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Abstract:

Few professionals perform their jobs in an environment as public, as pressurised, as short-termist and as unforgiving of mistakes, as that which exists for football club managers. Drawing on interviews with a cohort of current and aspirant managers on the UEFA / Scottish Football Association's Pro-Licence course - the certificate necessary to take up a position as manager at senior level in European football - the paper presents a rare insight into the role of the manager within the rapidly changing business context of football. Notwithstanding the challenging context, the interviewees are highly committed to testing themselves as managers. While football success remains the key managerial objective on which they expect to be judged, increased focus on financial matters introduces distinct challenges. Management education and the opportunity to learn from non-football environments are identified as having roles to play in better equipping managers for the challenges they expect to face.

Introduction

Professional football (soccer) in Europe has changed dramatically in the last two decades or so, in large part due to the escalation of media rights deals. Many professional football clubs are now complex businesses, intrinsically concerned with financial matters. In addition, changes in the ownership structure of clubs, including a trend towards foreign ownership in some countries like England (Christian Aid, 2010; Conn, 2012; Wheatley, 2012) ─ and in their internal management structures ─ have implications for the football manager's (hereafter 'manager') role and remit, particularly around transfer policy and the playing side of the game (Kelly & Harris, 2010). The increasing business emphasis of clubs is also evident in other areas which have implications for managers: for example, the status of players where there has been increased emphasis on players' freedom of movement and contractual bargaining power. At the highest levels of the professional game, today's managers are now dealing with a financially independent group of players. At the same time, managers are not sheltered from the increasingly pressured financial environment within which many clubs operate. For example, the very public role that manager Ally McCoist was forced to play during the six month period leading up to the liquidation of Scottish club Rangers, one of European football's biggest clubs, is a very high profile example of the manager's role in the (failing) business of football. More generally, the level of media and stakeholder scrutiny of managerial performance and decision-making is greater than ever before, not least as a consequence of new media and the prevalence of many outlets for opinion (Cleland, 2011; Gilmore, 2010).

This business transformation of football and its clubs is of great significance to what is known in British football ─ for the purposes of this paper taken to mean the professional leagues in England and Scotland ─ as the manager. (For an overview of the political and regulatory framework within which English and Scottish football sit, see, for example,

Morrow, 2011). While the primary responsibility of this role is the training and development of a club's first team squad of players (which may or may not include carrying out the role of coach), commonly, a British manager has also had responsibility for a club's medium- to long-term strategy. Ordinarily this has included activities such as talent identification, youth development, buying and selling of players, and media and public relations activities. In contrast, in many European clubs these types of activities would often be carried out by personnel who hold a variety of titles including Sporting Director or Director of Football; these distinctions, however, are not discrete. In recent years, a number of British clubs have adopted managerial and coaching structures akin to the European model which is, in essence, a Head Coach (who has responsibility for the training, development and performance of the first team only) and Director of Football (a senior management figure who has responsibility for all other football related activities and for liaison with other club executives and directors). The precise distribution of 'managerial' roles is also, however, a function of club size: while a manager in a smaller football club is often required to take on additional administrative roles, a manager in a more complex and financially developed football club will have direct responsibility for fewer areas of a club's operations — in this regard, they will concentrate solely on football matters (Bridgewater, 2010, pp. 31-55). The majority of British football clubs continue, however, to have a manager at the helm and for the purpose of this paper the term 'manager' is used throughout. That being said, there is clearly much work required here to standardise the terminology across Europe (which can be 'messy') and importantly, to try and offer an accurate description as to what football management in the present day actually entails.

Within this rapidly changing business context of football, the aim of this research is on understanding further the main issues that are related to a career as a manager. In advance of the paper's general and subject-specific literature review, we suggest that we have yet to

understand fully the *football manager* as there has been little consistency in how we understand: their career development; the tasks and responsibilities the role includes (or indeed, does not include); the position of a manager in organisational structures; and how the changing organisation impacts on the role of the manager.

