

EXPLORING HUMAN-CENTERED PHILOSOPHY IN SPORT: THE CASE OF RED BULL SALZBURG

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Abstract

This study explores the application of human-centered philosophy in sports, focusing on Red Bull Salzburg's integration of this approach into its management practices. Since its acquisition by the Red Bull Group in 2005, the club has transformed from a traditional football entity into a globally recognized brand by prioritizing player development, community involvement, and ethical values. Led by Dietrich Mateschitz, this shift emphasizes holistic growth, fostering both personal development and social responsibility. This research highlights how philosophical principles, including ethical considerations and intrinsic values, enhance human experience in sports. Red Bull Salzburg's commitment to inclusivity, personal growth, and community engagement is a model that balances business success with human values. The club's youth academy, fan culture, and community initiatives focus on nurturing life skills and psychological well-being and creating inclusive environments. Although initially criticized for its corporate restructuring, Red Bull Salzburg has successfully balanced its commercial achievements, generating €463 million in transfer profits over the last decade, with a human-centered philosophy. This approach shows how sports organizations can prioritize human dignity and ethical values while achieving financial success, thereby offering a sustainable model for the future of sports management.

Keywords: *human-centered philosophy, sports management, player development, community engagement, Red Bull Salzburg*

1. HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH IN SPORTS PHILOSOPHY

The exploration of human-centered philosophy in sports involves understanding how philosophical principles can be applied to enhance human experience in sports. This approach emphasizes the intrinsic values of sports, ethical considerations, and holistic development of individuals through sporting activities. By integrating humanistic and philosophical perspectives, sports can be viewed as a medium for personal growth, ethical development, and social interaction. Kretchmar discusses the intrinsic and extrinsic values of sports, exercise, and physical education. He highlighted that sports offer inherent values such as pleasure, knowledge, and skill, which are essential for personal fulfillment. Extrinsic values such as fitness and societal needs also play a significant role in the broader context of sports (Kretchmar, 1994). On the other hand, Reid emphasizes the historical and philosophical roots of sport, noting its role in education and social practices. She argues that sports have intrinsic values that align with intellectual inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge, akin to ancient Greek practice (Reid, 2012, 2009).

Louden advocated a humanistic approach to coaching, distinguishing it from traditional authoritarian models. This approach promotes free thought, critical analysis, and self-initiated learning, fostering a person-centered environment that values individual contributions and experiences (Louden, 1980). Building on this foundation, McNamee and Parry examined the ethical dimensions of coaching and physical education, emphasizing the moral significance of these practices. They argue for respect for persons within sports, highlighting the development of moral character and ethical behavior through athletic engagement. These perspectives underscore the importance of integrating humanistic and ethical considerations into coaching practices to support individuals' personal and moral development in sports contexts (McNamee and Parry, 1998).

Building upon the humanistic and ethical foundations established in coaching and physical education, further exploration of the broader philosophical underpinnings of sports is essential. This transition

facilitates a deeper examination of moral issues and fundamental principles that shape sports science and its methodologies. McNamee extensively addressed ethical issues in sports by examining the philosophical foundations of sports science and its methodologies. He advocated critical reflection on the underlying assumptions and biases of sports research, promoting a more philosophically informed approach (McNamee, 2004). Complementing McNamee's perspective, Connor (Connor, 2011) provides a comprehensive philosophical understanding of sports, focusing on essential elements, such as rules, chance, and competition. Connor posits that sport is a fundamental aspect of human life that mediates the relationship between humans and the natural world. Together, these works underscore the importance of integrating philosophical inquiry and ethical considerations into sports science to enhance research rigor and relevance, and deepen the understanding of sports's multifaceted role in human society.

In contrast to human-centered philosophy, some perspectives emphasize the competitive and commercial aspects of sports, which can sometimes overshadow intrinsic values and ethical considerations. The modern sports industry often prioritizes success and profit, potentially leading to moral dilemmas and focus on extrinsic rewards. Sports marketing, encompassing segmentation, targeting, and positioning to meet consumer needs, strategically employs a marketing mix through product development, pricing strategies, and promotional activities such as endorsements and sponsorships (Beech and Chadwick, 2007; Pitts and Stotlar, 1996). Concurrently, the economics of sports involves balancing profit and utility maximization for clubs and leagues by addressing demand, pricing, labor markets, and the economic impacts of sports broadcasting and facility financing. Business entities, teams, and leagues are the dominant cartels influencing economic development and policy decisions (Sandy et al., 2004). However, by integrating philosophical insights, sports can be reoriented towards fostering personal growth, ethical development, and social cohesion, aligning with broader humanistic goals. This balance between competitive drive and ethical mindfulness is crucial for creating a more holistic and sustainable sports environment that celebrates athletic achievement and upholds participants' moral integrity and well-being.

