



# The 7Fs of grassroots governance: theoretical and practitioner insights

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**Poll: What is the biggest challenge currently facing your organisation?**



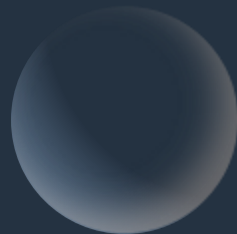
' ... within the field of VSCs there are clubs that are flourishing, clubs on the edge of dissolution and clubs that are being terminated.'

(Hoeijmakers & van der Roest, 2024, p.935)

What are your personal experiences?



**To share empirical insights  
about the difficulties of  
grassroots sports clubs and  
how some are seeking to  
address these through a  
governance lens.**



# Utility and ubiquity



- VSCs number 64,000-72,000 in England and approx. 150,000 in the UK (Nichols et al. (2014; 2022) and 700,000 in Europe.
- SRA/Active Insights (2024) research found almost 70% believe VSCs play a '**crucial**' role in their community.
- Various authors refer to the value (externalities/ positives) of VSCs, including:  
personal development, volunteering, and participation opportunities; social association/capital; mental and physical wellbeing; local economy impacts; facilitating diversity and inclusion.

# CLUBS: COMMON COMPLAINTS AND CRITICISMS?



1. The committee don't listen!

3. That 'kin captain just picks his pals.

2. Bl....Juniors!  
Pain in the ...

4. Juniors' parents, just use us as a babysitting service.

5. Club ... cliquey so and sos! It's a closed shop!

8. XXX:  
What does he/  
the committee actually do?

6. ... He just runs the club for his own benefit. Egomaniac!

7. We are fine as we are, no need to change or listen to new ideas (diversity/  
new blood)

9. Where's all the money being spent?

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Operating through certain key principles and values can help overcome some of these issues:

Stakeholder inclusion and continuous communication; responsibility (fiduciary); accountability; openness and transparency; democracy incorporating checks and balances which can build trust, integrity and credibility.

# What challenges do VSCs face?

1. Member/ volunteer attrition and recruitment (SRA, 2023)
2. Availability/ access to facilities (Seippel et al., 2023; SRA, 2023)
3. Increasing cost of utilities, facility maintenance/usage (owned/hired)
4. Professionalization and formalization (linked to increases in costs and administration time and resources [Lang et al., 2024])
5. Service and Quality expectations (consumerism/market forces) and capacity
6. Internal and External Club Contexts (local and structural) – see Buser et al (2025)

***overall, the financial picture for community clubs is one of increasing precariousness (SRA, 2023).***

## Context/ Environment

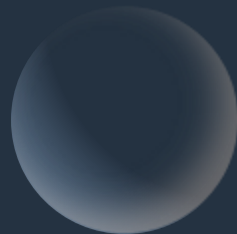
1. Social
2. Economic
3. Political & Legal
4. Technology
5. 'Field' pressures
6. Micro/Internal issues
7. Competition



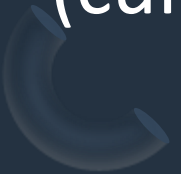


# What is organisational governance?

- **how an organization is led, directed and controlled;**
- **a system that provides a framework for managing an organization;**
- **'steering'.**



# The importance of organisational governance

- The board (executive committee) is the key decision making body that sets the strategy of the organisation
  - The board (executive committee) needs to ensure proper control mechanisms are in place (financial; safeguarding, risk, etc)
  - The board (executive committee) plays a role in setting the 'tone' (culture) of the organisation
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# UK Code for Sports Governance

## Five principles

- Structure
- People
- Communication
- Standards and Conduct
- Policies and Processes

## A Code for Sports Governance



# What coping mechanisms are adopted by clubs?

1. Communicating and engaging with stakeholders;
2. Addressing finances and facilities;
3. Reviewing and Planning



# My Research Governance: The 7Fs framework

1. Finances (frugal)
2. Fundraising and Funding (proactive)
3. Facing Outwards (look beyond/ reach out)
4. Facilities (playing & social)
5. Future Focus (planning, opportunities, threats)
6. Families and Friendships (FUN!)
7. Flexible, Facilitative, Functional (and formats)



