

# Lower And Slower: Why Recruitment, Retention And Progression Of Women Coaches Is Held Back By Sport Organisational Culture

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## Aim of the research

The aim of this presentation is to explore pertinent ideas and strategies for increasing the diversity of and equality between, our sport coaches through an analysis of sport organisational cultures. In particular, this specific presentation is based upon the stories that women coaches tell of their organisations and the culture in which they work, and what particular features of that are most pertinent in influencing their working experiences. Statistics demonstrate that recruitment, retention and progression of women in the coaching progression is lower and slower than their male counterparts. Imbalanced coaching workforces are often explained by women coaches having lower self-efficacy, less intention, preference, and motivation to coach and higher intent to leave the profession compared to men coaches (Chelladurai, Kuga, & O'Bryant, 1999; Cunningham & Sagas, 2003; Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003; Sagas & Ashley, 2001; Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006). Qualitative research has added to this by citing structural factors such as fewer opportunities, unequal gendered relations, unequal ideas of coaching competence, lower self-confidence, poor working conditions and homophobia (e.g. Allen & Shaw, 2013; Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; Kilty, 2006; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Norman, 2010, 2012; Shaw & Slack, 2002). The focus of this paper is specifically on examining the organisational structures and practices that influence women's careers at critical points of their coaching development.

## Theoretical background

Greater research is needed that examines what can be done in sporting organisations to create a culture that is more conducive to its different employees, in this case women coaches. For the benefits of a diverse workforce to be felt by individuals and organisations, a culture of diversity needs to be first established (Doherty, Fink, Inglis, & Pastore, 2010). This culture needs to be one characterised by "a respect for differences, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity and conflict, an orientation toward people vs. tasks" (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999, p. 292). From the literature however, while it is clear that while many sports organisations understand and are aware of the need for greater diversity amongst their coaches, a fewer organisations actually take tangible steps to address the context in which this inequality takes place (Doherty et al., 2010). Little is done to understand what working practices and processes, particular areas of organisational culture, or characteristics of an organisation, scaffold an imbalanced coaching workforce or provide less favourable experiences of the profession for certain groups of coaches (Cunningham & Singer, 2009). To analyse these particular participant stories, we drew upon Schein's (2004) three levels of culture to analyse the 'underlying values and assumptions' embedded within sport organisational culture. These manifest themselves in the artefacts and espoused beliefs and values within an organisation (Schein, 2004). Within this level, we addressed areas of culture that were most influential in women's working lives and progression as sport coaches.

## Methodology

Personal stories provide the evidence for the presentation. 42 interviews, lasting between 45–120 minutes, were conducted with a sample of women coaches at different points of their respective sport's coaching pathway. Participants were invited to the research by their national sporting governing body. Interviews focused on the participants' entry and progression into coaching and coach education, experiences of initial training and professional development, motivations for leadership/to progress, their experiences as a woman within their sport, and their experiences of the organisational context in which they work. The constant comparison method was employed to thematically analyse the interview data.

## Results and discussion

A key element of this project was to build a greater understanding through counter-narratives; the voices of outsiders-within, in this case, experienced women coaches and coach educators who were at critical points of their career and making decisions as to whether they remained in the organisation. We wanted to learn more, beyond what might be claimed by organisations it is doing to support women, about what works for women 'day-to-day' and how they are supported on the ground. For women to thrive and progress as coaches and coach educators, particular tenets of organisational culture are key in supporting their career. These were found to be: the establishment of a learning culture; inclusive leadership; and supportive work-

place relationships. Creating a culture that values and nurtures the contribution that women can make to the coaching and tutoring professions, creating a culture that accepts women in and associates women with, leadership, retaining frequent and meaningful relationships between organisations and staff, and rewarding and recognising women's experiences and achievements all serve to create organisational cultures that are welcoming and inclusive of diversity.

## **References**

Schein, E. M. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.