

## **Sport Leadership**

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### **Introduction**

This edition of the Sport Leadership section for Sport Management Digest covers a total of eight articles. The collection includes two studies each from *European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ)*, the *Journal of Sport Management (JSM)*, and *Sport Management Review (SMR)*, and one study from both the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics (IJSPP)* and the *International Journal of Sport Communication (IJSC)*.

The first article from *ESMQ* is entitled “Exploring the coach–administrator relationship within the SA cricket development environment” and was written by Cedric English (Edinburgh Napier University), Christine Nash (University of Edinburgh), and Russell Martindale (Edinburgh Napier University). The title of the second *ESMQ* article is “Moral disengagement and sport integrity: identifying and mitigating integrity breaches in sport management” by Jonathan Robertson (Deakin University) and Bram Constandt (Ghent University).

The first *JSM* article covered in this edition is called “Leading Culture Change in Public Recreation” written by Florian Hemme (High Point University), Dominic Morais (Trinity University), Matthew Bowers (University of Texas at Austin), and Janice Todd (University of Texas at Austin). Next, the *JSM* article entitled “Gender, Leadership, and Governance in English National Governing Bodies of Sport: Formal Structures, Rules, and Processes” written by Lucy Piggott (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) and Jordan Matthews (University of Chichester) is also considered.

Two *SMR* articles are also included in the current edition. First, “Breaking the glass monitor: examining the underrepresentation of women in esports environments” was written by Lindsey Darvin (State University of New York at Cortland), John Holden (Oklahoma State University), Janelle Wells (University of South Florida), and Thomas Baker (University of Georgia). Second, the article entitled “Commercial sport organisations and community capacity building: a case study of two surf parks” by Danny O’Brien (Bond University) is also discussed.

Finally, the first of the two remaining studies covered in this section is the *IJSPP* article entitled “Discursive resistance to gender diversity in sport governance:

sport as a unique field?” written by Annelies Knoppers (Utrecht University), Ramon Spaaj (Victoria University/University of Amsterdam), and Inge Claringbould (Utrecht University). The final study discussed below is the *IJSC* paper called “Statements Versus Reality: How Multiple Stakeholders Perpetuate Racial Inequality in Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership” written by Carter Rockhill (Northern State University), Jonathan Howe (The Ohio State University), and Kwame Agyemang (The Ohio State University).

In the following discussion, a summary of each of the aforementioned articles will be provided covering the main issues addressed, theoretical bases and contexts employed by the authors, and new insights generated by their investigations.

### **Advances in Sport Leadership**

Examining a large North American public recreation organisation, Hemme et al. (2021) provided an in-depth account of culture change in the sport environment. The authors rightly acknowledge the importance of public recreation programmes for youth and adults as integral components of the modern sport landscape, and argue a basic need for their scholarly inquiry due to the scarcity of investigations in this specific context. They also provide a convincing argument for potentially distinct phenomena present in this setting stemming from the intersection between sport and public service, where changing consumer preferences necessitate business principles which are sometimes not welcomed by public recreation officials. The study is distinctive due to the investigation following the organisational change process from the planning stages through to a concluding stage of the initiative. Another real strength of the design is its holistic approach, which is in contrast to more typical studies that focus on outcomes of specific changes without consideration of process. From a leader perspective, a notable finding was the absence of a heroic change agent with profound leadership capabilities that lead to successful transformation and success. Instead, the results provide an empirical account of the leader’s consistent and intentional willingness to address, reinforce, and recommunicate culture change in relation to organisational identity. While the article was situated within the organisational change literature and had a change management orientation, an opportunity was missed to consider the change process in relation to leadership. That is, while the focal agent was a leader by position, the “leading” terminology in the title of the article was effectively a misnomer which

would have been more appropriately referred to as “managing” culture change. Whilst perhaps not flamboyant or charismatic, it would appear the “pattern of productive engagement” (p. 493) by the change agent was indeed consistent with several leadership approaches (e.g., authentic, servant, strategic, transformational, etc). Moving forward with organisational change research in the sport environment, it would be advisable to also consider theoretical lenses that include leadership as a driver of culture and organisational change (e.g., Samimi et al., in press; Schein, 2010).

