

Sport Leadership

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Introduction

This first edition of the Sport Leadership section for Sport Management Digest will cover a total of eight studies published in the first half of 2021 in four different journals. This list includes three articles from *Sport Management Review (SMR)*, two from the *Journal of Sport Management (JSM)*, two from the *Journal of Sport Policy and Politics (JSPP)*, and one study from *European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ)*.

The first article from *SMR* is entitled “Volunteer selection at a major sport event: A strategic human resource management approach” and was written by Graham Cuskelly (Griffith University), Liz Fredline (Griffith University), Eunjung Kim (Edith Cowan University), Shane Barry (Griffith University), and Pam Kappelides (La Trobe University). The second *SMR* article is called “The effect of race on lateral moves to coach central positions,” written by Jeremy Foreman (University of Louisiana at Lafayette) and Robert Turick (Ball State University). The third *SMR* article is entitled “Doing hybrid management work in elite sport: the case of a head coach in top-level rugby union,” written by Edward Hall (Northumbria University), Shirley Gray (University of Edinburgh), Amanda Martindale (University of Edinburgh), John Sproule (University of Edinburgh), John Kelly (University of Edinburgh), and Paul Potrac (Northumbria University/University College Dublin).

The first *JSM* article covered in this section is entitled “Examining institutional entrepreneurship in the passage of youth sport concussion legislation” and is written by Landy Di Lu (Western University) and Kathryn Heinze (University of Michigan). The other *JSM* study is entitled “Agency theory and principal–agent alignment masks: An examination of penalties in the national football league,” written by Jeremy Forman (University of Louisiana at Lafayette), Joshua Bendickson (University of Louisiana at Lafayette), and Birton Cowden (Kennesaw State University). Next, the first of two *JSPP*

articles covered in this edition is entitled “Gender inequality in Canadian interuniversity sport: participation opportunities and leadership positions from 2010-11 to 2016-17” and is written by Mark Norman (McMaster University), Peter Donnelly (University of Toronto) and Bruce Kidd (University of Toronto). The other *IJSP* study is called “Gendering of recruitment and selection processes to boards in Polish sports federations,” written by Natalia Organista (Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education). Finally, the last article covered in this section is from *ESMQ* and is entitled “Innovation in national governing bodies of sport: investigating dynamic capabilities that drive growth,” written by Spencer Harris, Matthew Metzger, and Thomas Duening (all from University of Colorado, Colorado Springs).

Collectively, these studies cover a broad range of topics related to leadership, including: institutional entrepreneurship, principle-agent (mis)alignment, race and coaching employment, innovative leadership, hybrid management, and gender inequality issues in female leadership positions. In addition, this collection of research investigates leadership issues across a broad range of contexts and countries, including: coalitions for youth sport concussion legislation (USA), the Commonwealth Games (Australia), international rugby union, the National Football League (USA), national governing bodies (USA), national sport federations (Poland), and interuniversity athletic departments (Canada). In the following pages, a summary of each of the aforementioned articles will be provided, highlighting the main issues addressed, the theoretical basis taken by the authors, and new insights generated by their research.

Advances in Sport Leadership

In their study on volunteer selection at major sporting events, Cuskelly et al. (2021) accessed a massive pool of data from the 2018 Commonwealth Games to analyse factors predicting which applicants were chosen for interview. This research addressed a gap in the sport management literature in relation to volunteer selection determinants. While this investigation was focused primarily on identifying key drivers for one event’s selection process, the authors did note that their research was grounded in an inside-out and resource-based view of strategic management, where crucial value and competitive advantage stems from the ability to effectively gather and position human resources. While this article may at first glance seem tangential to leadership, it was included in this section review because applicant leadership skills were considered in the criteria for selection. Although not a provocative finding, a first takeaway from this research is that

volunteer availability understandably emerged as a necessary component for interview consideration. Of more substantive interest, however, is the second largest predictor of interview selection, which was the motive to represent/support the local community. When compared alongside the numerous other factors (skills, experience, and motives), the prominence of this factor is worthy of future consideration. For example, one question relates to whether this mindset was a conscious priority for the interview selection committee. Future research could consider a connection with concepts such as identification, involvement, and commitment. It could also be argued that 'supporting and representing your community' is a function of leadership, as several newer approaches to leadership focus on these elements. Furthermore, of all the predictors included in the model, this appears to be the lone factor representative of something beyond the skills and characteristics of the applicant. Conversely, it was also interesting that the motive to receive rewards and recognition was a negative predictor of selection, where applicants who indicated yes to this question were significantly less likely to be interviewed. Applicants would therefore appear to benefit from de-emphasising extrinsic motivations when applying for volunteer positions. Finally, it is of note that the skills with the largest predictive values were volunteering skills, driving skills, and English skills. Interestingly, all three of these skills came out on top of leadership skills, which had no effect on interview selection. One way this could be interpreted is that leadership skills were perhaps not essential in these positions. For example, it is quite probable that the vast majority of volunteer positions were entry level and included no direct reports. Alternatively, it could be that the selection committee (consciously or unconsciously) deemed applicants as not fully equipped to accurately assess their own abilities in this domain.