2. HUMAN-CENTERED MANAGEMENT: A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS DIGNITY, WELL-BEING, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Human-centered management (HCM) is an emerging paradigm that prioritizes human dignity, well-being, and flourishing within organizational contexts (Pirson, 2019; Pirson et al., 2010). This contrasts with traditional profit-oriented management, which views people as ends rather than means (Melé, 2016, 2013). HCM emphasizes humanistic values, common good purposes, positive work experiences, and participatory approaches (Townsend and Romme, 2024). This philosophy extends to various management aspects including strategy, governance, leadership, and culture (Pirson et al., 2010). In executive education, HCM promotes innovation from a global perspective (Lepeley et al., 2016). Advocates argue for reorienting management education away from the homo economicus model towards a more humanistic paradigm (Dierksmeier, 2012). The HCM also addresses societal challenges such as poverty and inequality through business practices (Kimakowitz et al., 2011), aiming to create sustainable flourishing within planetary boundaries (Pirson, 2019). Human-centered management represents a significant paradigm shift towards prioritizing dignity, well-being, and sustainability in organizational practices. This approach challenges traditional economic-centric management models by emphasizing human values, ethical considerations, and sustainable development. Integrating humanistic principles into management practices aims to create a more equitable and sustainable future for individuals and organizations. Below, we explore the critical aspects of this paradigm shift by drawing insights from the research papers.

Human-centered management emphasizes valuing employees as individuals rather than mere resources, fostering a work environment that respects personal dignity and encourages growth (Martínez et al., 2015). By integrating human dignity into management practices, organizations can address critical issues, such as income inequality and job insecurity, which are often perpetuated by traditional management models (Yamada, 2008). Furthermore, focusing on human dignity allows organizations to establish moral contracts with their employees, building trust and commitment essential for long-term

success (Mullins et al., 2001). Complementing these approaches, the Human Scale Development (HSD) framework offers a methodology for achieving sustainable development while enhancing human well-being, aligning with the principles of human-centered management by prioritizing human needs and community engagement (Guillen-Royo, 2015). Sustaining employee well-being is increasingly recognized as crucial in modern workplaces, as poor well-being can adversely affect both individual and organizational performance, highlighting the need for management practices that prioritize employee health and satisfaction (Loretto and Redman, 2015).

However, while human-centered management offers numerous benefits, it also faces challenges such as overcoming entrenched economic-centric paradigms and implementing comprehensive strategies for sustainable development (Melel, 2013). The transition to human-centered management requires a shift in organizational culture and the development of new competencies among managers and employees (Martínez et al., 2015). Despite these challenges, the potential for human-centered management to drive positive changes in organizations and society is significant, as it offers opportunities for innovation and growth (Mullins et al., 2001).

3. ADVANCING HUMAN-CENTERED SPORT MANAGEMENT: PRIORITIZING WELL-BEING AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Human-centered philosophy in sports management emphasizes prioritizing human aspects within sports administration. This approach involves considering the well-being and development of individuals involved in sports, including athletes, coaches, and staff members. By integrating human resource management practices such as recruitment, selection, training, and reward management, sports organizations can create a supportive and conducive environment for all stakeholders (Weerakoon, 2016). Furthermore, the philosophy of sports education plays a crucial role in shaping the values and practices within sports. It delves into the educational philosophical perspective of sports, aiming to instill values, such as teamwork, discipline, and respect, through practical methodologies. This aspect of sports education benefits physical education teachers, sports educators, athletes, and coaches, contributing to the holistic development of individuals within the sports domain (Isidori, 2015). In sports management, internal marketing can significantly impact job satisfaction and organizational commitment among employees in sports centers. Sports organizations can enhance employee satisfaction and commitment by fostering a culture of internal marketing, ultimately leading to improved overall performance and outcomes (Santiago et al., 2023).