Capturing the views of stakeholders from two different surf parks in the United Kingdom, O'Brien (2021) investigated community capacity building from the perspective of sport for development (SFD). The study addressed a call for scholars to look beyond international organisations and consider local community-based initiatives. Another novel aspect of this research was the consideration of commercial sport organisations, which are not typically located in challenged communities where SFD initiatives traditionally exist, but have a vested interest in facilitating sustainable local communities. Extending previous perspectives that sport organisations play a role in community capacity building, this study argued the commercial sector also has a role to play in the SFD landscape. Relevance to the sport leadership literature stems from leadership being outlined as a core dimension of community capacity. In the sport context, the authors outlined that leadership development among sports participants and volunteers, along with the credibility and symbolic power of athletes and coaches, are examples of how sport may facilitate community capacity. Several powerful quotations from participants signal the ability for this type of sport organization to develop individual leadership capacity which in turn may bolster the overall capacity of the community. Of particular importance, the findings indicated that these organisations provided pathways for women and young girls that empower and break down gender barriers that may otherwise not exist. An important contribution made by this study was that commercial sport actors can make a distinct contribution to community capacity building through their supply of human resources, leadership development, and business acumen. Surfacing leadership as an important asset and attribute that sport organisations can facilitate for communities to draw upon to elevate quality of life is a significant consideration. A limitation of the dimensions of community capacity framework utilised in the study is that the relationship between components is generally not addressed. For example,

it could be that leadership facilitates other multidimensional components of community capacity such as social relations, structures for community dialogue, value systems, civic participation, and learning cultures (Edwards, 2015; Swanson et al., in press). Future leadership should look to explore the direction of influence amongst these components of community capacity and consider leadership's catalytic potential.

Recognising the increased demands placed on coaches as sports shift from an amateur to professional environment, English et al. (2021) highlight tensions with administrators as an area warranting attention. This exploration of relationships *between* leaders represents a novel and fascinating line of inquiry. The authors contend that divergent views from various stakeholders (e.g., employers, executives, coaches, sponsors, etc) lead to increased ambiguity and challenges for goal alignment. These differing perspectives stem from a separate set of ideas, values, and beliefs referred to as institutional logics, and lay the foundation for tensions between coaches and administrators. The authors highlight interpersonal trust and power dynamics as important factors for better understanding the nuances of coach-administrator relationships. For example, trust is a key ingredient for success due to the interdependence, level of flexibility, and close cooperation required in team sports environments, yet the limited tenure of many coaches and administrators is often not a recipe for reaching the high-trust phase relationships. The researchers also note the complexities of power relations in these types of relationships, and describe power as often being shaped by policies and problems within the organisation. Their findings indicate the main areas of conflict between coaches and administrators to be clarity of rules and decision-making, disconnected agendas, allocation of resources, and distancing the coach in terms of job security and communication. The authors rightly note that risk and job security is not unique to this environment, however they do suggest that improvements can be made with regard to determining the true meaning of performance (i.e., subjectively and objectively) in the sport context. A limitation of the study design was only hearing one perspective of coach-administrator relationship, so it would be useful to gain insight on areas of conflict perceived by administrators as well. There is also more work to be done on power relations with regard to contract salary, duration, and end date. That is, bases of power will naturally flow from each of these factors when comparing relational dynamics, and will likely be interrelated with other perceived conflict areas

like disconnected agendas. The coach-administrator relationship is in effect a vertical yet shared leadership scenario (Ensley et al., 2006) of the most reduced form, and a leader-leader exchange dyad (e.g., Lorinkova & Perry, 2017), providing multiple avenues for further inquiry.

