

INNOVATIONS IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE SPORTS DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The increasing complexity and commercialisation of the global sports industry have increased the demand for innovative sports management policies and professional administrative practices that are capable of supporting sustainable development. Although many sports systems have adopted innovations in governance, leadership, technology, and financial management, their impact in developing climes such as Nigeria has remained uneven. This paper advances the argument that the effectiveness of sports management innovations is fundamentally mediated by administrative competence. While adopting a conceptual and analytical approach, the paper examines key innovation domains in sports management; these are policy and governance, administrative leadership, technological integration, and financial management, and critically analyses how administrative capacity shapes their contribution to sustainable sports development in Nigeria. The paper demonstrates that persistent challenges in Nigeria's sports sector are less a consequence of policy absence and more a reflection of weak administrative professionalism and institutional capacity. It therefore concludes that strengthening administrative competence is a strategic necessity for translating innovation into sustainable outcomes, with significant implications for national sports policy, institutional reform, and long-term athlete development.

Keywords: *Sports management innovation, administrative competence, sustainability, sports development*

Introduction

The global sports industry has undergone profound transformation over the past few decades, evolving from largely amateur-driven systems into complex, commercialised, and highly professionalised organisations. Contemporary sports organisations operate within competitive environments characterised by commercial pressure, media scrutiny, global stakeholder engagement, and rising expectations regarding accountability and performance. As a result, effective sports management increasingly depends on strategic planning, sound governance, professional administration, and continuous innovation across organisational processes (Hoye et al., 2024; Parent & Chappelet, 2017).

Innovation has therefore become central to modern sports management discourse. Innovations in governance structures, policy frameworks, leadership practices, technology adoption, and financial management are widely viewed as mechanisms for enhancing organisational efficiency, improving athlete welfare, and achieving long-term sustainability. In developed sports systems, such innovations have contributed to improved transparency, clearer accountability structures, diversified revenue streams, and more systematic athlete development pathways (Winand et al., 2019).

In developing sports systems such as Nigeria's, however, the outcomes of sports management innovations have been far less consistent. Nigeria possesses a large youth population, strong cultural attachment to sports, and a history of international sporting success, yet the sports sector continues to face persistent challenges. These include weak governance arrangements, unstable funding structures, limited institutional capacity, and inconsistent policy implementation. Sports policy scholarship suggests that such challenges are rarely the result of a lack of innovative ideas,

but rather of deficiencies in administrative competence and institutional professionalism (Houlihan & Green, 2009).

Innovative sports policies and reform agendas are frequently introduced within the Nigerian sports system, yet many have failed to achieve sustainable impact because of persistent implementation challenges, weak institutional capacity, and administrative inefficiencies (Houlihan & Green, 2009; National Sports Industry Policy, 2022). Chelladurai and Kerwin (2017) emphasise that effective sports organisations depend on administrators who possess competencies in leadership, strategic planning, human resource management, ethical governance, and financial control. Where these competencies are weak or absent, innovations in sports management tend to remain rhetorical, poorly implemented, or short-lived.

This paper therefore argues that innovations in sports management policies and practices can only contribute meaningfully to sustainable sports development in Nigeria when they are supported by competent and professional sports administrators. Using a conceptual approach, the paper examines key innovation domains in sports management and develops concrete arguments on how administrative competence mediates their effectiveness within the Nigerian sports context.

Conceptual Framework

The paper adopts a conceptual framework that positions administrative competence as the critical link between innovations in sports management and sustainable sports development outcomes. This perspective aligns with sports management literature, which explains organisational performance not merely by the presence of formal structures or policies, but by the capacity of administrators to operationalise them effectively (Hoye et al., 2024; Winand et al., 2010).