Moreover, the development of a people-centered sports philosophy is essential for promoting sustainable practices in sports events. Effective management strategies, political leadership, and stakeholder engagement ensure that sports events align with environmental sustainability goals. By adhering to a sustainable philosophy, sports organizations can contribute to the sporting community's and environment's long-term well-being (Kim, 2017). In conclusion, integrating human-centered philosophies in sports management enhances the overall experience of stakeholders and contributes to the sports industry's ethical, moral, and sustainable development.

4. RED BULL SALZBURG: A HUMAN-CENTERED REVOLUTION IN MODERN FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT

Red Bull Salzburg represents a paradigm shift in modern football management, emphasizing a human-centered approach that integrates business success with personal development and community engagement. Since its acquisition by the Red Bull Group in 2005, the club has transformed from a traditional football entity into a globally recognized brand (Figure 1). Dietrich Mateschitz, the visionary behind Red Bull, spearheaded this transformation with substantial financial investments and a new business model to revolutionize the club while keeping people at its heart (Whitworth, 2021).

The initial changes brought about by the Red Bull were met with resistance from the existing fan base. The proposed alterations to the club's colors, crests, and names sparked a significant backlash. Fans felt that "the club they had supported all their lives was being erased" (Flanagan, n.d.) Stefan Schubert, an

SV Austria Salzburg board member, voiced the emotional impact: "That company had just destroyed a huge part of our lives and dropped the color. Erased the history" (Flanagan, n.d.). This strong emotional response underscores the deep personal connections and human elements involved in football fandom.

Despite these challenges, Red Bull Salzburg has achieved remarkable success by strongly emphasizing human elements, focusing on player development, community involvement, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and personal growth. The club's General Manager, Stephan Reiter, encapsulates this philosophy: "Our commitment to integration and tolerance is not just an initiative; it is a fundamental part of our philosophy. We strive to create an environment where everyone feels respected and valued, regardless of their background" (Reiter, n.d.).

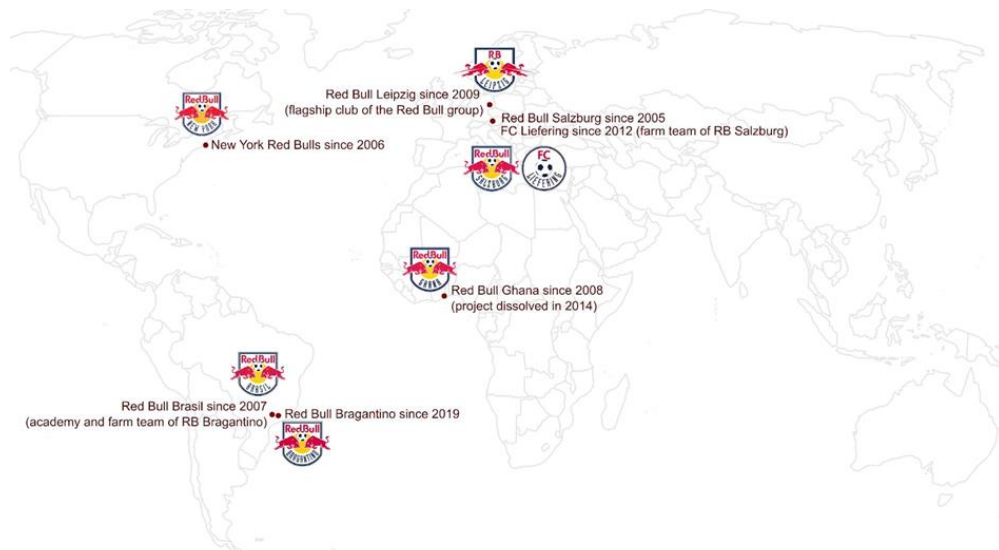


Fig. 1. Red Bull global football club's portfolio (Keech T., 2021)

5. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Red Bull Salzburg places significant importance on being an integral part of society by promoting the values of integration and tolerance. Stephan Reiter emphasizes, "We see ourselves as an important part of society and want to contribute to positive developments. Our commitment to integration and tolerance is deeply rooted in our club philosophy." The club actively engages in initiatives like the "Teamplay without an Offside" workshop, which educates young people about discrimination and promotes inclusivity through football (Reiter, n.d.). These programs use sports as a medium to bring people together, break down barriers, and foster mutual respect.