In a another *SMR* article, Hall et al. (2021) utilised the relational psychology perspective to examine the concept of hybrid management as applied to the multiple roles of a head coach in an elite sport system. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the aims of this study were to understand how the head coach's practice was co-created in complex networks, how actors engaged in organising these relations, and how they drew upon interactions to pursue goals. As part of this process, the study provided a useful network map of relationships to help understand the complexity and nuances of a head coach's positioning within the system. The study also provided good examples of how the head coach must navigate this environment and strategically manage nuanced relationships with and between collaborators. Additionally, the prominence of the head

coaching position was identified as a significant factor for influencing support, resources, and information flow. There was also a strategic aspect identified within the head coach's interactions, with purposeful intention around generating buy-in and the space to implement programs and agendas. Hybrid management was presented in this paper as a tripartite collection of management, leadership, and coaching roles. While perhaps not a goal of the study, an opportunity was missed to define each of these areas of hybrid management and address both their overlap and distinctive characteristics. Although the presented concept of hybrid management appears to infer a constant toggling of multiple hats to wear (i.e., managing, leading, coaching), the paper appears to equally embrace the messiness of these concepts and the simultaneous enactment of multiple roles in this environment. While an interesting and insightful read on the complexity of being a head coach in an elite sport system, this line of research would benefit from a deeper understanding of the characteristics, differences, and relationships between management, leadership, and coaching in this (and other) context(s). For example, on one hand, it could be that coaching refers to skill development or tactical guidance given to players. On the other hand, it could be that coaching actually encompasses a much broader space which includes both management and leadership functions. Additional inquiry in this area is needed to yield insight on how individuals in central positions of power and influence can effectively navigate their multiple roles.

In the final *SMR* article for this section, Forman and Turick (2021) tackled the effect of race on lateral moves to central coaching positions in the National Football League (NFL). This paper is essentially about the role of race in the movement of minority assistant coaches into more central positions that have a higher likelihood of promotion to prominent leadership roles (i.e., coordinators and head coaches). In the development of their first hypothesis, the authors note previous research on college students who perceived White people as being prototypical and more effective leaders. The authors reasoned that the existence of a general perception of this form could be one reason that Black coaches would be less likely to move to these central leadership roles. To test this hypothesis (and others), the authors accessed NFL data across 32 seasons and used logistic regression to establish a baseline finding that Black assistant coaches were indeed less likely to laterally move into central coaching positions, hence limiting their upward mobility in the leadership hierarchy. This is an important issue being addressed, as it suggests the effects of racial stacking go beyond player experiences and also extend into the coaching ranks. The authors' remaining set of hypotheses focused on leadership

decision-making (i.e., those made by head coaches hiring central position coaches) and the role that race plays in this process. To this end, the authors drew from homologous reproduction theory, which postulates that managers are more likely to promote individuals most similar to their own social and physical characteristics. In summary, while minority head coaches were not generally found to be more likely to move Black position coaches into central positions, over time, the analysis indicated that this indeed became the case. However, this trend did not continue throughout their careers, and at a certain point in time, minority head coaches became less likely to laterally move Black coaches to central coaching positions. The authors posited that this appears in part to be a result of the relatively stagnant average percentage of minority coaches on NFL staffs since 2003. A notable conclusion by the authors was that racial discrimination for head coach hirings may actually be related to decisions made by head coaches themselves, rather than being solely at the hands of owners and general managers who directly hire head coaches. That is, because central coaching roles represent the primary pool of candidates from which higher-level leadership positions are chosen, the lack of Black coaches in the central position coaching roles (which are decided by head coaches) significantly effects minority candidate availability. The authors concluded that identifying discrimination at lower levels can help inform understanding and discussion around the lack of minority head coaches in the NFL.

