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Creating a tennis culture in the national federation: Practical applications

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ABSTRACT

This article is the continuation of an introductory paper of the topic of culture in national tennis federation (NFs). It shares practical examples and guidelines that will assist these organisations in starting a process to embark in a cultural change that can be adapted to the specific characteristics of each organisation. It provides guidelines to all those involved on how to create the appropriate tennis culture in a national tennis federation. Finally, to stimulate the development of sound, practical, and evidence-based cultural practices by NFs, the paper identifies several future applied directions.

Key words: values, management, organisation, national association

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CULTURE GENERATION IN NATIONAL TENNIS FEDERATIONS (NFS)

Culture and strategy of NFs

From an organisational perspective, researchers such as Henriksen (2010a) have indicated that the macro-environment in which tennis organisations and players develop involves various cultural contexts which include the national and regional culture, the industry culture, the organisational culture, the general sporting culture, the tennis specific culture and the youth culture. These have been labelled as levels of culture (Rodriguez et al., 2024).

The relationships between culture and strategy in national NFs are considerably close. Figure 1 shows the main elements of both as related to these organisations.



Figure 1. *Elements of culture and strategy in NFs.*



To develop a sound strategy, cultural considerations should be at the core of the process. In this context, NFs should maintain regular contact with local, regional, and national political and sporting authorities to ensure the alignment with the national policies and strategies to promote tennis as a sport that can be played at all levels of the game (Davies, 2004) as well as with the national culture. When developing the strategy, the people in charge should issue guidance for inclusion of all stakeholders such as players, coaches, officials, clubs and event organizers, spectators, the industry, and tournament staff, including support personnel (Garcia, 2020). Finally, they should strive to promote better coordination between the national government and the regional organisations through a coherent strategy monitored by the NF.

Culture and governance in NFs

An effective system of governance of the national tennis federation is a crucial facilitator to adopt the adequate organizational culture. This involves defining roles and responsibilities, setting policies and procedures, and implementing processes for accountability and transparency.

This system creates an environment that promotes good decision-making and encourages collaboration (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010).

In this context, effective communication is essential in the adoption of a governance that fosters a strong culture. This includes both internal and external communication. Internally, communication should be effective among staff, board members, and players. Externally, communication should be clear and concise to inform stakeholders, sponsors, and the public about the federation's activities and successes (Rodriguez et al., 2024).

Towards a cultural improvement through change in NFs?

Culture develops daily out of the behaviours and actions of each stakeholder of the organisation and as such it can be changed (Henriksen, 2015). It has been understood as the prevailing attitude in the federation. Therefore, these organisations should adopt a proactive approach towards it.

It has been suggested that the first step to a cultural change in an organisation such as the national tennis federation is to conduct a culture audit to establish the current and desired culture through an aligned combination of informal and formal transformational leadership. By doing so, the NA stakeholders would have to reply to this question: which is the tennis culture of your NA?

In this process, cultural change will be, and must be, improvement and development oriented. Within this purpose, two main streams should emerge, the performance and the participation ones. Key principles such as excellence, sustainability, stability, and collaboration are the ones that guide the leaders in charge of the cultural change of organisations (Whitmore, 2005),

Creating a culture of excellence in NFs

Creating a culture in a national tennis federation can be a difficult but rewarding task. It requires setting up a system that can motivate and inspire players, coaches, and administrators to work together to achieve success. It also involves creating a positive attitude and environment that encourages collaboration and innovation (SIRC& Own the Podium, 2021).

