

## **Sport Leadership**

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### **Introduction**

This edition of the Sport Management Digest's Sport Leadership section encompasses a total of seven articles. The current edition includes four studies from the *Journal of Sport Management (JSM)*, one from *Sport Management Review (SMR)*, one from *European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ)*, and one from the *Journal of Global Sport Management (JGSM)*. Each of the articles in this section include either a direct focus on leaders and leadership in sport or examine those in leadership positions as important populations in the research.

The articles spanned a variety of contexts, cultures, and approaches to studying leadership. Included in this section are articles involving different countries such as a global sport leadership approach to examining the aptitude of a relationship between a South Korean governmental organization and a U.S. university (Nam et al., 2022). Chiu et al. (2022) conducted a study based on South Korean student athletes at the collegiate level involving leader-member exchange (LMX), turnover intention, and psychological factors. Feddersen and Phelan (2022) investigated when unethical and unprofessional behaviors may become more prevalent during significant times of change in elite British sport organizations. Based in Australia, Whales et al. (2022) investigated relational leadership in a professional sport organization as it pertained to leadership practice, development, and collective leadership performance. Breuer et al. (2022) conducted a German-based study, which aimed to determine factors that influence coaches' intention for further training at both the individual and organizational levels. Misener et al. (2022) focused their review of interorganizational relationships in amateur sport across England, Flanders, Canada, and U.S. Lastly, Damon et al. (2022) did not contextualize their North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) conference-based paper on any country but took a holistic approach to apply relational reflexivity across all of sport leadership.

In addition to the various contexts and countries studied, the articles in the current issue also spanned different methods. Two studies used case study methods to garner findings in their contexts (Feddersen & Phelan, 2022; Nam et al., 2022). Misener and colleagues performed a thematically organized review of interorganizational relationships. One of the articles performed a qualitative approach centered on semi-structured interviews and

interviews paired with observations (Whales et al., 2022). Damon and colleagues (2022) performed relational reflexivity to create a conceptual model. The remaining articles used a form of quantitative analyses, such as Breuer et al. (2022). Chiu et al. (2022) also used regression analyses along with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and reliability analysis.

The following section provides a discussion on the highlights of each reviewed paper with synthesis to each other or the greater sport leadership research stream where appropriate.

### **Advances in Sport Leadership Research**

Nam et al. (2022) examined a Collaborative Global Leadership Program (CGLP) between a South Korean sports organization, the Korea Foundation for the Next Generation Sports Talent (NEST) and a U.S. university. Using Bourdieu and Passeron's (2000) work on how social minorities can gain standing through acquiring forms of capital, Nam et al. (2022) used a case study approach to investigate the CGLP. Nam et al. (2022) used a mix of qualitative data, including interviews with participants, and qualitative document analysis of program documents. All sources of data were triangulated to ensure trustworthiness and a robust insight into the CGLP was provided. Findings illustrated that stakeholders involved in the CGLP believe that the focus was to aid former Korean athletes to gain educational and professional knowledge with an eye towards cross-culture social capital. Not only did the athletes who gained the cross-culture social capital enhance their standing aligned with the notion of Bourdieu and Passeron (2000); this also showed evidence of leadership skill development through the lens of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and self-efficacy behavior change as athletes positively enhanced their social behaviors as they embraced the educational experiences. Overall, the findings centered on several aspects. First, the historical evolution of the CGLP was an important finding to chronologically examine how the partnership transpired. Within this finding, it was evident that communication between the NEST leadership team and that of the U.S. university was paramount for the CGLP to evolve to meet the needs of the athletes and allow them the educational opportunities to enhance their various capabilities. The partnership grew to involve the host U.S. university integrating the athletes into educational curriculum opportunities beyond the classroom, such as through the university athletic department.

Secondly, there were findings pointing to three main positive outcomes from the CGLP: fostering potential global sports scholars, fostering potential global sports administrators, and fostering potential global coaches. Each of the positive outcome areas showed participants, namely the former Korean athletes how they can pursue leadership positions across sport in several ways. Nam et al. (2022) showed that participants recognized their potential to research issues surrounding Korean sport by pursuing graduate degrees through the host university. Further, evidence showed an enlightening participants had towards the possibility to influence change and leadership by becoming sport administrators themselves, including 12 participants who achieved administrative positions through the CGLP. Participants were drawn to global coaching possibilities, once they realized they could gain coaching experience at the host university and use the experience to coach sports such as judo and Taekwondo.