Innovations in sports management, including governance reforms, leadership restructuring, technological integration, and financial diversification strategies, represent deliberate efforts to enhance organisational effectiveness, improve service delivery, and strengthen long-term sustainability within sports organisations (Hoye et al., 2024; Parent & Chappelet, 2017). However, these innovations do not operate in isolation. Their effectiveness depends largely on the ability of sports administrators to interpret policy objectives, manage organisational change, coordinate diverse stakeholders, and institutionalise reforms over time (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017; Parent & Chappelet, 2017).

Administrative competence within this framework encompasses strategic leadership, organisational coordination, ethical decision-making, adaptability, communication, and professional expertise. Administrators who lack these competencies are often unable to manage resistance to change, ensure compliance with governance standards, or align innovative initiatives with organisational realities, thereby limiting the successful implementation of reforms (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017; Hoye et al., 2024). Consequently, innovations may remain policy aspirations rather than being translated into effective organisational practice.

Sustainable sports development outcomes which include organisational stability, athlete welfare, grassroots participation, competitive success, and financial sustainability, are therefore conceptualised as indirect outcomes of innovation, with administrative competence serving as the critical mediating mechanism. This perspective is consistent with sports management scholarship, which argues that organisational performance depends not only on the adoption of innovative policies but also on the managerial capabilities required to implement and sustain them effectively (Winand, Zintz, Bayle, & Robinson, 2010; Hoye et al., 2024). Within the Nigerian sports

environment, this framework provides a plausible explanation for the persistent gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes.

Innovation Domains in Sports Management and the Mediating Role of Administrative Competence

Innovations in sports management have increasingly been promoted as strategic solutions to long-standing governance, performance, and sustainability challenges within sports systems. However, evidence from both developed and developing contexts suggests that innovations do not automatically translate into improved outcomes. Rather, their effectiveness depends on the institutional environment and, most critically, on the administrative competence of those charged with implementation (Hoye et al., 2024; Houlihan & Green, 2009). In the Nigerian sports context, where policy inconsistency, weak institutional capacity, and political interference remain prevalent, the relationship between innovation and sustainable development is particularly mediated by the quality of sports administration (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022; Houlihan & Green, 2009).

This section discusses four key innovation domains; policy and governance, administrative leadership, technology, and financial management and critically examines how administrative competence determines their contribution to sustainable sports development in Nigeria.

Policy and Governance Innovations

Governance innovation has emerged as a central concern in contemporary sports management scholarship, driven by increasing demands for transparency, accountability, ethical conduct, and stakeholder inclusion (Hoye et al., 2024). Modern governance frameworks emphasise clearly defined roles, rule-based decision-making, separation of political influence from operational

management, and mechanisms for accountability to athletes, sponsors, and the public (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015; Hoye et al., 2018).

In theory, Nigeria has not been devoid of policy initiatives and governance reforms within its sports sector. Over the years, successive governments have introduced national sports policies, institutional restructuring initiatives, and administrative reforms aimed at improving sports governance and development (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development [FMYSD], 2009; Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022). However, the persistent gap between policy formulation and practical outcomes highlights a fundamental governance challenge, reflecting weaknesses in implementation, institutional capacity, and administrative effectiveness (Houlihan & Green, 2009; Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022). As Houlihan and Green (2009) argue, sports policies frequently fail not because they are conceptually flawed, but because the institutional and administrative capacity required for implementation is inadequate.

Administrative competence becomes crucial in this context. Effective governance innovation requires administrators who understand policy objectives, can translate them into operational procedures, and possess the authority and ethical orientation to enforce compliance. Where administrators lack competence in policy interpretation, stakeholder management, and institutional leadership, governance reforms are unlikely to move beyond policy intentions to achieve meaningful organisational transformation (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017; Hoye et al., 2024).

In Nigeria, weak enforcement of governance regulations, limited transparency in decision-making, and persistent political interference in sports administration have undermined the sustainability of governance reforms and institutional effectiveness (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022; Houlihan & Green, 2009). Without administrators who are professionally

trained, ethically grounded, and strategically oriented, governance innovations are unlikely to achieve their intended developmental outcomes because effective implementation depends on competent leadership and sound administrative capacity (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017; Hoye et al., 2024).

