The role of sport governance consultants

Help or hindrance?

Rowland Jack

Introduction

For those who believe that sport can bring benefits to society and individuals, the governance of sport matters. In order for sport to achieve its maximum impact, the resources available to the sector must be managed effectively, efficiently and honestly.

As explained elsewhere in this book, there are a number of different actors in the sector who can influence sport governance, ranging from sport federations themselves to governments, social scientists, journalists, NGOs, commercial partners and others. I will consider the role that consultants can play in promoting better governance in sport, acknowledging that their involvement offers benefits, while also posing risks.

The organisations that govern international sport, such as the not-for-profit associations known as International Federations, arguably have the most direct responsibility. A number have embarked on governance reform projects in recent years, such as FIFA (FIFA 2016). However, the fact that there are limits to self-governance is well-recognised (Geeraert 2019).

Governments, a vital or dominant source of funding for sport in many countries, increasingly often take an interest in sport governance. Indeed governments are among the stakeholders in the International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport (IPACS), a multi-stakeholder platform (IPACS 2017). The over-riding objectives for governments in this area are to protect public investment and to obtain the best possible return for the funding provided. The leverage of control over funding can give governments power to impose monitoring processes and to drive change. While the evidence suggests that government involvement is growing, governance of relatively small sport bodies will rarely be a top priority. In many countries, the government department responsible for sport also has limited capacity and appetite to act.

Academic research has played an important role in the evolution of sport governance. For example, university research is naturally vital in the anti-doping field. When academics with relevant expertise are consulted, they can provide guidance on a broad spectrum of governance topics. The key constraint on the

influence of university researchers is that, in most cases, there is no obligation on sport federations or other actors to seek input from them, nor necessarily to implement advice that is received. It is only in quite specific circumstances that the academic sector can influence governance in sport directly.

Many of the highest profile sport governance scandals in recent years have been uncovered by the work of investigative journalists. There is no doubt that investigations into FIFA from the late 1990s onwards by journalists including Jens Weinreich, Andrew Jennings and Thomas Kistner (among others) have had a significant impact on sport governance. An active, thriving media industry with the freedom to ask difficult questions makes a vital contribution in this sector, as in many others. However, media outlets and individual journalists have limited resources and will naturally tend to focus on the most outrageous cases. More mundane, everyday reverses or improvements in governance are unlikely to attract much media attention.

The role of consultants

I believe there is also an important role for consultants specialising in sport governance, a group consisting of an assortment of individuals and small organisations who have become more prominent and more numerous since about 2010.

I made my own entry into sport governance consultancy in 2013. I had spent the prior 15 years of my career entirely in the sport sector, including stints with a government sport agency in the UK, an International Federation in Switzerland and a number of years in communications consultancy, working mostly on Olympic clients related to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing, Vancouver and London.

By 2011 I had become concerned about poor governance in international sport and began actively researching the field both out of personal interest and with the belief that there could be a commercial opportunity.

My perception was that failures and vulnerabilities were being uncovered regularly, particularly by investigative journalism, but there was only a limited amount of activity to attempt to rectify the issues identified.

After 18 months of planning, I set up I Trust Sport Ltd in 2013. A second company with a slightly different focus, Governance United Ltd followed in 2018, established with two other co-founders.

In this chapter, I will make the case that the consultancy approach shows promise and offers several benefits as one of an array of tools for reforming sport governance. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that it is also possible for consultants to hinder efforts at reform if the inherent risks are not managed adequately.

Argument

My observation is that consultancy projects have made an important contribution to changes in sport governance. Federations including World Athletics (formerly the IAAF) and the International Biathlon Union (IBU) have overhauled

their constitutions and ways of working as a result of commissions that were led by external consultants (IAAF 2016a; IBU 2019). I should mention that I Trust Sport was not involved in either of these projects.

In both cases high-profile crises and leadership changes provided impetus for fundamental reforms and then independent consultants with specialist expertise contributed significantly to the technical work.