The last key finding from Nam et al. (2022) revolved around the factors which impeded the effectiveness of the CGLP. Initial hinderances included several participants not believing that the CGLP curriculum met their needs. This proved to be an aspect of the partnership that evolved over time to meet the various needs of the different students (former Korean athletes). Another shortcoming of the program in the view of the participants was the lack of emphasis to learn and practice their English in the curriculum, specifically with an emphasis on what participants would need to know to communicate in business settings through English. The last impediment to the partnership's effectiveness was discrimination towards the participants at times. While instances of discrimination were not reported as frequent, they still negatively impacted several of the former Korean athletes as they studied in the U.S. Overall, Nam et al. (2022) illustrated how leadership training can be accomplished through an international partnership, with the NEST and U.S. university combining to enhance the human and social capital of Korean athletes while opening sport career opportunities for them.

Remaining in the realm of leadership and various types of capital, Breuer et al. (2022) examined coaches in Germany on nonprofit sport clubs as leaders and what factors influenced their intention to increase their own human capital; namely, coaching education. With differing roles between coaches and trainers in German club sports where coaches are responsible for one sport whereas trainers are involved in more than one sport as well as a sport's fitness program, Breuer et al. (2022) targeted coaches for their study. A framework based on human capital theory and rational choice theory (Becker, 1967; 1976) was used to inform this paper. As their framework and previous research showed, Breuer et al. (2022) argued that coaches are

likely to invest in their own human capital, such as education, when they believe the outcomes will be greater than the costs. However, what factors influence a coach's intention to engage in such education remained limited in our understanding. Through a robust quantitative approach, which garnered  $n = 2,384$  coaches from  $n = 1,274$  sport clubs, Breuer et al. (2022) performed multilevel analysis to account for the clustering that coaches from the same club were not independent from each other. This allowed for finer analysis than regular regression analysis and to also examine the coaches (individual-level) and clubs (group-level).

Results showed that a mix of individual and organizational (i.e., sport club) factors influenced coaches' intention to pursue formal education training. Specifically, at the individual level, coaches' intention was high when the education would renew their coaching license. The potential to develop personally through the education was also an influencing factor and one that was more important than sharing knowledge with fellow coaches, financial remuneration, and other fringe benefits from the education (Breuer et al., 2022). Further evidence showed that coaches would also be more likely to engage in increasing their human capital if their own profit off the education would outweigh the costs and time when taken into consideration long-term and across multiple clubs (Breuer et al., 2022). Thus, showing evidence for the human capital theory (Becker, 1967) alluded to in Breuer et al.'s (2022) framework. At the group level, their analysis pointed towards evidence of cost-oriented measures, specifically, reducing the costs, to be the most influential factor a club could provide to enhance a coach's intention to pursue additional education. Overall, Breuer et al. (2022) showed that applying human capital theory to better understand coaches' continued education shed greater light on the phenomenon and helps to inform managers of sports clubs and coaches about how to enhance the likelihood that a coach will engage in further education. From a leadership perspective, positioning coaches as key leaders of a sport club shows that coaches in leadership figures should continue to pursue additional education to not only renew their necessary licenses, but to also take into consideration career progression and how financial benefits further in their careers may be enhanced by more education in the short-term.

Shifting away from different types of capital and leadership, Feddersen and Phelan (2022) investigated how times of change in British sport organizations allowed for unethical and unprofessional behaviors among organization staff. Using two separate ethnographic case studies, Feddersen and Phelan (2022) captured focus groups of leaders (administrators) and stakeholders (athletes, parents, coaches) across the two different organizations throughout the

ethnography. The organizations encompassed an Olympic sport governing body and a high-performance organization within Britain's Performance Hub and referred to as the Institute. As both authors undertook ethnographic approaches to each organization, they used the Alvesson and Spicer (2012) concept of functional stupidity for their framework. This concept entails when there is a reluctance for individuals to engage in substantive reasoning, reflexivity, and tends to hold a short-sighted view (Feddersen and Phelan, 2022). This framework helped to make sense of how unethical and unprofessional behaviors can occur even from people who are intelligent and do not normally engage in such behaviors. The rationale to engage in such behaviors was the crux of the current study.

