

# **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL SPORT ORGANISATIONS**

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## **Aim of abstract/paper - research question**

Interest in leadership development and succession management practices within the broader discipline of management studies has increased significantly over the past 30 years. This development is also of importance to the field of sport management where leadership processes and performance are under constant scrutiny. Well managed organisations view leadership as a source of competitive advantage that can differentiate them from their competition. In order to maintain a competitive advantage such organisations invest heavily in developing their current and future leaders. Despite the increased global research into leadership development and succession management within the field of management studies surprising very little empirical work has been completed within sport management. This paper hopes to start filling this gap, albeit in a small way.

## **Theoretical background or literature review**

The presented research examined the nature of leadership development and succession management practices employed in professional sport organisations located in Australia. To achieve this aim the study explored the practices of Australia's three leading football codes through the collection of qualitative data. The three organisations that agreed to participate in the study were the Australian Football League (AFL), the Australian Rugby Union and the National Rugby League (NRL).

## **Methodology, research design and data analysis**

Interviews were conducted with the senior management of each organisation. In total, 15 interviews were conducted with five senior managers from each of the three sporting codes. In addition to the collection of interview data, documents from the selected organisations and material published through secondary sources were also analysed. From the analysis of the collected data a number of themes emerged.

## **Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

The study found that the leadership development and succession management practices of the three organisations were generally informal in nature with a great deal of importance placed on experienced based learning as an approach of developing individuals rather than through more formal methods of leadership training. It was found that unique Australian leadership constructs were evident in the management of the three professional football codes. The interview participants demonstrated an egalitarian style of leadership that was influenced by a collaborative and collegial approach amongst the senior executive employees. From the analysis, the AFL emerged as the most advanced organisation with its leadership development and succession management practices. The AFL demonstrated a clear and effective structure that encouraged staff to engage in leadership development with the purpose of moving into higher level management positions within the organisation.

The findings from this study extend our knowledge of leadership development and succession management practices as implemented in sport organisations and highlight the importance of effective leadership within highly competitive markets. The study has implications for current practice illustrating the benefit of an experience-based approach to leadership development within sport organisations. Furthermore, the importance of linking leadership development and succession management in a holistic process rather than being viewed as two separate management components was highlighted. Therefore, it is argued that an integrated approach to leadership development and succession management can provide professional sport organisations with a clear structure and process for fostering leadership talent.