Administrative and Leadership Innovations

Leadership and administrative innovation focus on the professionalisation of sports management through competency-based recruitment, continuous capacity development, performance evaluation, and strategic leadership practices. Chelladurai and Kerwin (2017) emphasise that modern sports organisations require administrators who possess not only technical expertise, but also competencies in leadership, human resource management, communication, and organisational behaviour.

In advanced sports systems, leadership innovation has shifted sports administration away from patronage-based appointments towards professional management structures. Such innovations have enhanced organisational stability, improved service delivery, and strengthened athlete support systems through competency-based leadership and effective governance practices (Hoye et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2015). In contrast, many sports organisations in developing contexts continue to rely on informal leadership arrangements that prioritise political loyalty or seniority over managerial competence (Houlihan & Green, 2009; Parent & Chappelet, 2017).

The Nigerian sports system illustrates this challenge clearly. Although leadership reforms and institutional restructuring initiatives have been introduced over the years, their impact has been constrained by inadequate investment in administrative capacity building, limited professional development opportunities, and weak institutional commitment to merit-based management

practices (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022; Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017) Chelladurai and Kerwin (2017) argue that without deliberate strategies to develop administrative competence, leadership innovation becomes superficial, failing to influence organisational culture or performance outcomes.

Administrative competence mediates leadership innovation by determining whether new leadership structures translate into improved decision-making, enhanced staff motivation, and greater organisational effectiveness (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017; Hoye et al., 2024). Competent sports administrators are better positioned to align organisational objectives with national sports development priorities, manage human resources strategically, and create organisational environments that promote athlete development, staff commitment, and organisational learning (Taylor et al., 2015; Hoye et al., 2024). In the absence of these competencies, leadership innovations are less likely to produce meaningful organisational change and may instead reinforce existing inefficiencies and weak governance practices (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017).

Technological Innovations in Sports Management

Technological innovation has transformed sports management globally, influencing areas such as athlete monitoring, performance analysis, event management, communication, and data-driven decision-making. The effective integration of digital technologies has enhanced organisational efficiency, informed strategic planning, and improved decision-making processes within sports organisations when supported by appropriate managerial capacity and governance structures (Hoye et al., 2024; Winand et al., 2010).

However, the adoption of technology in sports organisations does not automatically produce positive outcomes. The successful integration of digital technologies depends on their alignment

with organisational structures, strategic objectives, and the administrative capacity required to manage technological change effectively (Hoye et al., 2024; Parent & Chappelet, 2017). In many developing sports systems, technological innovations are introduced without adequate planning, staff training, or integration into existing organisational processes, resulting in underutilisation, implementation challenges, and limited organisational benefits (Winand et al., 2010; Hoye et al., 2024). In Nigeria, investments in sports technology, including athlete data management systems, digital registration platforms, and performance analysis tools, have often been constrained by inadequate technical expertise, insufficient digital capacity, and weak administrative coordination (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022). Administrative competence is therefore central to determining whether technological innovations enhance organisational efficiency or merely increase operational complexity, as the successful adoption of technology depends on strategic leadership, organisational readiness, and effective management capacity (Hoye et al., 2024; Parent & Chappelet, 2017). Competent administrators are required to assess organisational needs, oversee technology adoption, train personnel, and ensure that technological tools support broader strategic objectives. Winand et al. (2019) emphasise that organisational performance improvements linked to technology are contingent on leadership capacity and managerial alignment. Where such competence is lacking, technological innovation remains isolated from meaningful development outcomes.

Financial Management Innovations

Financial innovation is increasingly viewed as essential for the sustainability of sports organisations, particularly in contexts characterised by limited public funding. Hoye et al. (2018) identify revenue diversification, sponsorship development, public–private partnerships, and

transparent financial management systems as key financial innovations in modern sports management.