A culture of excellence should be established by setting and enforcing high ethical and behavioural standards. This includes developing a clear mission statement that outlines the purpose of the organisation, its objectives and goals, and the values it will strive to uphold. It should be communicated frequently and reinforced through positive reinforcement and rewards. There should be a clear system of accountability in place, so that all stakeholders in the sport are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

The organisation should also strive to provide a safe and supportive environment for its players, coaches, and administrators, and ensure that everyone is treated with respect and fairness. Finally, a culture of learning should be fostered by providing educational opportunities and resources that allow players, coaches, and administrators to continue to develop and grow. By creating a culture that encourages collaboration, innovation, and learning, a national tennis federation can create a positive and successful environment that will benefit all its stakeholders.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL TENNIS FEDERATIONS

This section includes several examples and proposals for the implementation of an appropriate organisational culture in a NF. Research and practice have provided several key themes that can be used as guiding principles for the structure of an initiative of culture generation. These themes include development, performance, participation, professionality, equality, inclusion, respect, sustainability, and innovation.

Positioning development at the core of the culture

Creating a development culture in a national tennis federation is essential to ensure that the sport continues to grow and thrive. It requires a clear vision and strategy to create a culture of growth and development. This includes setting measurable objectives for improvement and engaging stakeholders in the process (Rahim, 2021).

A collaborative approach should be taken to ensure everyone has a shared understanding of the goals and objectives. The national tennis federation should create an environment that encourages creativity, innovation, and collaboration. This is achieved by providing access to resources, such as education, training, and mentoring, to help players and coaches reach their full potential. (Browers et al., 2015).

Additionally, the national tennis federation should foster an environment that values participation, inclusion, and diversity (Perez et al., 2019). This includes creating opportunities for all levels of players to engage in competition, regardless of their skill level and background.

Finally, a culture of development should be established and sustained through effective communication and marketing strategies. This includes using digital channels to reach out to the public and engaging stakeholders to create a positive and encouraging atmosphere. By creating a development culture in a national tennis federation, the sport will have the potential to grow and reach its full potential (Monegro, 2021).

How can tennis federations create a performance culture?

A performance culture has been defined as high performing cultures prevail when the shared perception and action of elite team environment members: a) supports sustained optimal performance; b) persists across time in the face of variable results (i.e., wins, losses, ties); and, most importantly, c) leads to consistent high performance (Cruikshank & Collins, 2012).

To create a performance culture in NFs, the focus should be on both the individuals and the organisation. According to the means available, the NFs should try to provide a series of services and products that would facilitate the generation of a performance mentality and thus, an increase in the number and quality of high-level players, coaches, events, and facilities.

Players should be at the core of the performance culture. To do so it has been proposed to base it around a sustainable strategy that supports the mental and physical health, safety, and well-being of their players. Organisations such as SIRC & On the Podium (2021) have identified personal dimensions to help federations generate their culture of excellence including mental and physical health and well-being, psychological and physical safety and safe sport, and self-determination.

For instance, the NF can ensure the availability of top-class facilities (i.e., national training centre), quality coaching services, and additional player support services that can be offered compared to any options that the players might have. The NF should attract players with the possibility of superior exposure and the assurance that the advancement of their career as a professional tennis player is the priority. Providing training and competition grants and scholarships, offering wild cards in the appropriate tournaments, and assisting in the access to public or private sponsorship can be some of the means that the federation can provide to generate this performance context (Browers et al., 2015).

Additionally, the relevant business-oriented management processes should be constantly revised and improved to generate the necessary impulse to develop and grow the different areas of the tennis industry at various levels of the game (Botella, 2022). The implementation of the best professional management practices is necessary to ensure that all involved assist in this endeavour. From an operational perspective, the NF should consider implementing organizational processes and activities that include leadership, communication, and motivation to create a performance management cycle.

In this context, NFs should take a proactive approach towards implementing a performance culture. To drive this forward, the following table outlines key programs, target users and the corresponding key message for each programme.

Table 1
Examples of gender equality programmes that a NFs can implement to improve their culture on this crucial aspect.

