopian athletics club ownership and structuring guide line objective 1, 2, and 3 there are different types of athletics clubs ownership and organizational structure. Having such variety increases the athletics club management challenges. The reason is the clubs organized for different purposes with variety of mission, vision and goals. The number of challenges also increases as the variety of clubs structure increased. As the result of the questionnaire, interview, observation and documents presents that, the Ethiopian athletics clubs have been exposed to many challenges. The major management challenges faced to the Ethiopian athletics clubs are: resource (human, physical, financial), facility, the structure in practice, the club strategy, the environment (actions of athletes, suppliers, and service providers), decision making procedures and the line of communication, the state formation of a country and lack of understanding about social and economic values of athletics sport by stakeholders. These major management challenges could be minimized by modifying the club structure based the demand of the current situation.

## 5. Conclusion

Organizational structure clarifies the individual's duties and responsibilities or is a process of assigning authority to the people in the organization who assigned to manage the athletics clubs effectively and management challenges are the factors which hinder the effective management of the clubs to be effective in their performance.

- The organizational structure of athletics clubs is a guiding point to manage the clubs. Based on the structure the athletics club personnel are responsible to manage the athletics clubs.
- Everybody in the club is responsible to manage tasks according to the given club structure.
- The contingency theory is a widely accepted theory that deals with optimal organizational structure is dependent upon various situational factors but it doesn't mean this is the only theory. However, in managing the athletics club managers face many challenges to manage the athletics clubs successfully.
- The athletics clubs strategy, environment (internal and external), resource (human resource: paid and volunteers, physical resource and financial), an improper line of

communication and lack of evidence-based decisions, lake of the knowledge on the social and economic values of athletics clubs to the country, the state formation of a country and unable to revise the structure based on the demand of the situation are the major athletics club management challenges in Ethiopia.

- The structure must be adaptable to the environment of the athletics clubs.
- Managers must consider the club strategy, environment, resource, facility, lines of communication and ways of decision making, the sport policy of a country, state formation of a country, the economic and social values of athletics sport in both crafting and revising the club structure.
- The athletics club structure in Ethiopia must be revised in line with the sport policy and state formation of the country.

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