Through a multi-step data analysis process involving focus group data, ethnographic observations, and a cross-case analysis after analyzing each case individually, Feddersen and Phelan (2022) found several themes with specific themes for each case: lack of reflexivity, lack of justification, and a lack of substantial reasoning. In the first case the lack of reflexivity theme showed a specific behavior of *not questioning taken-for-granted practices*, the lack of reasoning theme showed *how bureaucracy created the conditions for turmoil*, and the lack of justification theme showed evidence of *when smart people do bad things*. The second case revealed findings for the themes as such: a lack of reflexivity illustrated *entrenched behaviors—medals and more*, lack of reasoning showed *bureaucracy, money, and a leadership vacuum*, and the lack of justification theme demonstrated *the policing of space and acceptance of conflict*. It should be noted that both organizations were facing significant change during the time of the study, and this offered a unique view into the change processes with leadership and unprofessional behaviors on display for the researchers. The cross-case analysis shed further light into the phenomenon through the functional stupidity lens, with Feddersen and Phelan (2022) finding five rationales having emerged as to why unethical and unprofessional behaviors were enacted (a) you have not spent time in the trenches, (b) it has always been like this, (c) policing space, (d) I am just doing my job, and (e) giving opportunities to those close to me. Having analyzed two individual cases and both cases in a cross-case analysis, Feddersen and Phelan (2022) showed that organizations undergoing significant change are particularly susceptible to individuals engaging in unethical and unprofessional behaviors. Moreover, their findings illustrated that the individuals engaging in such behaviors did not necessarily harbor malicious intent but slipped into a gray area of behavior during a time of change.

While Feddersen and Phelan (2022) examined behaviors that can come about with a leadership vacuum during organizational change, Misener et al. (2022) reviewed interorganizational relationships (IORs) and how sport leaders have used IORs throughout amateur sport. While their review encompassed a variety of ways through which IORs have been studied, related theories that have been applied, and future research, Misener et al. (2022) also critiqued IORs, acknowledging the pros and cons of their growing emphasis. Of particular interest to sport leadership and leaders is the notion of IORs being used by leaders for networking purposes. While IORs and networks or network theory have been intertwined with opening opportunities, previous research has confirmed the trepidation Misener, and colleagues (2022) pointed to in who is leveraging the IORs networks and whether it is truly a two-way network of a mutually beneficial relationship. Katz et al. (2018) found the IOR for senior woman administrators (SWAs) in intercollegiate athletics was not as cohesive as previously thought. The two studies validate that SWAs as women leaders in amateur US intercollegiate sport do not always engage in mutually beneficial IORs. Misener et al. (2022) conclude their review with not only future research directions but also a call for sport academics and practitioners to come together to better understand and evaluate the partnerships at the roots of IORs.

To link with the notion of relationships among leaders and others in sport, Whales et al. (2022) examined relational leadership through a case study approach on a professional Australian netball team. Through their multi-method case study approach, Whales et al. (2022) collected data including observations, video analysis and both informal and semi-structured interviews. With relational leadership and the root notion of socially constructed leadership emerging in sport in recent years (Billsberry et al., 2018), this study advanced the discipline's understanding of how relational leadership can be manifested in a professional sport team context.

As Whales et al. (2022) noted, based on their findings there is an important care that needs to be taken by members or a team or organization as there is evidence that multiple members influence each other. Specifically, their findings pointed to three categories which emerged: non-verbal interactions, verbal interactions, and meaning making. Each of these categories can occur at any time and often there is always at least one category of relational leadership being participated in. Whales et al. (2022) argued that leadership is practiced

through these categories and share this similar notion of leadership as practice as Damon et al. (2022) put forth in their model as well.