The IAAF appointed a consultant with experience serving on of the federation's committees as chair of the IAAF Governance Structure Reform Working Group. The final set of recommendations arising from the working group (IAAF 2016b) was ultimately accepted in a vote by the IAAF Congress. Measures included changes to the authority and composition of the Executive Board, which has subsequently seen the introduction of some independent directors, plus the creation of the independent Athletics Integrity Unit. The Integrity Unit oversees all doping and other integrity matters, including the investigation and prosecution of cases.

In 2018 the IBU appointed a senior lawyer with experience in international sport as chair of its External Review Commission (IBU 2018). The set of reform proposals approved by the IBU Congress the following year included the introduction of term limits for the Executive Board and the delegation of 'judicial' decisions to an external authority, namely the relevant divisions of the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

I argue that advisory projects of this type, following the traditional consultancy model, are one method of promoting better governance in sport that can be highly effective, in the right circumstances.

Forms of consultancy in sport governance

It is worth considering the term 'consultancy' and what it involves. Definitions of consultancy tend to describe it as a professional practice that gives expert advice within a certain field. An individual consultant or consultancy firm usually provides expert advice on a particular subject to an organisation (generally known as the client) for a fee (Institute of Consulting 2020).

In order to provide an effective service, the consultancy firm should have relevant expertise, which may include individuals with specific qualifications. Typically, the consultant or company will provide a service that the client lacks or is unable to fulfil. Being external to the client organisation, the consultant can potentially offer a more objective point of view, and with greater freedom than an individual employee or internal team.

The client organisation may decide to appoint a consultant to gain an objective perspective, or to help take difficult decisions. In addition, it may be more efficient in cost and time to appoint a consultant than to use internal resources, especially for a one-off project.

Thinking about the sport governance sector in particular, a consultant could theoretically supply a service to any of a number of stakeholders. The client could be an organisation or an individual within the sector, such as a sport federation/

association, league or club. Alternatively, the client could be an organisation to which sport bodies are accountable in some way (Pielke 2013). There are hierarchical organisations that sport bodies are directly accountable to, such as government agencies and other bodies with a regulatory role. Funders of sport are also potential clients, again including government agencies as well as sponsors and broadcasters. A third category of possible client consists of organisations with public reputational impact on sport, ranging from international institutions to non-governmental organisations and activists.

A personal observation in the sport governance sector is that the main potential consultancy opportunities seem to divide between (1) audit and (2) advisory approaches. Traditionally, an 'audit' is an opinion given based on examination of financial statements. However, the term can also be used in a wider sense.

Michael Power (1999) describes the conceptual elements of audit. In the first instance, there is a clearly defined objective, such as measuring compliance with regulations. An individual or organisation that has some independence from the matter being audited conducts technical work to gather evidence. The auditor then expresses a view based on the evidence.

Audit is typically required when there is an accountability relationship of some type. It is intended as a risk reduction exercise.

Advisory governance consultancy, by contrast, fits the traditional consultancy model in which a consultant is appointed to provide an external, more independent perspective, or to help take difficult decisions.

There may be individuals or groups within an organisation who want to reform governance but face resistance or are wary about making the case because they perceive risks in doing so. In these circumstances, appointing a consultant may be the preferred option.

One strength of the advisory consultancy approach is that findings and recommendations which an organisation has commissioned itself may be more likely to be addressed and adopted (as in the example of World Athletics cited above). External intervention is not a pre-condition, although pressure from outside may on occasion provide motivation for the decision to hire a consultant.

In the following paragraphs I move to consider some examples of how consultancy in sport governance functions, plus the related benefits and risks.

The ASOIF case

I Trust Sport's most prominent work has been the provision of an external, semi-independent governance audit service. In my experience, this can be a productive approach for reforming sport governance because it creates incentives and a pathway for incremental improvement.

A client project worth highlighting is the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) governance study. ASOIF has conducted three assessments of international federations in 2017, 2018 and 2020, all with support from I Trust Sport.

The assessment, which is overseen by an appointed committee, takes the form of a self-assessment questionnaire distributed to the International Federations that consists of 50 indicators, each scored on a scale from 0 to 4. Indicators are divided equally among five broad themes: transparency, integrity, democracy, development and control mechanisms. Each score for every indicator has a separate definition to make the assessment as objective as possible.

