
GOOD ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES

To encourage women as
high-performance coaches



The dearth of women as high-performance coaches in Australian sport is a concern with statistics reporting only a 15% representationⁱ. Globally, statistics present a similar picture with the low percentage of women as high-performance coaches at the national/Olympic level in countries such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada between 6 to 14%ⁱⁱ.

Despite several decades of research and interventions aimed to attract and retain women as high-performance coaches, similar barriers still existⁱⁱⁱ today. In particular, organisational practices and behaviours remain notable barriers to grow and retain women in these roles^{iv}. Barriers associated with women as high-performance coaches have reached a point of saturation and been well documented. A common recommendation from research to address these barriers is the need for a different approach in order to create change^v.

The Project

Organisational practices that support women as high-performance coaches needs to be researched, showcased^{vi} and embraced by sport. To assist, the following brief is part of a larger project¹ and presents perspectives from women as high-performance coaches and senior managers across five national sport organisations (NSOs) in Australia on what are good organisational practices. These NSOs² were selected from a) the list of NSOs that met the Australian Institute of Sport high-performance 2019 funding criteria and/or a member of The Coalition of Major Professional and Participation Sport, and b) had publicly accessible documents that acknowledge their focus to encourage women as high-performance coaches.

Insights of good organisational practices to attract, develop and retain women as high-performance coaches were gained from interviewing:

16



Women as high-performance coaches / Number of years as high-performance coach ranged from two months to 22 years

13



Senior managers (including 10 men and 3 women) / Number of years in current role ranged from two months to 11 years

¹ To examine the strategic organisational practices in sport to advance women as high-performance coaches in Australia. Damien Taylor (PhD research candidate), supervisors Professor Clare Hanlon and Dr Andrew Dawson (Victoria University)

² For confidentiality reasons these NSOs have not been identified

What we found

Common good organisational practices were identified by women as high-performance coaches and senior managers according to attraction, development and retention. A greater number of common attraction practices were reported (n=9) than development or retention practices (n=7). The most common organisational practice identified by women as high-performance coaches related to development: for NSOs to individually tailor professional and personal development for each woman in high-performance coach roles (n=14). Whereas every senior manager identified NSOs to provide clear high-performance coach pathways (attraction) and advocate women as high-performance coaches (retention).

Attraction

Clear high-performance pathways and recognition of family needs and talent identification were common good practices recognised by both groups. Women as high-performance coaches provided a greater range of good organisational practices related to attraction than senior managers. The provision of opportunities to attend training camps and to coach male and junior high-performance athletes were noted by these women however were not recognised by senior managers.

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RECOGNISE FAMILY NEEDS: TO HAVE THAT GENUINE DISCUSSION ABOUT OPPORTUNITY COST AND WHAT'S REQUIRED IN THE ROLE AND HOW IS THAT GOING TO WORK WITH THE FAMILY. BECAUSE IT'S ONLY EVER SEEN AS A REASON WHY YOU CAN'T, NOT AS A WAY OF HOW DO WE MAKE IT WORK.

(Senior manager)

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TALENT IDENTIFICATION: THERE WAS THAT TAP ON THE SHOULDER, WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED? AND THEN, I WENT, WELL I'LL GO AND PUT MY HAT IN THE RING AND THEN GOT THE JOB. AND THAT'S HOW I STARTED. AND THEN, ONCE I DID THAT, THERE WAS THIS REALIZATION OF I'M NOT GOING TO BE A WORLD CHAMPION ATHLETE, BUT MAYBE I CAN BE A WORLD CHAMPION COACH.

(Woman as high-performance coach)

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GOOD ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES	WOMEN AS COACHES	SENIOR MANAGERS
Recognise family needs	13	9
Talent identification	11	11
Clear HP career pathways	10	13
Genuine recognition as a HP coach	9	9
Attend training camps	7	0
Showcase successful HP coaches	6	6
Scholarships	6	4
Coach male HP athletes	4	0
Coach junior HP athletes	3	0

Development

Similar perceptions were identified by the two groups on good organisational practices related to the development of women as high-performance coaches. In particular for NSOs to individually tailor professional and personal development for each woman in high-performance coach roles. The majority of senior managers identified the need for NSOs to listen, learn and act on the needs of women as high-performance coaches and to enable women-only high-performance coaching courses.

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INDIVIDUALLY TAILORED DEVELOPMENT: MORE DEVELOPMENT. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT NOT ONLY SPORT SPECIFIC.

(Woman as high-performance coach)

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SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT: CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE IT'S OKAY TO SPEAK UP, HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD, NOT FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO GET RIDICULED, AND YOU CAN MAKE MISTAKES. I THINK THAT'S A REALLY IMPORTANT ASPECT OF GROWING AS A COACH.

(Senior manager)

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GOOD ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES	WOMEN AS COACHES	SENIOR MANAGERS
Individually tailored development	14	10
AIS led programs	10	8
Mentors	8	5
Safe environments	6	6
Listen, learn and act on needs	6	9
International development programs	6	5
Women-only courses	5	8

Retention

Four good retention practices for NSOs to conduct were commonly identified by women as high-performance coaches including: communicating, listening and supporting; encouraging peer networks; recognising the demands associated with motherhood and family roles; and advocating women as high-performance coaches. Every senior manager recognised a good retention practice was when NSOs advocate women as high-performance coaches. The provision of achievable career pathways to advance women in these coaching roles was a retention practice identified by the senior managers (n=3) however not by the women as high-performance coaches.



ADVOCATE WOMEN AS HP COACHES: BEING DELIBERATE WITH OUR INTENT... YOU NEED TO BE HAVING THE CONVERSATIONS INTERNALLY AND ACTUALLY WORKING ON CHANGING PEOPLE'S INTERNAL BEHAVIOUR. IF OUR SPORT IS GOING TO BE LIVING AS WHAT IT SAYS, ALL OUR PEOPLE NEED TO BE ADVOCATES.

(Senior manager)



MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY ROLE: IF WE WANT TO PROVIDE A CAREER PATH FOR WOMEN WITHIN COACHING, WE NEED FLEXIBLE CONDITIONS TO WORK AROUND FAMILY LIVES.

(Woman as high-performance coach)



GOOD ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES	WOMEN AS COACHES	SENIOR MANAGERS
Communicate, listen and support	13	9
Peer networks	13	9
Recognise motherhood and family role	13	7
Advocate women as HP coaches	12	13
Coach support	8	2
Financial support	6	1
Achievable career pathways	0	3

Final Comments

- ◆ To encourage women as high-performance coaches there is a need to embrace good organisational practices focused on attraction, development and retention
- ◆ The 23 good organisational practices identified in this brief provide a resource for senior managers to reflect on their practices targeted to women as high-performance coaches
- ◆ It is important to be mindful that what women as high-performance coaches perceive as good organisational practices may not necessarily be perceived by senior managers
- ◆ Prior to the development of strategies and high-performance plans, there is a need to gain the 'voice' of upcoming and current women as high-performance coaches on what are deemed good attraction, development and retention practices
- ◆ National data on the length women stay as high-performance coaches would be interesting to gain. In doing so would identify if greater emphasis is required on development and/or retention practices rather than attraction practices

Next Steps

A different approach to what has been enacted upon to attract, develop and retain women as high-performance coaches is required. We hope the insights provided in this brief stimulate thought and action. What are you doing to help?



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- ^v Krahn, A. N. (2019). Sport Policy Praxis: Examining How Canadian Sport Policy Practically Advances the Careers of Nascent Female Coaches. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*, 27(2), 118-127.
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