The UEFA Pro-Licence is the highest level in UEFA's suite of qualifications. Its focus is on how to manage as opposed to how to coach (PFA, 2012), resulting in attention being afforded to matters beyond the football field itself. At present, to take up a management position in the top level of any European nation's league system, it is necessary to hold or to be working towards a UEFA Pro-Licence (UEFA, 2010, Articles 36, 40), with each national football association having the responsibility to arrange appropriate training. The sample for this research is current managers (at the early stages of their managerial careers) and those who wish to become managers (aspirant managers) who are all participants on the Scottish Football Association's (SFA) UEFA Professional Licence (Pro-Licence) course and, hence, are representative of a range of individuals who aspire to be managers at the highest level in football.

From a career and career development perspective, this is quite unique: Although most managers follow a pathway in which a supporting coaching role in a club acts as a bridge between playing and managing (while the individual completes stipulated coaching and managerial qualifications en-route), some players — having completed these qualifications — make the transition direct to manager. The opportunity to use the insights of this group of current and aspirant managers enables cutting-edge research: providing first-hand knowledge, understanding, and interpretation on the issues that are related to a career in football management within its contemporary context.

Following this introductory section, the paper has five principal sections. First, — and in terms of background theory — we will offer an appraisal of the general literature as it

applies to professional football management. Second, we will introduce the theoretical focus of the paper with specific reference to the 'career' and describe the context and background to the research. Next, we will describe the research methodology, going on to present and discuss the research results, which centre on the career development of the manager, their tasks and responsibilities, the position of a manager in organisational structures, and how the changing organisation impacts on the role of manager. In the final section, we will set out the conclusions and implications of our research, along with our plans to progress this research, enabling a new body of knowledge to be developed on this specialised role.

Background theory

Unsurprisingly, given their central role in the game, there is a considerable volume of material, both biographical and auto-biographical on the lives and careers of individual managers. Other non-academic literature has focused on the attributes or characteristics of managers: these include contributions by journalists like Grant and Robertson (2010) who contend that there is something distinct about the characteristics of Scottish managers which, among other things, has resulted in their enjoying disproportionate levels of success in English football, as well as academic literature from Bolchover and Brady (2004), who sought to identify the characteristics of managers and the lessons that can be learned for business and management more generally. In juxtaposition, Wagg (2007, 2005) argues that football management is a paradigm, a long-standing myth in football culture that all of a team's performance can be explained by a single factor namely the stewardship of the manager. Elsewhere, Carter (2006, 2004, 1999) provides detailed accounts of the role and position of the manager over time, while economists have studied the implications of managerial turnover in football on such factors as performance (d'Addona & Kind, 2012; Audas, Dobson & Goddard, 2002; Bruinshoofd & ter Weel, 2003; de Dios Tena & Forest, 2007; Koning, 2003; Hughes, Hughes, Mellahi, & Guermat, 2010).

That being said, the closed nature of the world of football management and the resultant problems of access has meant that while academic literature on so many other aspects of professional football has burgeoned over the last couple of decades, the important role played by the manager remains underdeveloped. Understanding of this key position has been strengthened considerably in recent years particularly through the work of Bridgewater (2010), who focuses on the challenges and pressures faced by managers in English football, drawing on insights gained working with managers on the League Managers' Association Certificate in Football Management at Warwick University, and that of Kelly and his co-authors who have contributed a number of papers on issues such as: the role of the manager and its resistance to change (Kelly, 2008); the ways in which managers retain control over their players (Kelly & Waddington, 2006); and the relationship and trust between managers and directors (Kelly & Harris, 2010). Another recent example focuses on an analysis of the management approach of Sir Alex Ferguson, the manager of Manchester United for the period 1986-2013 (Elberse & Ferguson, 2013).

In their 2006 paper, Kelly and Waddington observed the continuing importance of traditional forms of authoritarianism as the basis of the authority of managers, long after such styles of management have ceased to be common in industrial relations more generally. It was also noted that the unchanging nature of the role of the manager sat in marked contrast to changes at other levels in football organisations, which have developed more complex management structures involving greater professionalism, bureaucracy, and more rational methods of coordination and control (Kelly, 2008; Kelly & Waddington, 2006). One example of this in the football management setting is the high degree of autonomy that has been afforded to managers, evident in areas as diverse as the arbitrary disciplinary codes and sanctions established by managers (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). Yet despite the manager's central role in the organisation and the significant degree of autonomy afforded to the