As an example, one indicator in the Transparency section assesses the extent to which General Assembly documents are published on the organisation's website. If there is only a press release announcing decisions made after the event, the score would be 1. For a score of 3 a full set of documents should be published openly. To earn a maximum score of 4 extra information should be provided, such as an archive of minutes and/or a video recording of the meeting.

The federations fill in their scores and provide justification, such as a reference to the relevant section of their statutes or a link to a webpage. I Trust Sport then moderates the completed questionnaires, adjusting scores up or down, where necessary, with explanatory comments. The objective is to be consistent and fair to each participating International Federation.

The resulting data can be analysed in different ways, looking at single indicators across a set of International Federations or changes in the scores of individual federations from one review to the next. After three assessments there is now evidence of improvements over the course of time.

In the review published in April 2017 (ASOIF 2017), 18 out of 28 International Federations studied had published at least one set of audited financial accounts. By the time of the third assessment, published in June 2020, this number was up to 25 out of 31 International Federations that were analysed (ASOIF 2020). Regarding term limits for elected officials, 13 out of 28 International Federations had some type of term limit in place in April 2017. This had increased to 22 out of 31 by early 2020.

While it is inevitably difficult to show that specific measures such as increased financial transparency and term limits for elected officials in themselves reduce risks of governance failings, these are examples of recommendations which tend to be found consistently in good governance codes.

The governance audits and associated meetings and support materials that were part of the project are of course only one of the drivers of various positive changes in International Federation governance in recent years. However, the official status of the project and the knowledge that the assessment would be repeated have evidently encouraged federations to adopt reforms specifically to meet standards defined in the ASOIF assessment process.

In several cases, the external impetus appears to have helped internal advocates for change, easing the progress of governance reforms that might otherwise have taken longer or not happened at all.

The case has been made that consultancy can make a useful contribution to improving sport governance, particularly in combination with reformers inside the organisation. By its nature, consultancy offers some opportunities that

distinguish it from other actors in the sector, such as academics and journalists. There are also associated risks.

Opportunities of consultancy

An important and perhaps under-recognised advantage of the consultancy approach is that there are limited barriers to entry. Each year, a number of individuals with significant experience in the sport sector continue to establish themselves as consultants, including some who focus on governance. There should be no call on public funding, nor any need to persuade a larger organisation to allocate scarce resources.

Compared to other types of legal entity, the structure of a privately-owned limited company provides considerable flexibility. It is perfectly possible for the same company to adopt a traditional consultancy model or to meet demand that might exist for training materials, technology tools or a variety of other products and services, with few restrictions.

In addition, a fair degree of experimentation is feasible. Proactive approaches can be combined with responses to requests for proposals. At least in the early stages, a small consultancy company can explore opportunities with some freedom, learning where there might be a gap in the market.

It is no surprise that consultancies specialised in other sectors and law firms have also become active in sport governance as it requires only a limited investment. The modest size of the overall market has perhaps limited the extent of their involvement to date.

In my particular case it soon became apparent that there was a need and an opportunity for governance audits, most often commissioned by organisations with an explicit or de-facto regulatory role (i.e. an organisation that provides supervision in some way).

Audit offers potential value as a consultancy approach for improving sport governance. It may be contracted centrally for a number of organisations, which brings benefits in the form of a degree of independence from the organisations being audited and the potential to make comparisons. In addition, it may be repeated at intervals, providing the means to track progress over time.

There is an obvious potential conflict when a single supplier works on both advisory and audit projects for the same client. In general, I Trust Sport has tended to concentrate on the audit side.

By contrast, governance advisory work is more likely to be commissioned by the sport body itself, posing risks (of which more below), and only at occasional intervals, perhaps following a change of leadership or negative publicity.

One of the other aspects of the consultancy opportunity to consider is the diversity of potential clients.

As referenced above, consultants can either work with sport bodies or with stakeholder organisations. When sport bodies are the client it is important that there is some degree of openness to an external view and an appetite for change.