Ensuring that football is accessible to everyone is a core aspect of a club's human-centered approach. Recognized for providing barrier-free access to its facilities, Red Bull Salzburg demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity beyond mere compliance with regulations (Red Bull Salzburg, n.d.). By offering services such as audio commentary for visually impaired fans and ensuring that facilities cater to diverse needs, the club works to make every individual feel valued and included.

The club extends its human-centered philosophy to education and personal development. Ernst Tanner, former director of the Salzburg Academy, highlights the holistic approach: "Our educational programs are designed to develop not only skilled athletes but well-rounded individuals. We believe in the holistic development of our players" (Tejwani K., 2020). The academy focuses on nurturing life skills, psychological well-being, personal growth, and athletic training.

Red Bull Salzburg actively involves fans and players in the community and charitable projects. Andreas Ulmer, a player ambassador for the Wings for Life Foundation, states, "Our fans are the heartbeat of our club, and their involvement in charitable projects exemplifies the community spirit we strive to foster."

'(Reiter, n.d.) By engaging in activities that benefit society, such as fundraising for medical research or participating in community services, the club reinforces its commitment to being a positive force in people's lives.

6. FAN CULTURE AND SUPPORTER RELATIONS

The takeover by Red Bull altered the club's traditional identity, leading to feelings of alienation among long-term supporters. Recognizing the importance of fans as individuals with deep emotional connections to clubs, Red Bull Salzburg has made concerted efforts to rebuild trust. Initiatives, such as fan forums and community events, provide platforms for dialogue and mutual understanding(Flanagan, n.d.). The organization acknowledges its integral role in the club's fabric by listening to supporters' concerns and involving them in its evolution. While honoring traditional supporters, Red Bull Salzburg also focuses on engaging a new generation of fans who resonate with the club's modern ethos. Marketing campaigns emphasize success on the pitch, the club's values, and community initiatives. This dual approach aims to create a diverse fanbase united by shared values and a sense of belonging.

7. TALENT DEVELOPMENT: NURTURING THE WHOLE PERSON

The success of Red Bull Salzburg's youth academy was rooted in its holistic approach to player development. Beyond technical skills, the academy prioritizes personal growth and psychological well-being. Ernst Tanner articulates this philosophy: "We are not just training footballers; we are nurturing individuals who can succeed in life"(Tejwani K., 2020).

The academy employs a multidimensional diagnostic approach that integrates motor, perceptual, and personality-related performance factors to predict future success, aligning with the best practices of top academies worldwide (Höner et al., 2017). Understanding the pressures young athletes face, academies provide psychological support to help players develop resilience, self-regulation, and mental strength(Tomlinson, 2011). This approach acknowledges that players' mental health and personal development are as important as athletic performance.

Technical skills are the cornerstone of an academy's training program. The players were regularly tested and monitored to obtain the desired performance curves (Huijgen, 2013). The academy also emphasizes tactical training to ensure players adapt to different game situations (Wein, 2007).

Players who have come through the academy often speak of the supportive environment and the personal attention they receive. Erling Haaland, one of the academies' most successful graduates, remarked, "At Salzburg, they cared about me as a person, not just a player. That made all the difference in my development" (cited in (Tejwani K., 2020)). Such testimonials highlight the impact of the club's human-centered philosophy on individual success stories. Academy training programs significantly impact players' careers and spell duration. Those attending well-established programs like Red Bull Salzburg have better chances of succeeding in the top European leagues (Radoman and Voia, 2015). Integrating social and biological factors ensures that players are physically prepared, and socially and psychologically equipped to handle the demands of professional sports (Balsevich, 1996).

Red Bull Salzburg also has an efficient transfer philosophy and market strategy. Over the last decade, Red Bull Salzburg has generated significant €463 million in transfer profits (Table 1), ranking it among Europe's top clubs for player transfers(APA, n.d.). Ralf Rangnick emphasized, "Our philosophy is to develop young talents and prepare them for the next step in their careers, whether at another Red Bull club or in a top European league." (Keech T., 2021) This model boosts a club's financial sustainability and enhances its reputation as a hub for emerging talent.