Programmes	Target Users	Key Message
Introduction of a Performance Management System	Players and Coaches	Use the tool to track performance goals and monitor progress against the goals
Employee Well-Being and Mental Health Support Program	Players and Club Management	Ensure players have access to the resources to help deal with the pressures of performing in high-stress environments.
Organisational Development Programs	Staff and Federation Management	Foster a culture of continuous improvement by providing staff with access to programs that will help them acquire the skills and knowledge to reach their potential.
Leadership Development Programs	Federation Management	Equip federation managers with the right skills and tools to effectively motivate and lead teams.
Fan Engagement and Inclusion Initiatives	Fans and Supporters	Ensure fans and supporters are engaged through activities promoting inclusion and participation
Technology-Driven Initiatives	Federation Management and Fans	Use technology to increase engagement and access to information on performance trends and progress.

By undertaking these initiatives, NFs can create an environment of empowerment, inclusivity, and accountability, all of which will help drive a positive performance culture within its organization.

Additionally, building rapport with players, developing awareness, motivating players, communicating directly and effectively, and providing specific, constructive, and meaningful feedback can help create a "performance culture" and increase their satisfaction with their tennis involvement.

Can a participation culture be generated by NFs?

Creating a participation culture in a nation is a complex mission that requires strong commitment from the NFs (Cortela et al., 2019). To create a participation culture in tennis, the mission should be articulated around the importance of introducing and retaining as many people as possible to the game. This can be achieved by creating the right mix of programmes, such as introductory activities, coaching programmes, competitions and tournaments, court hire, equipment services, and membership benefits. It is also important to adapt tasks to the individual abilities of the players and to generate adequate confidence through a view of realism.

It is in the best interest of tennis federations to have a participation programme that looks at getting more players no matter their characteristics involved in the game of tennis. Through the establishment of the proper structures, this can be achieved (Young et al., 2021). Finally, employing and evaluating creative online strategies using technologies such as Facebook, Twitter or Tik-Tok to ensure that they continue to meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders can also be helpful.

What about a professional management culture in NFs?

Professionalisation should be a crucial part of the organisational culture of NFs (Ruoranen, 2018). It has been viewed as an attitude on people that arises from the management philosophy. As an example, they need to adapt to the culture of accountability to access to financial resources, especially in nations where funding comes from the government or public institutions. For instance, it has been shown that traditional management approaches and limit financial resources can hinder professionalization, whereas competitiveness and media exposure can promote it.

Adopting a professional management culture means working as a business and change the management philosophy. By doing so, NFs can add a series of proven efficient practices to their organization such as the functional differentiation and specialisation of the staff to be more efficient and generate more funds to improve current programmes or start new ones (Crespo et al., 2021). The constant application, revision and improvement of relevant management processes and tools would generate the necessary impulse to develop and grow the different areas of the tennis industry at the various levels of the game (Van Wyck & Davies, 2009). These areas need to fall under the appropriate scope of the business strategic plan to drive the organizations to a level of service that would make them competitive (Crespo-Dualde, 2021). Tennis federations should be cognisant of and pay particular attention to how they implement cultural processes that include leadership, communication, and motivation (Crespo-Dualde, 2022). These organisational and cultural processes are essential to a

tennis federation and should be implemented effectively for gainful results (Lloyd et al., 2022). Therefore, implementing the best professional management practices is necessary to create a professional culture within a tennis federation.

To create a professional culture at all levels of the game in a national tennis federation, it is important to focus on the efficient provision of tennis services and to identify the challenges in the current strategy and define a new one if necessary (Monegro, 2021). Many federations should act as a non-profit organisation, but by working as a business, it would add a considerable level of professionalism to the federation and generate more funds to implement the current strategy in a sustainable way (Crespo-Dualde, 2022). For beginner players, it is in the best interest of the federation to have a participation program that looks at getting more children and adults involved in the game of tennis. Furthermore, at the higher levels of the game, collaboration between all stakeholders is required to produce high-performance national tennis players in a sustainable way (Crespo-Dualde, 2021).