When appointed by stakeholders, the work is more likely to be effective if the client has genuine leverage over the organisation in question.

Until now it has appeared that the majority of the governance consultancy projects in international sport have been commissioned by sport bodies themselves or by organisations with at least a partial regulatory role.

Governments and inter-governmental bodies have contracted occasional pieces of work but rarely on a significant scale. This is an area that may see growth in future.

In the case of not-for-profit organisations, such as grant-giving organisations with a relevant purpose, any funding available is often heavily over-subscribed, as in the case of the European Union's Erasmus+ programme. Until or unless there is a well-funded organisation with a specific interest in sport governance, it is difficult to see such bodies commissioning substantial consultancy work. Of course, it is an advantage for the consultancy approach that seeking grants is only one of several possible avenues for funding, and not the most significant.

There remains potential for some of the more independent stakeholders in sport to hire governance consultants. Sponsor activism in sport governance has tended to be limited to isolated cases, with one example being the withdrawal of T-Mobile from its sponsorship of a professional road cycling team in 2007 following negative publicity in relation to doping (Austen 2007). In future there may be more significant activity from sponsor brands, private equity groups and broadcasters that have an interest in seeing improvements in sport governance.

A personal observation is that sponsors have tended to react to governance crises in organisations or individuals they fund in a binary way: either the commercial relationship is cancelled, as in the case of T-Mobile, or else no action is taken, at least as far as is known publicly.

A third way should be possible, in which brands demonstrate to their shareholders, customers, employers and other stakeholders that they are acting responsibly, acknowledging reputational or even legal risks in their relationship with sport properties and acting in an appropriate way to try to deal with the issues. Cooperation between sponsor brands with similar interests might be one approach to consider if individual companies are reluctant to act alone.

Risks of consultancy

It would be remiss at this stage not to consider the risks associated with consultancy, which can limit its effectiveness in the sport governance field or even actively hinder progress towards reform.

1 Competence

The first and perhaps most obvious risk is that the consultant may be unsuited to the task, whether through lacking relevant expertise, professionalism or even integrity. Indeed, in the new and evolving sector of sport governance, it is far from clear what the 'right' skills are.

However, the same is ultimately true of all consultancy and of many roles within organisations (e.g. integrity officers). It seems unlikely that wholly incompetent or unscrupulous consultants would be able to continue in the market for long. Provided that consultants are perceived to add value in other sectors, there is no reason to believe they cannot do so in sport governance.

2 *Need for a paying client*

It is inherent in the nature of most consultancy, beyond pro bono projects, that there must be a paying client. In contrast to a staff journalist or tenured academic who might have some latitude to choose a subject which looks interesting and worthy of study, a consultant can only work if a client is willing and able to pay.

In some types of consultancy, such as financial audit, there is a regulatory requirement that creates a market for the service, or at least a well-established niche that consultants serve.

By contrast, in the case of sport governance, the sector was scarcely recognised and the market hardly existed until about 2010. A consultant seeking to improve sport governance, therefore, has to offer a service which a client chooses to pay for. As a result, there are intrinsic conflict of interest risks in the relationship between client and consultant, which do not usually apply in the case of a wholly external actor, such as a journalist or academic researcher.

Almost all consultants seek to leave key client contacts and the organisation feeling that the project has been worthwhile. In some cases, the piece of work may clearly be a one-off. In other cases, the possibility of repeat work exists, either explicitly or implicitly. In aiming to please the client, the consultant should obviously be aware of the risk of steering too far towards outcomes or recommendations that are hard to justify in the particular circumstances of the project.

3 *Scope of work risks*

In engaging with a potential or actual client the first risk relates to the scope of work for the project. In the absence of a regulatory requirement or easily defined parameters, it may not be straightforward to determine what aspects of governance should be covered. Some clients are prescriptive about the terms of reference (e.g. revising an organisation's code of ethics), while others are fairly vague ("meet best practice standards"). The consultant may be able to influence the scope of work, either in the process of trying to secure the client, or through persuasion once appointed. Nevertheless, the final decision on the scope of work rests with the client. Should the project be restricted or mis-directed in a way which the consultant finds unacceptable, the responsibility lies with the consultant to walk away. In fact, comparable risks apply regarding the scope of work for an internal member of staff with governance responsibilities.