manager, Perry describes the position as 'organisationally vague', often having no job description, or even clearly specified objectives or clear accountabilities (Perry, 2000, p.59). This vagueness and variability in remit and expectations is also highlighted by Bridgewater (2010, pp. 38-55). Hughes et al. (2010) liken managers to outward-looking senior operating officers, with responsibility for strategy (e.g. playing style), operational tactics (e.g. game decisions), player development and acquisition, media relationships, competitor analysis, and managing marketplace change. Moreover, autonomy is quite distinct from job security: in recent years the average managerial tenure in England has fallen to 1.5 years in 2008/09, down from over 3 years in 1992/92 (Bridgewater, 2010, p.159). Almost half of all first time managers are never reappointed to a manager's job, while on average it takes a dismissed manager 1.5 years to obtain another managerial position (Bridgewater, 2010, p.162). These figures are supported by the 2012 UEFA benchmark report which indicated that 53% of head coaches in Europe's top leagues had been in position for less than one year at the time the clubs received their annual license from UEFA to participate in its pan-European competitions (UEFA, 2012).

Theoretical focus

The career of a football manager

In the career-focussed literature, professional football is under studied. Football can be characterised as an organisational field; its diversity of actors constituting and contributing to its own distinct social and institutional context and logics (Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2011). Ostensibly, the field has a high degree of autonomy: Its governing bodies are able to dictate rules of behaviour within the field, not just in terms of what happens on the pitch but also on matters such as entry and exit to its competitions and its models of financial distribution and behaviour. Moreover, they also determine rules and regulation around employment, for players and other actors like managers — in effect, these governing bodies and leagues acting

as gate-keepers. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that resistance to professionalisation is evident in traditional perceptions of the preparation required for the career of manager. In addition, within football it has been assumed that the main prerequisite for being a manager is previous playing experience (Kelly, 2008), coupled with an emphasis on learning by doing rather than more formal training and qualifications (Bridgewater, 2010; Carter, 2006; Kelly, 2008). According to Kelly (2008), most managers were sceptical about formal training qualifications, seeing these more in terms of helping them to get a job rather than helping them to do the job. More generally, it has been argued that the hostility towards education and formal training is partly a function of the cultural context of football: its emphasis on its working class roots and on attributes like masculinity and physicality, contributing to a distrust of intellectualism (Carter, 2006; Gearing, 1999; McGillvray & McIntosh, 2006). Just as important, however, as players' and managers' views of the transferability of playing skills into management ability, is this equal (and apparent) acceptance by many directors and club owners, the key gatekeeper(s) in managerial careers. This suggests a form of 'symbolic capital' based on prior competence (in a related activity) and networks, recognised by the key actors in the field and by the rules of the field as legitimate, valid and useful (Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer & Meyer, 2003).

But at the same time, it is considered important that football is open to contemporary thinking on careers and career development. Drawing on the business and management career literature, in everyday conversation, the term 'career' was commonly understood as a person's evolving sequence of work experiences over time (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989). Careers were seen as predictable, secure and linear, providing people access to rewards over their working lives and a sense (perhaps misplaced) of security and control (Baruch, 2006). Concurrently, career was also seen to provide a sense of status or social worth, and in some cases, could even represent an individual's 'life dream' (Adamson, Doherty & Viney, 1998).

Contemporary literature on business in general, and on career-specific material, emphasise the dynamic nature of labour markets, with organisations taking less responsibility for employee career development. More generally, macro-environmental changes such as globalisation and technological developments, coupled with the blurring of boundaries between organisations, industries and occupations, have contributed to a new work context that encourages new ways of examining careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Emphasis has switched from advancement in one organisation, where an organisation can control individuals' careers, to viewing the career as one of self-employment, the notion of the protean career (Hall, 1976), and to so called boundaryless careers (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Greenhouse, Callanan & DiRenzo, 2008). In this literature the focus is on individual agency; pro-active and self-directed individuals engaging in different career self-management activities to create career options that enable them to realise their personal career goals and ensure their employability (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Hall & Associates, 1996; Hall & Moss, 1998).