## Governance Domains (The 7 F's Framework)

Domain	Explanation
Finances (conformance and fiscal frugality)	Continual monitoring of financial position; checks and balances implemented; tighter controls on spending; overheads reduced; compliance with regulatory frameworks and constitutional requirements
Fundraising and Funding	Regular social and other internally and externally focused fundraising activities; embracing new ideas and opportunities; income diversification; pro-active in seeking funding opportunities and sources.
Facing Outwards	Seeking partnerships and (closer) links with others for purposes of mutual support, aid (intellectual, financial, physical resources) or assistance/guidance.
Facilities (improvements and developments)	Ongoing reinvestment and upgrading of facilities: spectating, playing and proactive, social/hospitality and changing accommodation.
Future Focus	Looking ahead, planning future developments, and investment in junior teams and infrastructures.
Families and Friendship	Providing a friendly, welcoming, and inclusive atmosphere. A more family-orientated environment, informal and fun, partly through new programmes, events, and social activities.
Facilitative, Flexible and Functional	Listening to and responding to members and stakeholders, embracing innovation, new ideas, new products, new teams and new programmes, linked to club missions/objects.

Est. 1909

**OUR VISION: To be a successful and sustainable club for everyone.**

**OUR MISSION: To provide safe and enjoyable sporting and social opportunities for members and visitors.**

**The club ethos and culture should reflect our vision and mission and is guided by common principles and values:**

- **Club Environment and Ethos:** To be a safe, welcoming and inclusive club where **all** are treated non-judgementally, with fairness, dignity and respect.
- **Operations:** To provide efficient and excellent service; to be considered good value for money by stakeholders.
- **Business Culture:** To be progressive, innovative and flexible, seeking to generate a surplus to enable infrastructure investment.
- **Stewardship of Assets:** To manage our finances and infrastructure prudently: ethically, equitably, responsibly, efficiently and sustainably.
- **Organisation and Leadership:** To be proactive, dynamic, effective, accountable, democratic, and transparent.

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Commercial &amp; Financial</b>	<b>Reputational &amp; Cultural</b>	<b>Structural and Operational</b>
Strategic Goal  To be a successful multisport club.	Strategic Goal To have a high-quality cricket ground, with top-class practice, social and spectating facilities.	Strategic Goal To have a vibrant and attractive social scene.	Strategic Goal To be financially secure, growing income annually and maintaining a healthy reserve.	Strategic Goal Be recognised as an inclusive, progressive community-centric club.	Strategic Goal Have progressive, innovative and dynamic committee/s
Cricket Aim: To provide appropriate cricket playing (and/or coaching) opportunities for junior and senior players, enabling each individual to attain participation at the level suited to their aspiration and ability. (ongoing) Football Aim: to have a successful football team Pool Aim: to have two teams competing regularly throughout the year.	Ground Aim: To be in the top half of the NL and PS for pitch and ground reports. To receive positive feedback from members and visitors regarding social and spectating facilities.	Social Aim: To have a social calendar of events that provides for all club demographics and external/local community partners.	Financial Aim: To make an annual surplus of £3-5k. To maintain a bank reserve of ≥ £20K.	Reputational Cultural Aim: To be perceived positively and regarded as having an inclusive culture by different stakeholder groups: members, leagues, governing bodies, local council/councillors, community groups, sponsors, visitors, new members.	Structural and Operational Aim: To have an effective and accountable governance structure that oversees the effective management of the club and ensures efficient operation. To provide excellent services and products to members and visitors.

Closing  
Messages  
'The third place?'



THANK  
you

The image shows the words "THANK YOU" in a colorful, hand-drawn style. The word "THANK" is in all caps, with each letter in a different color: T (black), H (pink), A (orange), N (yellow), and K (grey). The word "you" is in lowercase, with 'y' in yellow, 'o' as a red circle with white lines, and 'u' in teal.