As an example, in the case of a governance audit study similar to the ASOIF governance project it would be possible for the client to seek to remove potentially sensitive topics from the assessment questionnaire, such

as the existence of term limits for officials in sport bodies. If a client made such a demand, the consultant would have to choose between going ahead with an exercise of reduced value or abandoning the work.

An additional risk on a similar theme is that the client and consultant may have very different views about what amounts to good practice in a particular aspect of governance. One example is the topic of quotas regarding gender balance in leadership roles. It is perfectly possible to make a strong case both for and against the use of quotas. If the disagreement is truly fundamental, finding a practical resolution may be a challenge.

Incidentally, the gradual maturing and evolution of sport governance may prove helpful in defining an appropriate scope of work for consultants. Once specific tools and methods become accepted as industry standards then it will be easier for clients to commission a project.

4 *Being used as an instrument*

Even if the consultant is satisfied that the scope of work is appropriate, a related risk is that the client may have a clear objective from the start (or even a vested interest) in the project reaching a specific conclusion. In some cases, a client seeks external validation for an idea that is already being considered internally, which is recognised as one of the motivations for appointing consultants.

A plausible scenario is that a sport body under new leadership commissions a governance project with the aim of justifying a desired change in the way the organisation operates.

In the circumstances, the consultant may reach a similar conclusion to the client but a risk obviously arises if the consultant in their professional judgement believes, after due process, that a different recommendation is appropriate, or else that the right course of action is debatable. Confronted with this situation, much will depend on the consultant's powers of persuasion and the willingness of the client to engage in meaningful dialogue. Provided that the client has good intentions, a reasonable compromise will often be possible. An internal member of staff might have an even more difficult task to win over the organisation's leadership in the same scenario.

In determining how much to compromise, it is reasonable for the consultant to take into account what is realistic in the circumstances. If reforms will have to be approved by a vote at a General Assembly, for instance, there may be limits to the extent of changes that will be acceptable to members. In such cases, an effective engagement campaign by the organisation's leadership and external pressure can obviously help win over the doubters.

A risk of a slightly different type arises when a client body seeks to legitimise aspects of the organisation to external stakeholders, perhaps even glossing over significant failings. One method of doing so may be by trying to direct or instrumentalise a 'brand name' consultant to reach a desired conclusion. A university department or team may be appointed with the same intention.

In appointing a 'brand name' consultant as an instrument in this way, the client hopes to borrow their reputation just as a commercial brand may look for a reputational benefit from the association with a popular sport property that it sponsors.

It is obviously the responsibility of the consultant to determine what findings are appropriate and legitimate. Consultants should be wary about projects that seem mainly intended to justify the client's preferred course of action.

A related reputational issue arises when an organisation or interest group seeks to commission an 'attack' project with the aim of exposing poor practice or damaging another interest group either within the same entity or elsewhere. The consultant must decide whether both the potential client and their grievances are credible. Even if they are, there may be a trade-off between potential dangers and rewards.

The risks described above all relate to consultancy projects involving a sport body directly as the client, where there are inherent potential conflicts of interest. Some of these hazards are mitigated if the work is commissioned by a regulator or other external entity rather than by the organisation to be studied.

However, there conflicts of interest can still arise. For example, even a well-intentioned regulator may be uncomfortable about a consultation survey producing findings that are critical of the regulator itself.

5 *Limitations of audit*

In relation to governance audit work, an important risk to consider relates to the limitations of the audit process itself.

Former financial auditor Michael Power describes audit as the level of a folk craft or art (Power 1999). Historically, there has been an iterative cycle relating to financial audit where audit is seen to fail when a high-profile scandal occurs and the audit process is revised. A period of stability follows for a few years, until the next failure.

He describes several compromises which he argues are inevitable in any audit exercise.