Damon and colleagues (2022) used a relational reflexive approach from their NASSM symposium to broadly discuss how sport leadership can continue to evolve. Specifically, they used their relationally reflexive practice and discussion with their NASSM audience to form the Sport Leadership Generative Partnership Model (GPM). The Sport Leadership GPM was rooted in the notion of leadership as practice (Raelin, 2016) and brings together sport leadership teachers and researchers, sport industry practitioners, high impact learning, and high impact research against the backdrop of a socio-political cultural context to be applicable to any culture. With the Sport Leadership GPM as a foundation, Damon et al. (2022) proceeds to offer thought-provoking questions for readers from academic backgrounds (researchers, teachers, and students) and sport practitioners related to how leadership is understood, engaged with communities, and what the future of sport leadership will look like in a post COVID-19 world. Further, they also provide a “privileging practice in sport leadership call to action self-assessment tool” to aid the reader in their journey towards reflecting on their own leadership as practice.

The last article in this edition revolved around South Korean intercollegiate student-athletes perception of leader-member exchange (LMX) and its impact on their turnover intentions (Chiu et al., 2022). Additionally, Chiu et al. (2022) also examined two dimensions of psychological empowerment through the LMX and turnover intention relationship. With LMX offering a dyadic approach to studying leadership and its influence on followers, LMX offered a unique approach to study the leadership dyad between coaches and student-athletes (Chiu et al., 2022). Much like in the broader organizational behavior research track, turnover intentions in the intercollegiate context are integral to understanding as keeping these intentions low can not only save team resources in having to recruit more players but can also impact the psychological well-being of the team and its individual athletes (Chiu et al., 2022).

Through their SEM and related quantitative analyses, Chiu et al. (2022) found that LMX had a negative influence on turnover intentions of student athletes, thus illustrating the utility of the LMX approach by coaches to their student athletes to decrease the chances that a student athlete will want to leave the team. Further, as a student athlete’s psychological empowerment increased, this also negated turnover intentions. Their results illustrated leaders of sport teams in South Korea should not only monitor the LMX approach between coaches and

student athletes and psychological empowerment of student athletes, but also aim to cultivate high perceptions of both to increase the chance that a student athlete will remain on the team.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, this collection of articles advances the sport leadership research stream in several ways. Among the advancements include broad contexts spanning different countries, types of sport organizations, and a variety of methods employed. While there is no single overarching theme or theory connecting each article, it is noticeable that these articles tend to be moving away from the traditional way the discipline has researched leadership for decades (Welty Peachey et al., 2015). For example, common and foundational leadership theories such as transformational and transactional were not major parts of these studies despite their significant use in building the sport leadership foundation. Additionally, most of the studies also used methodological and analytical approaches that deviated from the traditional leadership studies. For a quantitative study, Breuer et al. (2022) used a multilevel approach to capture both individual and group levels. Even Chiu et al. (2022) who used a more traditional approach of independent, dependent, and moderating variables, integrated a not as often used theory in LMX as an independent variable, and then used SEM to analyze LMX across turnover intentions and involved psychological contract breach and empowerment as additional moderating and dependent variables. Further, this edition of articles also illustrated the variety in approaches that can be used to study sport leadership. Approaches that have not been used extensively before such as two case studies and cross-case analysis (Feddersen and Phelan, 2022) and relationally reflexivity (Damon et al., 2022) provided deep insights that may not have been evident without their specified approach. Additionally, articles in this edition captured broad aspects of leadership through unique contexts, such as Nam et al. (2022) in their global sport leadership partnership study or Misener et al. (2022) who examined an important aspect of amateur sport leadership; interorganizational relationships. The papers in the current edition offer unique contributions, which will hopefully provide a foundation for coming sport leadership research.

## **Annotated Bibliography**



Breuer, C., Feiler, S., & Rossi, L. (2022). *Increasing human capital of coaches—An investigation into individual and organizational factors. Journal of Sport Management, 36(2), 199-209.* <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2020-0319>

A group of researchers from the German Sport University Cologne, used a multilevel regression approach to capture individual coaches (n = 2,384) and their sports clubs (n = 1,274) to determine what factors influenced coaches' intentions to increase their human capital. The results showed that at the individual level, factors that positively influenced a coach's intention to increase their human capital included if doing so would renew their license and if the education benefit would outweigh the cost.