NFs can manage tennis professionally by understanding certain components of business and adapting them to the administration of their tennis organisation. The main objective for tennis clubs and federations is the overall promotion of tennis (Van Wyck & Davies, 2009). The constant revision and improvement of the relevant management processes would generate the necessary impulse to develop and grow the different areas of the tennis industry at the various levels of the game (Crespo-Dualde, 2022). These areas need to fall under the appropriate scope of the business strategic plan to drive the organizations to a level of service that would make them competitive. Additionally, promotion strategies should make existing consumers, but especially non-consumers, aware of the programmes on offer from the federation (Davies & Van Wyck, 2009). In doing this, the manager needs to apply the AIDA principle: Attract attention, create Interest, create a Desire to become involved, and Action by the consumer (Crespo-Dualde, 2021).

The professional culture of the NFs should not replace the existing systems completely but build on them to eventually optimise the performance of the organisation.

The facilitators of the adoption of a professional culture consist of a combination of personnel, processes, and resources. In this context, funding is a key resource for professional management. NFs often have limited budgets and limited access to external funding sources and therefore struggle to hire professional management staff. Additionally, some federations are composed of volunteer board members and staff, who may lack the necessary technical skills and experience to manage a federation efficiently and effectively.

The importance of equality in the generation of the NF culture

NFs should strive to create and implement a gender equality culture to better serve all players. To do this effectively, they should invest in gender-equality focused programming. They have a responsibility to create environments that foster respect and inclusivity for all individuals regardless of their gender (Fuentes & Carmona, 2021).

Through necessary programming, the development of meaningful mentorship opportunities, and the implementation of educational initiatives all stakeholders in tennis, the NFs can create gender equality cultures that create a more positive and equitable environment for all players (Cepeda, 2021).

In this context, NFs have a responsibility to lead and encourage a gender equal culture within their organisations. They should develop programs that work to ensure equal opportunity for all. The following table presents programs that NFs can employ to ensure gender equality and a key message on what they should do to make these programs a reality.

Table 2
Examples of gender equality programmes that a NFs can implement to improve their culture on this crucial aspect.

Programmes	Target Users	Key Message
Establish gender-neutral criteria for selection of teams	All players	Encourage participation in tennis at all levels regardless of gender
Organize gender-sensitive training camps and workshops	Players, coaches, volunteers, administrators, and staff involved in sport organizations	Provide equal opportunities to all genders
Implement an anti-discrimination policy and complaint procedure	All members of the organisation	Be transparent and provide clear rules and codes of conduct for all clubs and regional federations, while also fully enforcing and implementing any policies
Female Leadership Development Program	Female coaches, players, administrators	Empower and support female stakeholders to increase their standing in sport and give them the tools to pursue leadership positions
Mentorship Programs	Male and Female staff	Create meaningful mentorship opportunities that bridge gender gaps and encourage men and women to mentor one another
Educational Programming	All participants in sport	Provide educational sessions and initiatives that focus on fostering respect and understanding between genders and that highlight the importance of equality in tennis.

The implementation of such gender equitability programs will require NFs to create an environment in which gender equality is embraced and supported. This includes making sure that the right resources are in place and that organizational culture is developed and nurtured (Szto, 2015). Additionally, NFs should seek out educational opportunities and resources through sources such as the ITF (Advantage All campaign, 2023), and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) who host various initiatives and workshops regarding gender equality. To ensure that these initiatives are successful, and that gender equitability is established, NFs should ensure that leadership is consulted and that processes such as program evaluation are implemented.

What about values of respect and inclusion? How can NFs create a culture of respect and inclusion?

NFs should enact and adopt programmes to better promote key values such as respect and inclusion among players, coaches, and all those involved in tennis. Generating a culture that emphasizes the adoption of the adequate values based on solid moral attitudes has been shown to positively affect player development (Lucidi et al., 2017). These programmes should target the specific people within the organization and be tailored to ensure individuals are able to develop the skills needed to foster an environment of respect and inclusion (Cahill, 2022). The following table provides a guide for tennis federations to consider when crafting programmes to foster a culture of respect and inclusion:

Table 3
Examples of inclusive programmes that a NFs can implement to improve their culture on this crucial aspect.