Robertson and Constandt (2021) venture into the important leadership space of ethics and integrity by exploring immoral behaviours in sport through the lens of moral disengagement. As the authors explain, moral disengagement refers to a set of cognitive mechanisms that disengage one's moral self-regulation processes, and therefore help to explain why people make unethical decisions (without the appearance of feeling guilty or censuring themselves). To better understand integrity in the sporting environment the authors apply Bandura's (1999, 2016) framework of moral disengagement that consists of the following categories: behavioral (e.g., economic justification), agency (e.g., displacement of responsibility), effects (e.g., denial of consequences), and victim (e.g., attribution of blame). The authors then overlay this framework of moral disengagement to better understand a fascinating array of sport integrity issues. For example, there are various accounts of economic justifications for taking performance enhancing drugs, which allow for the individuals to convince themselves they are doing the right thing and justify these behaviours to themselves. An integral component of this conceptual study is the pivot toward what sport managers can do to mitigate moral disengagement, and specifically, how they might be able to lead sport actors towards integrity. The authors highlight ethical leadership as an obvious approach for guiding sport participants and personnel to engage in moral decision making and become more aware of instances and tools they (can often unconsciously) use to turn off their morals in particular decision-making settings. However, it should be noted that there are a number of moral-based forms of leadership with overlap and usefulness in this domain, such as authentic and servant (Banks et al., 2021). Conversely, the authors also note that avoiding negative forms of leadership related to narcissism and controlling interpersonal styles should also be avoided as these approaches have been positively associated with moral disengagement. Another important consideration is the (dis)placement of agency by sports actors within the leader-follower relationship. For example, it could be argued that the need for leadership is exacerbated in situations where followers face pressure to deviate from their own beliefs in order to conform to those of their leader (e.g., player-coach or CEO-board relationships). In such instances followers

could displace their responsibility to act morally and shift responsibility for their unethical actions to those in leadership positions (Hinrichs et al., 2012). In sum, future inquiry on leadership approaches best positioned to combat moral disengagement in sport settings is a critical pathway of future inquiry.

In an examination of leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics, Rockhill et al. (2021) investigated the statements of universities and athletic departments versus the reality of their diversity in these roles within Power 5 conferences. In broad terms, the researchers sought insight on the degree to which 1) mission, vision, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements are actually inclusive of DEI language, 2) the degree of reality achieved through these statements as demonstrated through the leadership positions, and 3) the alignment of racial DEI objectives between institutions and their athletic departments. Detailed and comprehensive analyses are provided for each of the conferences in relation to the objectives of the study. While variance existed across conferences, broadly speaking the results indicated that 1) roughly only half of the universities and athletic departments had mission or vision statements that included reference to DEI, 2) roughly only 20% of institutions had a success rate for achieving a DEI reality in its leadership positions, and 3) roughly only three institutions for each conference (approx.. 23%) demonstrated alignment of DEI objectives between the academic institution and their athletic department. The threshold for meeting racially diverse hiring practices was 40% non-white individuals in leadership positions, which was consistent with the average student-athlete population. Further, 18% percent of institutions did not include aspects of DEI within any statements (academic or athletic), and only 25% of the schools explicitly valued racial DEI or considered it part of their purpose. The study design and discussion were rooted within both critical race theory (CRT) and institutional theory, and the authors make several important points for consideration. For example, from CRT perspective, the authors argue that institutions abstaining from including aspects of racial DEI statements perpetuate the ordinariness of racism and the expectation they will hire racially diverse candidates. Another critical finding was that of the few schools with DEI statements from both institution and athletic department, nearly 80% failed to meet the threshold for achieving racial DEI. From these results, the authors therefore maintain that these particular DEI statements hold little significance as they are not reflected in the reality of their sport leadership positions. Furthermore, the

researchers note that this circumstance appears to support the CRT tenet of interest convergence, where actions taken to alleviate racism can be more symbolic than substantive (Bell, 1992). In addition, the authors argue that institutionalisation has allowed these organisations to be legitimised without being challenged to act on their stated beliefs. Isomorphic forces (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), such as modeling their statements after others (i.e., mimetic), pressures to appease dominant stakeholders (i.e., coercive), and pressure to honour cultural expectations are also discussed as potential determinants. This revealing study invokes several pathways for future inquiry, including authentic and shared leadership considerations at the organisational level.