Chiu, W., Hui, R. T. Y., Won, D., & Bae, J. S. (2022). *Leader-member exchange and turnover intention among collegiate student-athletes: The mediating role of psychological empowerment and the moderating role of psychological contract breach in competitive team sport environments. European Sport Management Quarterly, 22(4), 609-635.* <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1820548>

The authors, researchers at Open University of Hong Kong, Nagoya University of Commerce and Business, Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi, and Konkuk University examined the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and turnover intention in South Korean collegiate student-athletes. Further, they also integrated psychological empowerment as a mediating variable, and psychological contract breach as a moderating variable. Results indicated that LMX negatively influenced turnover intentions, two dimensions of psychological empowerment (meaning and self-determination) significantly mediated the relationship, and that psychological contract breach negatively moderated the relationship between LMX and psychological empowerment.

Damon, Z. J., Leberman, S., Wells, J. E., Burton, L., Ferkins, L., Weese, J., & Peachey, J. W. (2022). *Privileging practice in sport leadership: Applying relational reflexivity. Journal of Sport Management, 36(4), 394-407.* <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2020-0407>

Researchers from the University of Central Arkansas, Massey University, University of South Florida, University of Connecticut, Auckland University of Technology, Western University, and University of Illinois performed relationally reflexive practice based on their NASSM conference symposium. Doing so, along with the discussion during the symposium led to the creation of the Sport Leadership Generative Partnership Model and a self-assessment tool for the reader to use to reflect on their own thoughts towards sport leadership practice, research, and teaching.

Feddersen, N. B., & Phelan, S. E. (2022). *The gradual normalization of behaviors which might challenge ethical and professional standards in two British elite sports organizations. Journal of Sport Management, 36(5), 409-419.* <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0077>

Researchers from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and Oxford Brookes University examined two organizations in Britain undergoing significant change through ethnographic case study approaches to determine what justifications are given to normalize unethical and unprofessional behaviors. The case study and cross-case study

analyses provided evidence that the common rationales were (a) you have not spent time in the trenches, (b) it has always been like this, (c) policing space, (d) I am just doing my job, and (e) giving opportunities to those close to me.

Misener, K. E., Babiak, K., Jones, G., & Lindsey, I. (2022). *Great expectations: A critical review of interorganizational relationships in amateur sport*. *Journal of Sport Management, 36*(3), 277-288. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0240>

Researchers from the University of Waterloo, University of Michigan, Temple University, and Durham University performed a critical review of interorganizational relationships (IORs). The review found a variety of cultural and political impacts which dictated IORs throughout amateur sport and how leaders in such sport organizations do not always provide a mutually beneficial IOR as is implied. The review concludes with a call to engage with practitioners in future IOR research.

Nam, B. H., Marshall, R. C., Love, A., Graham, J., & Lim, S. (2022). *Fostering global sport leadership: A partnership between a Korean sport organization and a US university*. *Journal of Global Sport Management, 7*(1), 199-225. DOI: [10.1080/24704067.2018.1520608](https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2018.1520608)

Researchers from the University of Tennessee and Korea University detailed the partnership between a South Korean sport government organization and a U.S. university to develop former South Korean athletes into leaders in the sport industry. The findings illustrated that the former South Korean athletes were successfully learning from the partnership to achieve leadership positions in sport across academia, sport administrator positions, and sport coaching positions.

Whales, L., Frawley, S., Cohen, A., & Nikolova, N. (2022). *We are a team of leaders: Practicing leadership in professional sport*. *Sport Management Review, 25*(3), 476-500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.1952793>

Researchers from the University of Technology Sydney used an exploratory case study approach to investigate relational leadership in a professional netball team in Australia. Emergent themes of relational leadership found through non-verbal interactions, verbal interactions, and meaning making pointed towards a professional sport team socially constructing their own leadership and allowed for leadership to develop this way rather than in a hierarchy, with effective team performance still occurring.

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