Programmes	Target Users	Key Message
Anti-bullying and harassment training	Coaches, players, parents, and other members of the NF	Respect and inclusion should be a given, not an exception. Everyone deserves to feel safe and free from discrimination
Diversity and inclusion policy	Entire organization	Celebrating diversity is a key part of fostering respect and inclusion. By recognizing and honouring individuals' differences, a respectful culture is cultivated.
Sportsmanship workshops	Players and coaches	For players and coaches to successfully practice good sportsmanship and build respectful relationships, they must learn about ethical decision-making and fair play.

A culture of sustainability. The need to act now for the future

Sustainability practices have become a key issue in the culture of NFs that have a modern approach to management and administration. For instance, research has shown that economic factors play a crucial role in tennis associations' operation and economic sustainability (Varmus et al., 2022) and studies have focused on the initiatives of NFs, tournaments (Trendafilova et al., 2021), players (Balliauw et al., 2017) and circuits (Van Hecke, 2022).

Table 4 summarises some practices NFs can adopt to address this key issue that should be an integral component of their organizational culture.

Table 4
Examples of sustainable programmes that a NFs can implement to improve their culture on this crucial aspect.

Programmes	Target Users	Key Message
Outreach Campaigns	Regional federations, tennis clubs and their members	Create awareness of sustainability and encourage everyone to contribute to the relevant initiatives.
Education & Training	Young players	Educate young players, sports authorities, and members of the sports federations about sustainable initiatives and how climate change is affecting sports and players.
Integrating Sustainability	Society at large	Implement sustainability into the NF governance structure, making sure the federation's practices meet all sustainable standards, such as corporate social responsibility, performance management, and sustainable transportation.

Through all these initiatives, National Sports Federations can ensure that sustainability practices become an everyday part of their activities and create a ripple effect to facilitate the uptake of sustainable practices across their organisation.

What about innovation? How can NFs create culture of innovation?

NFs should create a culture of innovation that encourages experimentation and a willingness to embrace change (Crespo et al., 2021a). To do this, they should create a comprehensive strategy that outlines the various programmes, target users, and key messages on how to implement them. Programmes should be tailored to the needs of the stakeholders, such as players, coaches, clubs and other federations (Crespo et al., 2022a).

Examples of programmes that NFs should put into place for effective implementation of a culture of innovation have been studied by authors such as Crespo et al. (2021b) and include, among others, innovation incubators, hackathons, mentor programmes and industry collaborations. Target users for these programmes should include players, coaches, administration personnel, and other relevant staff. These stakeholders should be educated on the benefits of innovation and encouraged to embrace a culture of change and empowered to think creatively and foster a safe environment for the exploration of new ideas (Tennis Australia, 2023).

Finally, the key message that NFs should communicate to promote a culture of innovation is that innovation is essential to allowing tennis to develop and stay competitive. This could include initiatives such as new training procedures, using technology to improve performance, introducing new strategies, and introducing marketing opportunities that will benefit all stakeholders. It is important to emphasize that innovation should be encouraged at all levels, from

the administrators to the players, and that everyone should be open to new ideas that can help the sport to grow and succeed (Crespo et al., 2022b).

CONCLUSIONS

As seen through this article, culture is a crucial issue which has many implications and influences. In this complex and changing scenario, the culture of a NF, with which all stakeholders should voluntarily comply is comprised by aspects such as development, excellence, values, ethics and morals, inclusion and respect, sustainability and progress, participation and performance. Its function is instrumental to generate the strategy, inspire the people, educate the staff, construct standards, and meet the demands of the strategy of the NF (Lussier & Kimball, 2009).

Following Maitland et al. (2014) conclusions, we acknowledge that understanding organisational culture is crucial to improve coaching practice, inform stakeholders relationships, increase participation, improve talent identification, boost performance, and ensure inclusion and diversity in organisations such as NFs.

It is hoped that this paper has provided practical and applied guidelines for NF leaders and tennis stakeholders responsible for driving cultural change in their environments.

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