The final three articles covered in this section relate to gender imbalance and the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership positions. Exploring administrative and governance hierarchies, Piggot et al. (2021) examined gender power relations within the national governing body context of England Golf and the Lawn Tennis Association. The authors begin by noting the documented gender imbalance evident in sport organisations across a wide range of nations and regions. The aim of the researchers was to consider the extent to which hierarchies, rules, and processes reproduce or resist male dominance and gender segregation within their leadership. On a baseline level, their findings indicated three forms of gender segregation were present in the current study context: vertical (i.e., dominance of one gender in senior positions), exclusion (i.e., a glass ceiling), and distribution of tasks (i.e., issues assigned to one gender). Further, examples of gendered administrative structures, rules, and processes were also categorised into voluntary hierarchies (e.g., unique rules such specific numbers of leadership positions according to gender) and paid hierarchies (e.g., lack of open positions and opportunities). This study extended the literature by revealing that gender power relations favouring men were simultaneously protected and resisted in the current context, while highlighting limitations of policy-based approaches. Much of this research was shaped by the work of Bourdieu (1993) who introduced the concept of a “field of struggles” to describe when forces are either conserved or transformed depending on the success of groups or individuals seeking power. From this perspective, the following three strategies are put forth for actors to either preserve or change their positions: conservation, succession, and subversion. Broadly speaking, the results of this study suggest the presence of several conversation

strategies employed by men, limited opportunities for succession strategies by women, and no apparent acts of subversion in these sport organisations. Fruitful future research pathways may therefore include practical considerations for the underrepresented group to employ subversion strategies by dominant agents to transform the system (Bourdieu, 1993). For example, female athletes with high levels of experience and success in sports or other arenas could potentially be harnessed for positive disruption (Thomas et al., 2019) within sport organisations.

Knoppers et al. (2021) examined the presence of discursive practices in sport organisation boards that could limit or prevent gender balancing strategies in these leadership roles. The authors noted various previous attributions of limited female leadership in sport (e.g., shortage of role models, skewed work-life balance requirements, male homosociality and established networks, negative stereotypes of strong women leaders, etc), and argue that little scholarly inquiry has looked specifically for reasons why attempts for gender balance have failed. With this goal in mind, the researchers sought to consider discourses that board members draw upon and use to resist gender balance, find out why they engage in this resistance, and how these ways of thinking might be specific to sport. The findings indicated four forms of discursive resources to resist gender balance. First, discourse on meritocracy relates to the sentiment that females selected by a quota system would be assumed to be not as qualified. This in turn could impact motivation, as the narrative suggests, if some feel they are being overlooked for someone potentially less qualified. However, the findings also noted a lack of clarity about merit (i.e., what is specifically is being considered as good or qualified) which could serve as an exclusionary tool. Second, discourse of neoliberalism relates to the perceived curtailment of sport organisations to act freely. Further, no one being excluded from applying for a board position, and changes coming from within rather than a top-down mandate, conform to a neoliberal argument. Third, discourse of silence/passivity relates to legitimising inaction or passive resistance. Examples include board members characterising themselves as passive victims of sport structures and society at large. Finally, discourse of diversity relates to rationales for gender imbalance based on demonstrating diversity in other ways (e.g., age, ethnicity, etc). Drawing from their data and the literature in this area, the authors also speculate on reasons for discursive practice in this environment. These include increased competition for prestigious positions, zero sum game, and desire for



status, power, or symbolic status. A key aspect of Knoppers et al.'s (2021) paper related to the role of board members to demonstrate leadership on this diversity issue. The role of leadership in creating gender balance could perhaps require an extension of the traditional boundary of known group members. That is, some approaches such as identity leadership (Inoue et al., 2021) incorporate leadership considerations for potential members as well. In addition, it may be time to extend the definition of strategic diversity leadership (e.g., Martins, 2020) to include the promotion of diversity balance within groups. While such an approach may introduce tensions for leading current group members, it might also pave the way for growth and opportunity.