Shifting to articles in *JSM*, but staying within the NFL context, Forman, Bendickson, and Cowden (2021) accessed NFL data across 34 seasons to examine how coaches adapt to broad changes in league-wide rules. They did this through the lens of agency theory, which is relevant when one party (the agent) acts on the behalf of another (the principle) – in the current case, the head coach on behalf of NFL owners or general managers. A main premise of this research was that in a new era of constant rule changes (i.e., for player safety purposes), playing aggressively in a manner that participants are more accustomed to may induce more game penalties, but still increase overall performance (i.e., winning more games). The researchers indeed found support for this hypothesis, which in turn creates the potential for agents (head coaches) to be misaligned with principles (owners) due to conflicting goals. That is, head coaches may be more inclined to coach in way that promotes aggressive behavior which might be at odds with the new rules put in place by owners. The authors offered the term ‘alignment masks’ to describe a situation where changing rules provide an opportunity for shirking (a failure of the agent to maintain best efforts). In the current context, misalignment between principle

and agent can occur due to conflicting goals (i.e., winning versus following the new rules). Ultimately, the authors focused on how leaders (i.e., NFL head coaches) balance strategies for current (short-term) performance with how this may impact their future (long-term) head coaching opportunities. For example, the results indicated that coaches whose teams incurred more penalties and experienced more on-field success had a decreased likelihood of obtaining a head coaching job in the future. This research brings several considerations to the surface. First, while owners may indeed make rule changes at the league (macro) level to broadly better the game of football, when it comes to managing their own team (at the micro level), it could be that the owner and head coach are indeed very much aligned (i.e., in agreement that while aggressive play may induce more penalties, winning is more important). Second, while an interesting finding that coaching teams with less penalties increases the likelihood of future employment, it will take a great deal of convincing to have coaches believe that win-loss records are not the most important predictor of future coaching opportunities. Third, although coaching for less penalties (and presumably increased player safety) would seem to align with an ethical leadership style, the aggressive and high-pressured nature of the NFL may not be an optimal context for such an approach.

The other *JSM* article covered in this section was from Di Lu and Heinze (2021) and focused on leading institutional change around sport policy. In particular, these authors investigated the activities and tactics of two coalitions at the state level in the USA involved in passing youth sport concussion legislation. Through the lens of institutional theory on change and entrepreneurship, the authors used a qualitative approach via interviews with key stakeholders and archival data to examine how institutional actors leverage resources to assemble and legitimise their group and cause. The study revealed diverse membership in these coalitions which included victim's families, sport organisations, medical experts, and advocacy groups. The findings revealed that the tactics of these coalitions could be broadly classified into political, technical, and cultural activities that allowed them to make the most of expertise and resources to generate support for new concussion legislation. This study contributed to the sport management literature by gaining insight on process-based approaches for change and influence. For example, the research shed light on the temporal dynamics in this process, identifying a sequence of coalition building (political), crafting legislation (technical), and framing and justifying new practices to appeal to wider audiences (cultural). While leaders and leading featured as key components throughout the paper

and coalition process, this study primarily focused on leadership at the organisational level. For example, a key implication of this research is the leading role that sport organisations can play in creating and passing important sport policy. Moreover, beyond the traditionally central and dominant sporting organisations, the findings indicated that sport organisations from varying sectors (e.g., non-profit, private) can also play an instrumental role in the development and approval of sport policies. The formation of sports coalitions also provides a fascinating context for leadership research focused on the individual level. For example, investigating individual influence within these coalitions, and concepts such as emergent and shared leadership, appear to be fruitful avenues for future inquiry.

The next two articles featured in this section come from the recent *IJSP* special issue on the Policy and Politics of Women's Sport and Women in Sport. First, Norman, Donnelly, and Kidd (2021) analysed leadership positions and athletic participation data from four separate gender equity studies including 56 universities within the Canadian interuniversity sport system (U Sport). With regard to participation, the authors found that while equal representation was found for the number of teams for each gender, inequality existed in the total number of individual participation opportunities (men 56%, women 44%). For leadership positions in the athletic departments, females were on average underrepresented for athletic directors (79% men, 21% women), assistant athletic directors (51% men, 49% women), head coaches (83% men, 17% women), and assistant coaches (79% men, 21% women). While this research spanned a period of time from 2010-2017, there was minimal variation across the data set, and no apparent numerical trend for the lessening of these disparities. As the authors correctly note, these findings make a strong case for proportionality to be considered when designing future gender equity policies. While it is possible that advances towards equity have occurred since 2017, according to the article, U Sport's gender equity policies have not been updated since 2004, and no equity goals have been identified. The findings of this study suggest much more research is needed in relation to female participation opportunities and women in leadership.