In Nigeria, sports organisations remain heavily dependent on government funding, exposing them to political instability and inconsistent resource allocation. Houlihan and Green (2009) argue that sustainable sports development requires financial systems that are resilient, diversified, and professionally managed. Financial innovation, however, demands administrators with strong financial literacy, ethical accountability, and strategic negotiation skills.

Administrative competence plays a pivotal role in financial innovation by influencing how financial resources are mobilised, allocated, and monitored within sports organisations. In the absence of competent administrators, initiatives aimed at diversifying revenue sources are often weakened by poor financial planning, limited transparency, and inadequate accountability. Consequently, stakeholder confidence which is an essential prerequisite for attracting sponsorships, partnerships, and long-term investment, is largely shaped by perceptions of administrative integrity, professionalism, and financial stewardship (Hoye et al., 2024; Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017).

In Nigeria for example, ineffective financial management has contributed to recurring challenges such as delayed or unpaid athlete allowances, abandoned sports development programmes, inadequate maintenance of sports facilities, and overdependence on government funding (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022). Financial innovation, therefore, cannot be separated from administrative professionalism. Competent administrators are essential for building financially sustainable sports organisations capable of mobilising resources, ensuring financial accountability, and supporting long-term athlete development and grassroots sports participation (Hoye et al., 2024; Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017).

Across all four innovation domains, a consistent pattern emerges: innovation alone does not guarantee sustainable sports development. Rather, administrative competence determines whether innovative policies and practices are effectively implemented, institutionalised, and sustained over time (Hoye et al., 2024; Winand et al., 2010). In Nigeria, strengthening administrative capacity is therefore not a supplementary concern but a foundational requirement for achieving meaningful and sustainable sports development (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2022; Houlihan & Green, 2009)

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This paper examined the role of administrative competence in mediating the relationship between innovations in sports management and sustainable sports development in Nigeria. It leveraged on established sports management scholarship, and the analysis demonstrates that while innovations in policy design, governance structures, leadership practices, technology, and financial management are essential, they are insufficient in isolation. The persistent underperformance of Nigeria's sports sector is therefore not primarily attributable to a lack of innovative ideas, but to systemic weaknesses in administrative capacity and institutional professionalism.

Across the innovation domains discussed, a consistent pattern emerges: innovations achieve sustainable impact only when implemented by competent administrators who possess strategic leadership skills, ethical orientation, organisational capacity, and adaptability. Governance reforms fail where administrators cannot enforce accountability or manage stakeholder relationships effectively. Leadership innovations remain superficial where professional standards are not institutionalised. Technological investments underperform where administrative planning and capacity are weak, while financial innovations collapse in the absence of transparency, financial literacy, and strategic resource management.

From a national policy perspective, these findings carry important implications. First, sports development policies in Nigeria must move beyond structural reforms and place deliberate emphasis on administrative capacity building as a core development strategy. This includes institutionalising competency-based recruitment, continuous professional development, and performance evaluation systems for sports administrators at all levels. Second, national sports governance frameworks should prioritise administrative autonomy, ethical accountability, and protection of professional decision-making from excessive political interference.

Third, innovation strategies in areas such as technology adoption and financial diversification should be embedded within broader institutional strengthening efforts, rather than treated as standalone interventions. Without administrators who are capable of aligning innovation with organisational goals, such initiatives are unlikely to yield sustainable returns. Finally, sustainable sports development in Nigeria requires a long-term perspective that recognises administrators as critical agents of change, whose competence directly influences athlete welfare, grassroots sports participation, organisational effectiveness, and national sporting success.

In conclusion, this paper argues that administrative competence is not merely a supportive element in sports management innovation, but its defining condition. For Nigeria to harness innovation as a tool for sustainable sports development, policymakers and stakeholders must invest strategically in professional sports administration as a national priority.

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