



Participation Perspectives for Governing Bodies in ANZ

Jonathan Harris

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In August, SRI's ANZ team alongside Asahi Takano and Thomas Fleurot of Portas Consulting, had the pleasure of hosting an event with leaders from national governing bodies focused on participation.

We welcomed professionals from a variety of sporting organisations, across AFL, Cricket, Football, Rugby Union, Athletics, Swimming, Netball, Tennis, Cycling as well as from Sport Australia.

Portas is a leading international management consultancy dedicated to sport and physical activity, and were in Melbourne to present at the National Sports Convention. Our conversation focussed on innovation and best practice in participation, developed from their insights with major governing bodies around the world.

The lively discussion brought to light seven key areas of focus and discussion that are impacting / can impact leadership and strategy across Sporting bodies.

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1. Getting the one sport / one delivery model right

Mandated from Sport Australia and prioritised by every national governing body, there is no doubt that the focus on one sport / one delivery models is impacting national governing body strategy. SRI has witnessed this impacting recruitment decisions and people strategy at both state and national governing bodies. This is directly impacting participation decision-making, and there is sometimes a lack of clarity in mandate. For example; who is best placed to deliver sport outcomes? Are the states' governing bodies most appropriate given their proximity to the grassroots, or should the Federal body lead delivery on a nationwide basis? Ultimately, SRI believes that sports should approach this question on what is best for the sport as opposed to what is best for the individual boards.

2. Innovation in the creation of new products & content into the marketplace

In the past couple of years it has been fascinating to watch innovation / disruption in how Governing Bodies are seeking innovation around the delivery of their Sport offering into the market place. This includes diversification of product that appeals to the 'attention economy' or to non-traditional market. Sports are increasingly recognising they must change the narrative of the sport, and also that the consumer is becoming more demanding. SRI have seen a number of national governing bodies subtly alter their participation or sport delivery teams and recruit for increased consumer delivery or customer experience skills. In addition Sport must innovate and bring new product to the marketplace.

Market leading junior programs at AFL, Cricket or Touch Football; are modernising their offering, while other sports are seeking new Mass Participation products. The more progressive sports recognising the commercial opportunities that come with this customer focus appealing to commercial partners.

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3. Everything comes back to data

Portas emphasised that data collection and the veracity of data is key. Sports must have their insights right from the outset, and investment in research is crucial. Often sports will say they don't have all the data they need – but don't underestimate the amount of data at your disposal. Having the right evidence base will allow you to get everyone on the same page around the facts, build buy-in and ensure everyone works towards the same objectives. The key success factors are to start small, build credibility over time and keep in mind the change you want to drive when collecting and analysing data – focus on insight, not data itself.

4. It's bigger than sport

Funding and support into grassroots participation should not just come from the sport function of government. Sports must also access funding in health & community functions. Sports can play a big role in preventative health, supporting physical literacy, education, social and youth outcomes. However, sports need to factually demonstrate the value they generate, especially in terms of social return on investment. When approaching government, national governing bodies must understand the information and angle they seek and help ministers / the government make a strong case for additional funding.

5. Different sports are on the same team

We are increasingly seeing opportunities for sports to work together and be a collective voice for the sector, rather than compete over existing funding and participation base. Sports coming together can be a powerful tool to make a collective case for funding and support. Whilst there will always be some competition, there are many shared interests in growing overall participation, interest, popularity and attractiveness of sport, amongst others.

6. Balancing participation and high performance

Within a changing ecosystem, clarity on objectives for national sports organisations is required. What should the balance be between growing the sport or delivering success? Vibrant mass participation can fuel elite success, and vice versa – but the link is critical in the form of clubs, leagues and an organised pathway. A clear, fact-based understanding of this dynamic can then inform an optimal allocation of funding based on outcomes and KPIs to measure success.

7. Take the time to listen and trust your audience

Consultation with everyone delivering the sport is crucial to creating the right strategy and action plans for any specific sport. National sports organisations should understand the pain points, the challenges, resistance to change across the ecosystem (from grassroots to elite) and work together to deliver change for the sports. If everyone is involved in the process, states will work more cohesively with national bodies and grassroots delivery system will support the central strategy. All in all, it will create an ideal alignment behind shared objectives.



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About the Authors

Jonathan Harris, Managing Partner, ANZ — SRI

Based in Sydney, Jonathan Harris specialises in commercialisation across the evermore convergent industries of sports, media, entertainment and content. Jonathan advises on executive and retained search assignments for Australia's sports, media and entertainment industry, and leads consulting and advisory projects related to broader HR, People and Structure. Jonathan additionally plays a lead role in SRI's global Elite Performance and Participation practice, harnessing cutting-edge practices that impact this sector across clubs & teams and national governing bodies.

Asahi Takano and Thomas Fleurot — Portas Consulting

Asahi Takano and Thomas Fleurot represent Portas Consulting, the global strategy consultancy dedicated to sport and physical activity. They are currently supporting the government in Singapore in creating data-driven strategies to increase sports participation and physical activity and have both worked with a wide range of federations in the UK and Europe more broadly.



About SRI

SRI is an executive search and talent consulting firm focused on shaping the futures of clients and candidates across the media, content, technology and sport landscape. We have deep expertise in these dynamic, disrupted and increasingly interconnected sectors. We partner with our clients to find the game changing leaders that will help them thrive. SRI has worked with a broad range of companies from content owners to fast growth consumer technology disruptors to shape their businesses.

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About Portas Consulting

Portas is a leading international management consultancy dedicated to helping clients harness the power of sport and physical activity for the benefit of all. They have supported federations, governments and corporates in designing growth strategies for sport and participation. Our conversation focussed on innovation and best practice in participation, developed from their experience and insights of working with major governing bodies around the world.

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