In the second article from the *IJSP* special issue, Organista (2021) investigated the selection process for leadership positions (i.e., board members) in Polish sport federations through a series of interviews with past and present board members and senior managers. An impetus for the study was Poland's recent last place global ranking for women holding board positions in sport federations. For context, this percentage was

9% for Poland, with Norway topping the list at 37%. A balanced design was employed where 12 female and 12 male participants were interviewed, and the difference in the emergent themes from the alternate gender perspectives was striking. In relation to perceived barriers for women to obtain a board position for a national sports federation, female participants identified a perceived lack of trust towards women in sport and an 'old boys' network' as the primary barriers. In contrast, the barriers identified from the male participants were a perceived lack of willingness and commitment by female candidates and a reluctance for women in these positions to take responsibility and perform management functions. Another key aspect of the findings was the female participants' view that structural obstacles embedded in the system are more favourable for male candidates. These related to the role of male networks and the requirement that candidates for board members are nominated by current federation members. Through the lens of gendered organisational logic and inequality regimes, the findings supported the notion that meanings assigned to masculinity and femininity resulted in the reproduction of inequalities and male participants not seeing the importance of updating gender ratio policies. As noted by the author, future research in this area should consider how gender relations operate at the individual, organisational, and structural levels. Alternate perspectives such as hegemony and dimensions of culture (i.e., organisational and national) may also be useful to better understand these types of leadership scenarios in context. As is the case with the previous *JSPP* article discussed, better understanding equity barriers and practical steps to ensure equitable opportunities for women are areas worthy of further inquiry.

The final article covered in this section review was published in *ESMQ* and investigated the dynamic capabilities in national governing bodies of sport (NGBs). In this study, Harris, Metzger, and Duening (2021) interviewed four CEO's or Executive Directors of US-based NGBs to better understand drivers of '3M' outcomes (i.e., medals, money, members) and the role of innovative leadership in this process. Working from a baseline dynamic capabilities framework which includes organisational learning, market alignment, and resource acquisition and mobilisation), the authors postulated innovative leadership as precursive to these more established drivers of the targeted outcomes. A premise in the article was that leaders must advocate and execute effective logics and design their organisations in a manner that promotes innovation. With this in mind, the researchers looked to consider leader cognition and their capacity for effectuation (i.e., focusing on acquiring and utilising resources to continuously adapt to changing environments). An

interesting takeaway from the study is that the directors of low-performing NGBs appeared to view innovation in the context of rebuilding and making the most of what one has to work with. In contrast, the directors of high-performing NGBs promoted innovations related to social media and changing technologies. While the authors appeared to suggest this finding as evidence that leaders of high-performing organisations have an effectuation propensity (and that directors of low-performing organisations do not), it seems that additional complexities may need to be considered. For example, an insightful aspect to this study is the emergence and recognition of external and internal 'initiating conditions' (e.g., size, wealth, diversity considerations, competition dynamics) which leaders inherit and operate within. This reasoning therefore suggests that a directors' approach to leadership, innovation, and effectuation may be largely dictated by the organisation's circumstances (i.e., initiating conditions). Future research might therefore look to investigate the agency of leadership for innovation in different contexts (e.g., high versus low-resource scenarios), and consider alternative perspectives on the meaning of innovative leadership.

Annotated Bibliography

Cuskelly, G., Fredline, L., Kim, E., Barry, S., & Kappelides, P. (2021). Volunteer selection at a major sport event: A strategic Human Resource Management approach. Sport Management Review.

An Australian research group from Griffith, Edith Cowan, and La Trobe Universities use quantitative data from volunteer applications from the 2018 Commonwealth Games to investigate factors that predicted the selection of applicants ($N = 53,234$) who were chosen for interview. 71.0% of applicants indicated previous volunteer experience, with 60.8% indicating having leadership skills. Using binary logistic regression, the most prominent predictors of interview selection were availability during the trials and preparation periods, the motivation to represent and support the local community, and volunteering skills. The indication of having leadership skills was not a significant predictor of being selected for interview. In addition, applicants indicating a motive to receive rewards and recognition were significantly less likely to be interviewed.

Di Lu, L., & Heinze, K. L. (2020). Examining Institutional Entrepreneurship in the Passage of Youth Sport Concussion Legislation. Journal of Sport Management, 1(aop), 1-16.

Researchers from Western University in Canada, and the University of Michigan in the United States use qualitative data from interviews and archival sources to investigate the activities and tactics of two coalitions involved in passing youth sport concussion legislation. From the theoretical perspective of institutional entrepreneurship, the authors examine strategies of leading change in sport policy in the states of Washington and Oregon. The analysis revealed diverse coalition representation and their engagement with the previously identified categories of political, technical, and cultural activities. The range of specific tactics emanating from this typology included recruiting for knowledge and connections, diversifying membership, strategic compromising, and embedding policy in a broader value context.