Perhaps the most significant is the 'expectations gap' between what society believes audit should do (namely, correctly identifying when an organisation is in financial trouble or instances of serious malpractice) and what it can actually achieve. The stated objectives of the auditor for the audit of financial statements of a company in the UK, the legal form of most national sport federations, are "(...) to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes the auditor's opinion" (Financial Reporting Council 2016, p. 1).

Expensive and intrusive financial audits, which are required by law and highly regulated, still sometimes fail to uncover serious issues, as repeated cases in business and other sectors including sport attest.

A second important compromise concerns the relative benefits of proximity and independence. While people inside an organisation will usually have more knowledge of how it actually operates, they lack independence. In contrast, external auditors are more independent (although the risks identified above regarding the relationship between client and consultant apply) but they are limited to using sampling and other methods to gain a partial understanding of the organisation.

The next trade-off relates to the merits of individual judgement compared to common standards. A completely fair and objective assessment would take account of each specific characteristic of any organisation studied. However, this would be very difficult. At the other end of the scale, there is value in agreeing common standards to enable a degree of comparison ('one size fits all'). A compromise is therefore needed between conducting an audit which is perfectly tailored to the organisation and using a methodology which is consistent and comparable to the extent that it will be recognised as valid. Ideally, the process should also be repeatable.

This particular trade-off is apparent in the ASOIF governance project. A uniform methodology was adopted to assess 31 International Federations despite the fact that they range in staff numbers from fewer than 10 to many hundreds. Perhaps inevitably, scores on some of the indicators tended to be higher among the larger organisations. In order to compensate, the participating Federations are provided with information about how their results compare to others of similar size.

A further risk relates to the resources needed to conduct the audit. The level of investment in audit clearly has to be proportionate. A more sophisticated and costly process might lead to a more thorough analysis but there is a practical limit. A compromise therefore exists between expenditure and the level of assurance.

6 Need for judgement

In my experience, it is usually feasible in consultancy work to find an acceptable compromise which allows the client to benefit from the project they pay for and the consultant to maintain integrity. In practical terms, organisations which are very poorly governed are unlikely to commission governance consultants, just as they are unlikely to give capable staff the authority to make significant changes. There have been a small number of occasions when I have declined potential opportunities due to associated reputational risks.

For a consultant specialised in sport governance, maintaining integrity is of course an absolute priority. A consultant must accept that complaining openly about a client or about rejection by a potential client will not be feasible (with rare exceptions) and therefore it is important to consider all of the factors carefully before taking on a client assignment.

In general, it is incumbent on the consultant to act in a responsible way and think about longer-term consequences of any decisions made. Once a certain degree of credibility has been earned, there is associated power in

advice and recommendations which are offered. As is often stated, reputations can take years to build but only a moment to lose.

It is evident that consultancy presents considerable opportunities for tackling issues in sport governance but a range of risks must also be managed. Some are inherent to any type of consultancy whereas others relate to the limitations of audit as a technique.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued, informed by my own experience, that consultancy offers a promising and perhaps under-rated set of tools to the various approaches to tackling failures of sport governance.

Consultancy projects have contributed to important changes in sport governance in recent years, for example in organisations such as World Athletics and the IBU. Governance audit work, including the projects I Trust Sport has been involved in with ASOIF, can steer sport bodies towards incremental improvements. Both advisory and audit consultancy techniques are more likely to influence significant reform when there is a combination of external pressure on the organisation and internal political will for change.

Consultancy presents a number of benefits compared to the options open to some of the other actors seeking to improve sport governance, including the lack of dependence on public subsidy, low barriers to entry and flexibility. Various categories of organisation could potentially be clients and there are few restrictions on the type of work that could be undertaken.

As for consultancy in any sector, it is vital that the individuals who do the work have the necessary expertise and take care to maintain their professional integrity. As explained above, in an immature market it is not obviously apparent what the right skills are. While several vocational courses and qualifications exist, it seems too soon at this stage for industry standards or a professional body.