Examining a relatively new field of esports, Darvin et al. (2021) investigated the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in this context. The authors note that while esports is now a global phenomenon, challenges with male-driven toxicity appear to be a major threat to the industry. As such, it is therefore important to develop a baseline of understanding for the career experiences and barriers that female leaders in this space have experienced thus far. Utilising inductive thematic analysis from interviews with high-level executives and professional players working in this sector, the researchers uncovered four categories of challenges. Breaking the "glass monitor" incorporated challenges experienced via family disapproval, negative stigmas, and lack of support. A barrier of toxic "geek" masculinity was also identified where participants experienced discrimination, tokenism, and hegemonic masculinity. Hostile esports environments was also identified as a challenge, where women were subject to stereotyping and harassment, while also experiencing imposter syndrome and gender zoning (i.e., preventing female access). Finally, a "mental" grit category incorporated the utility of professional maturity, overcoming adversity, and previous success in a male-oriented arena. Another novel finding in this final category was the recognition that females in this industry perceive the need to resemble "tanks" in video games that primarily exist to absorb damage (i.e., dealing with substantial amounts of harassment). The authors note the need for systemic change in the esports industry to create a merit-based playing field that is inclusive for all. Future research should therefore consider leadership styles that can most effectively address this needed change and move the industry forward in this critical area. Similar to the above commentary relating to diversity leadership, this esportsing context could serve as a

catalyst for a modified form of inclusive leadership (e.g., Cameli et al., 2010); one which extends beyond openness and availability toward the promotion of inclusivity amongst institutional members.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the new studies published in the latter half of 2021 have made several contributions and provided meaning future research pathways in the sport leadership space. These studies collectively covered a broad range of topics related to leadership, including: coach-administrator relationships, power, trust, moral disengagement, integrity, gender, diversity, underrepresentation, meritocracy, community capacity building, and cultural, institutional, and sustainable change. This new body of research also examined leadership across several different contexts and countries, including: cricket development (South Africa), national governing bodies of golf and tennis (United Kingdom), public recreation (United States), esports (United States), commercial surfing organisations (United Kingdom), National Olympic Committees and Sports Federations (Netherlands), and collegiate athletics (United States). In addition, these papers demonstrated synergistic opportunities on various approaches to leading in the sport environment (e.g., authentic, servant, ethical, inclusive, and diversity) and will hopefully serve as a platform for future research in the months and years ahead.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

*Darvin, L., Holden, J., Wells, J., & Baker, T. (2021). Breaking the glass monitor: examining the underrepresentation of women in esports environments. Sport Management Review, 24(3), 475-499.*

A consortium of researchers from the State University of New York at Cortland, Oklahoma State University, University of South Florida, and the University of Georgia, all in the United States, analysed data from 10 semi-structured interviews with female esports players, content creators, and executives to explore the underrepresentation of women throughout the industry. Utilising inductive thematic analysis, four themes emerged from their analysis: 1) breaking the “glass monitor”, 2) toxic “geek” masculinity, 3) a hostile sport environment, and 4) “mental” grit. The

study provides an initial step toward understanding the career experiences of women in this sport sector and identifying obstacles experienced in their pursuit of elite level careers.

*English, C., Nash, C., & Martindale, R. (2021). Exploring the coach–administrator relationship within the SA cricket development environment. European Sport Management Quarterly, 21(4), 466-483.*

A research group from Edinburgh Napier University and the University of Edinburgh used data from interviews with 13 cricket coaches operating in the South African development environment. Through the lens of institutional logics, trust, and power, the study explored the coaches' perspectives of their relationship with administrators, focusing on interactions and negotiations within competitive environments. Challenges identified by coaches included administrators lacked understanding of the developmental environment and differences in priorities relating to collaboration, priorities, financial decisions, resource allocation, and results-driven agendas. The authors conclude that the establishment and communication of organisational and managerial-level performance parameters to allow for coaches' fulfilment of duties with minimised administrative interference. Implications include the importance of implementing more effective coach performance management systems.

*Hemme, F., Morais, D. G., Bowers, M. T., & Todd, J. S. (2021). Leading Culture Change in Public Recreation. Journal of Sport Management, Journal of Sport Management, 35(6), 485-498.*

A United States-based research group with representation from High Point University, Trinity University, and the University of Texas at Austin used data from 67 interviews with members of a public recreation organisation located in the United States providing sport and leisure programmes to its community stakeholders. A focus of the investigation was to understand perspectives on the institutional change agent in charge of a culture change initiative. The findings revealed an intentional willingness of the change agent to consistently recommunicate and reinforce changes in conjunction with a ritualistic expression of organisational identity. Implications suggest a counter view to technocratic ideas of culture change as a

programmed and stepwise exercise, which highlights supporting change efforts through local, continuous, and heterogeneous reframing exercises.