#	Club	Expenditure ↑	Arrivals ↑	Income ↓	Departures ↑	Balance ↓
1	 SL Benfica	€612.73m	328	€1.37bn	329	€752.47m
2	 Ajax Amsterdam	€508.70m	166	€997.02m	159	€488.32m
3	 Red Bull Salzburg	€197.34m	281	€663.17m	276	€465.84m
4	 FC Porto	€437.18m	273	€832.37m	270	€395.19m
5	 LOSC Lille	€391.35m	190	€771.38m	187	€380.02m

Table 1. Transfer income and expenditure 2014/15 – 2024/25 (source: transfermarkt.com)

8. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: PEOPLE AT THE CORE

Mateschitz envisioned a club in which innovation and human values coexisted. He stated, ‘We aim to create a unified brand identity that resonates with fans worldwide while respecting the individuality of each person involved with the club.’ (Whitworth, 2021) This vision permeates organizational culture and influences decisions from top management to day-to-day operations. The club fosters a work environment that values employees’ contributions and encourages professional growth. By investing in staff development and promoting a culture of open communication, Red Bull Salzburg ensures that its employees are motivated and aligned with the clubs’ human-centered values. Collaboration is encouraged across all levels of the organization, reinforcing that every individual plays a vital role in the club's achievements.

9. BRANDING AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Red Bull Salzburg's branding strategy extends beyond commercial objectives to reflect its human-centered philosophy. Marketing campaigns highlight the personal stories of players, staff, and fans, emphasizing the human elements that make the club unique. By showcasing these narratives, the club connects with people emotionally, strengthening brand loyalty and community ties.

While expanding its global presence, the club remains sensitive to local culture and traditions. Dietrich Mateschitz emphasized the importance of respecting cultural nuances, and international success comes from understanding and valuing local identities. We strive to connect with people by honoring what matters to them" (Whitworth, 2021). This approach ensures that the club's human-centered values resonate with diverse audiences.

10. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

One of Red Bull Salzburg's ongoing challenges is to balance commercial success and its human-centered philosophy. Critics argue that corporate ownership can overshadow a club’s personal and cultural aspects. Michael Flanagan observes, "The corporatization of clubs like Red Bull Salzburg challenges traditional notions of what a football club represents to its community." (Flanagan, n.d.) Addressing these concerns requires continuous prioritization of people over profits in decision-making processes.

The perception of Red Bull Salzburg as a "plastic club" lacking authenticity can hinder its ability to connect with traditional football supporters (Tamsut, 2018). Overcoming this requires genuine engagement with fans and a demonstrable commitment to human values. The club can reshape its identity by amplifying its personal stories and community initiatives to reflect its true ethos.

Despite its success, questions regarding the long-term sustainability of Red Bull Salzburg's business model still need to be answered. The heavy reliance on player transfers for revenue generation poses risks if the market dynamics change (Szymanski and Kessenne, 2004). An economic downturn or shift in transfer market regulations could significantly impact a club's financial stability. Factors such as the

market size, fan base, and local rules can influence the applicability of this model to other clubs (Szymanski, 2003).

11. FUTURE OUTLOOK: STRENGTHENING THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Red Bull Salzburg plans to expand its community programs and deepen its engagement with local supporters to further its human-centered philosophy. This includes collaborative projects with schools, charities, and regional organizations, fostering stronger relationships and mutual support. Recognizing the importance of fans as individuals with unique connections to the club, Red Bull Salzburg aims to develop new strategies that honor its history while embracing innovation. This can involve commemorative events, heritage projects, and increased transparency to build trust and a shared sense of identity. The club intends to enhance its youth academy by incorporating more educational programs, life-skills training, and psychological support. By investing in the personal development of players and staff, Red Bull Salzburg reinforces its commitment to nurturing individuals who can positively contribute to society.

12. CONCLUSION

1. Red Bull Salzburg's human-centered philosophy is a defining feature of its success. This emphasizes the importance of people in every aspect of its operation. From community engagement and support relationships to talent development and organizational culture. The club placed individuals at the core of its mission. By fostering an environment in which everyone feels valued and respected, Red Bull Salzburg demonstrates how focusing on human values can drive both sporting excellence and business success.
2. Remarkably, even with this human-centered approach, the club excels in the business aspect of football. Generating €463 million in transfer profits over the past decade, Red Bull Salzburg is one of Europe's most successful clubs in the transfer market (APA, 2024) [4]. This achievement underscores that prioritizing people does not preclude financial success; rather, it can enhance it.
3. While challenges remain in balancing commercial interests with human-centered values, the club's ongoing efforts to prioritize people over profits position it as a model for others in the industry. By continuing to evolve and adapt its strategies with a focus on human elements, Red Bull Salzburg can strengthen its legacy and impact within the global football landscape.

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