Naturally, risks and limitations apply that have to be managed. The need for a client that is willing to pay is an important barrier, particularly in the absence of many specific activities that are either required by regulators or accepted as an industry standard. It is incumbent on the consultant to be aware of and mitigate the risks associated with the client–consultant relationship. Such risks range from being prescribed a scope of work that allows limited opportunity for improving governance (or even ignores key issues), to the consultant going too far to accommodate a client's wishes in the conclusions reached. Dilemmas are often manageable, provided that key individuals within the client organisation are genuine in their intentions. For example, a good consultant can help steer a client towards a deliverable and worthwhile scope of work in the situation where the original request is vague (“improve governance standards”), working within limitations of timetable and budget.

It is also important that expectations are realistic, recognising that an external consultant cannot implement significant changes on their own, and that a

governance audit will not necessarily uncover all of the underlying issues in an organisation. Responsibility is shared between the commissioning organisation and the consultant. For instance, a consultant should dampen client hopes of a radical transformation of an organisation's reputation in a short period of time. Meanwhile, a client giving a briefing should be honest about the openness of the leadership for change. Drawing from relevant case studies and previous experience can help in setting parameters.

Many of the risks can be reduced—and the incentive for a sport body to reform increased—when consultants are commissioned not by the sport body itself but by an external organisation to which it is accountable.

An important implication is that consultants could do more to help improve sport governance if other actors that have leverage over sport bodies become more active in working with consultants, most notably governments and commercial partners. While governments and funded public agencies are now gradually taking a closer interest in the sector, there have been limited examples so far of active engagement by the commercial partners.

One avenue to consider for further research would be to gauge the potential appetite among governments and commercial partners for appointing consultants to support or monitor the governance of sport bodies over which they have leverage. It would also be useful to understand the barriers to doing so.

In the area of governance audit, it is possible that there are lessons for sport to learn from other sectors where measurement and assessment are routine, such as health and education. A study of comparable audit regimes might be instructive.

In commenting on the opportunities for sport governance consultancy, it is only fair to acknowledge that the market in its current form exists because of diligent and often thankless work by whistleblowers, journalists and researchers over a period of years. Many individuals and organisations such as Play the Game uncovered governance failings within sport bodies. Pioneering academics and others have developed approaches and methods to tackle some of the weaknesses, including tools which lend themselves to consultancy projects. Along with other consultants active in the sport governance field, I owe a debt to the work that has gone before.

At least until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the market for sport governance consultancy was established and maturing, even if it is a relatively small niche. It is to be hoped that the recent focus on governance remains amid the dramatic and inevitable changes to the sporting landscape that are resulting from the crisis.

References

- ASOIF 2017, *ASOIF First Review of International Federation Governance*, ASOIF, Lausanne.
 ASOIF 2020, *ASOIF Third Review of International Federation Governance*, ASOIF, Lausanne.
 Austen, I 2007, 'Cycling's Drug Problem Leads T-Mobile to End Sponsorship', *New York Times*, 28 November.

- FIFA 2016, *FIFA Congress Approves Landmark Reforms*, FIFA, Zurich.
- Financial Reporting Council 2016, *Description of Auditor's Responsibilities*, The Financial Reporting Council Limited, London.
- Geeraert, A 2019, 'The limits and opportunities of self-regulation: Achieving international sport federations' compliance with good governance standards', *European Sport Management Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 520–38. doi:[10.1080/16184742.2018.1549577](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2018.1549577)
- IAAF 2016a, *Overwhelming Vote for IAAF Reform Delivered by Membership*, IAAF, Monaco.
- IAAF 2016b, *Time for Change*, IAAF, Monaco.
- IBU 2018, *International Biathlon Union Appoints External Review Commission*, IBU, Salzburg.
- IBU 2019, *Historic Extraordinary IBU Congress Marks Beginning of New Era for IBU*, IBU, Salzburg.
- Institute of Consulting 2020, *What is Consulting?*, Institute of Consulting, London.
- International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport 2017, *About IPACS*, IPACS.
- Pielke, R 2013, 'How can FIFA be held accountable?', *Sport Management Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 255–67. doi:[10.1016/j.smr.2012.12.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2012.12.007)
- Power, M 1999, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.