*Knoppers, A., Spaaij, R., & Claringbould, I. (2021). Discursive resistance to gender diversity in sport governance: sport as a unique field?. International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 13(3), 517-529.*

Researchers from Utrecht University and the University of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, and Victory University, in Australia, investigated the presence of discursive practices in sport organisation boards which may limit or prevent gender balancing initiatives. Data across two projects included 60 interviews with female and male board members from various sport organisations at the national and international levels (e.g., National Olympic Committees and National/International Sport Federations). The findings revealed that board members justify resistance to gender balance through discourses of neoliberalism, meritocracy, diversity, and silence/passivity, which may have roots in the sport capital and early life experiences of actors. The authors contend that incorrectly assumed meritocracy and gender blindness may be especially salient in the field of sport.

*O'Brien, D. (2021). Commercial sport organisations and community capacity building: a case study of two surf parks. Sport Management Review, 24(5), 723-746.*

A researcher from Bond University in Australia utilised a dual case study approach to investigate community capacity building at two surf park locations in the United Kingdom. 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted in person across both organisations to explore ways that commercial sport organisations can facilitate community capacity building. The findings revealed how partnerships between commercial, public, and third sector organisations can encourage mutual capacity building and facilitate diverse inter-community connections in the wider landscape. The author argues that the results suggest that sport actors should align with less-traditional partners outside recognised sports systems to facilitate more effective community capacity building.

*Piggot, L., & Matthews, J. (2021). Gender, Leadership, and Governance in English National Governing Bodies of Sport: Formal Structures, Rules, and Processes. Journal of Sport Management, 35(4), 338-351.*

A research team from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and the University of Chichester conducted 33 interviews with males and females in leadership positions within England Golf and the Lawn Tennis Association. Drawing from Bourdieu's theory of practice, the researchers extended the literature for increased understanding of mechanisms relating to gender power relations at the structural level of practice within these sport organisations. The findings indicated a gender power relations favouring men were simultaneously protected and resisted within both organisations, and highlighted the limitations of policy-based approaches driven from the top down. Recommendations are developed emphasising the significance of combined approaches at the structural, individual, and cultural levels to enable transformation and sustainable change.

*Robertson, J., & Constandt, B. (2021). Moral disengagement and sport integrity: identifying and mitigating integrity breaches in sport management. European Sport Management Quarterly, 21(5), 714-730.*

Researchers from Deakin University in Australia and Ghent University in Belgium partnered to develop a conceptual article focused on immoral behavior in elite sport. The study aimed to demonstrate the utility of Bandura's mechanisms of moral disengagement to explain integrity breaches, and to conceptualise four functions of integrity management to facilitate morally engaged sport managers. Utilising social cognitive theory of moral thought and interdisciplinary perspectives (i.e., psychological, managerial, and ethical) of moral disengagement both in and out of sport, the results provide a rationale for how sports managers use various strategies to switch off their moral compass when engaging in immoral behavior. Implications include the need to discuss moral disengagement within the sport environment and the implementation of strategies and management tools to maintain moral engagement in this context.

*Rockhill, C. A., Howe, J. E., & Agyemang, K. J. (2021). Statements Versus Reality: How Multiple Stakeholders Perpetuate Racial Inequality in Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership. International Journal of Sport Communication, 14(3), 398-427.*

A research team from Northern State University and The Ohio State University investigated the lack of equity, racial diversity, and inclusion in leadership positions in the intercollegiate athletic context. Through the intersection of Critical

Race Theory and Institutional Theory, the researchers examined the alignment between athletic department mission, vision, and diversity, equity, and inclusion statements and the reality of leadership position demographics. Utilising a variety of secondary databases and online sources, their analyses revealed that institutions from the Power 5 Conferences generally maintain a lack of racial diversity through their mission statements or cultures with symbolic declarations that exclude diverse values and lack meaning for creating a diverse reality.

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