Foreman, J. J., Bendickson, J. S., & Cowden, B. J. (2021). Agency theory and principal-agent alignment masks: an examination of penalties in the National Football League. Journal of Sport Management, 35, 105-116.

The authors, researchers from University of Louisiana at Lafayette and Kennesaw State University, both in the US, used National Football League (NFL) data across 34 seasons to examine how coaches (i.e., leaders) adapt to general changes in coaching strategy and securing subsequent head coaching positions through the lens of agency theory. Using a combination of Arellano-Bond dynamic panel data estimation and survival analysis, the results indicated the presence of agency misalignment, where incurring more penalties results in on-field success, but decreases the likelihood for obtaining future head coaching opportunities. In addition, the findings indicate that coaches have higher chances of securing future head coaching positions if they are Black, younger, or have held more head coaching jobs in the past.

Foreman, J. J., & Turick, R. M. (2021). The effect of race on lateral moves to coach central positions. Sport Management Review, 1-23.

Researchers from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and Ball State University, both in the US, quantitatively analysed data on the National Football League (NFL) across 32 seasons to test the effect of race on lateral coaching moves. With the theoretical premise that centrally located positions are more likely to be selected as future leaders, they focused on the likelihood of Black coaches making a lateral move to central coaching positions (and hence better positioned for promotion). Using logistic regression, the findings indicated Black coaches were less likely to make lateral moves to coach central

positions, and that minority head coaches were less likely to assign Black assistant coaches to coach central positions earlier and later in the sample period.

Hall, E. T., Gray, S., Martindale, A., Sproule, J., Kelly, J., & Potrac, P. (2021). Doing hybrid management work in elite sport: the case of a head coach in top-level rugby union. Sport Management Review, 1-25.

A British Isles research group from Northumbria University, the University of Edinburgh, and University College Dublin used multiple qualitative methods in conjunction with ethnographic fieldwork to examine the hybrid role of the head coach for an international rugby union team during a 20-month period. Utilising the heuristic device of Crossley's relational sociology perspective, the head coach was found to strategically manage nuanced relationships with and between organisational collaborators which were characterised by varying levels of trust. The position of the head coach was identified as a significant factor for influencing support, resources, and information flow, while strategic interactions were found to generate buy-in and the space to implement programs and agendas.

Harris, S. J., Metzger, M. L., & Duening, T. N. (2021). Innovation in national governing bodies of sport: Investigating dynamic capabilities that drive growth. European Sport Management Quarterly, 21(1), 94-115.

A research group from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs in the US used data from interviews with four CEO or Executive Directors of US-based National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport to examine the effect of dynamic capabilities on the '3M' outcomes of members, medals, and money. The investigation focuses on three established antecedents of sustained innovation (organisational learning, market alignment, and resource acquisition and mobilisation) whilst also considering innovative leadership as an added variable to the dynamic capabilities framework. The findings indicated varied performance and notable differences across organisations in relation to both innovative leadership and the other traditionally researched factors. A conceptual model was also advanced which positioned innovative leadership as a driver of the traditional dynamic capabilities.

Norman, M., Donnelly, P., & Kidd, B. (2021). Gender inequality in Canadian interuniversity sport: participation opportunities and leadership positions from 2010-11 to 2016-17. International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 13(2), 207-223.

A Canadian research group from McMaster University and the University of Toronto used combined quantitative data from four separate gender equality studies in Canadian interuniversity sport to investigate gender inequality for both leadership positions and athletic participation across 56 institutions over four seasons (from 2010-2017). Equal gender representation was found in relation to the number of teams for each gender. However, inequality was found in relation to the total number of individual participation opportunities; women received no more than 44% of the opportunities in any given season. Gender disparities were also found with regard to the average representation percentages within the following leadership positions: athletic directors (21% women), assistant athletic directors (49% women), head coaches (17% women) assistant coaches (21% women).

Organista, N. (2021). Gendering of recruitment and selection processes to boards in Polish sports federations. International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 13(2), 259-280.

The author, from the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Poland, utilised qualitative data from 24 interviews with present and past board members and senior managers of Polish sports federations. The primary purpose of the study was to examine board recruitment and selection policies. Significant differences were found between women and men in perceived barriers for gender-balanced boards. Male participants perceived a lack of willingness and commitment by female candidates, and a reluctance to take responsibility and perform management functions. In contrast, women participants identified a perceived lack of trust towards women in sport and an 'old boys' network' as the primary barriers, while noting selection policy as a structural obstacle due to the major role of male networks.