While personal agency remains central to the concept of career, it is also essential to understand the wider context in which careers unfold; of the constraining and enabling aspects of the social context (Bailyn, 1989). Careers were not merely the property of individuals but of the collective; careers embodied the attributes, expectations, and interpretations of the social reference group to which the individual belonged. Such reference groups provided the actors with models of the career paths available to them, cues for judging career progress, and terminology to make sense of their role (Van Maanen, 1980; Garavan & Morley, 1997). The emphasis of the Chicago School, interpretive sociologists who advocated an inductive, exploratory approach to conducting research, was on the situational context of the career (the social environment); its relational aspects (i.e. interaction with other significant individuals in the workplace and the establishment of personal social networks);

and chronology (Hughes, 1937). The influence of the external environment and in particular institutional forces such as social class, gender, ethnicity, education and regulation also inevitably act to constrain individual career agency (Mayrhofer, Meyer & Steyrer, 2007).

Research context and background

A professional team sport like football has a very distinct context. Managers operate in an environment in which they need to contend with the expectations of successful performance (i.e. winning matches and competitions); knowing that failure to do so places increased pressure on their employment status (Bridgewater, 2010). Moreover, they are operating in an increasingly complex and multifaceted environment, their work held to account not only by football club directors, but by fans and the media (Cleland, 2011; Rynne, Mallet & Tinning, 2006).

In Scotland the SFA's Pro-Licence was ratified by UEFA in 2000, with 111 successful candidates to date. Since 2007, the SFA Pro-Licence has included a compulsory, residential management workshop led by university academic staff. The aim of this workshop is to help current and aspirant managers to better understand the business side of football and to equip them with some generic management skills and techniques that can be applied in their day to day work. It includes sessions on boardroom skills, decision-making, power and influence, leadership techniques, negotiating skills and financial management. The Pro-Licence course allows current and aspirant managers to acquire skills that differentiate managing from coaching as it offers education and knowledge which is intellectually different from traditional coaching courses.

At the start of football season 2013/14, 50% of managers in the Scottish Professional Football League Premiership had been awarded their Pro-Licence by the SFA. In addition, a number of SFA Pro-Licence holders are working as managers at the highest level in England.

Research method

As other authors have noted (Kelly & Harris, 2010; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Roderick, 2006), gaining access to key individuals involved in the world of professional football is difficult due to its closed nature and a suspicion of outsiders. The authors' involvement over a number of years in the provision of management education programmes as part of the SFA Pro-Licence has resulted in a degree of trust being established between the researchers and key contacts at the SFA. This trust, coupled with professional relationships established with current and aspirant managers during the Pro-Licence residential management workshops, meant that they were receptive to an invitation to participate in research interviews. This importance of trust and rapport has been commented upon by other authors who have conducted studies with those involved in football (Pain & Harwood, 2007). Moreover, this engagement provided an opportunity for the authors to learn something about the context in which the phenomenon being studied is embedded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In contrast to Kelly's position as an insider (2008), however, we remained outsiders, our involvement with professional football limited to academic activities.

The purpose and approach to be adopted in the research was explained orally to all current and aspirant managers (the 'participants') at the workshop and permission was sought to conduct an initial interview with them. All participants were informed this would be longitudinal research and, therefore, further interviews would be requested at a later stage. Each participant was also provided with written information on the study and a consent form. Prior to this, ethical approval had been given by the University of Stirling School of Sport Ethics Committee. All participants were assured of anonymity in any published outputs. All participants on the programme agreed to take part in the research (initial and follow up interviews). Ultimately, of the 22 participants on the Pro-Licence course, 19 (including one female) were interviewed (the 'interviewees'). Three individuals were unable to participate

within the timescale due to work and/or personal circumstances. While it is possible to argue that this sample size is not representative of the larger population of current and/or prospective professional football managers, this sample is large in the context of previous qualitative research on football management. Moreover, few studies have actually utilised semi-structured interviews with current and aspirant managers in professional football which considerably enhances the validity of the research. Of note, on-going access to this sample, representing almost the entire cohort of a particular football association's biennial intake to its Pro-Licence, provides an unparalleled opportunity to enhance our understanding of the role of a contemporary manager and those who aspire to this position.

Qualitative methods were considered the best approach to this study, allowing an inductive explorative approach to inquiry (Silverman, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were held with each individual to ensure an in-depth and as rich a source of data as possible, allowing interviewees the time and space to provide their personal views, attitudes and opinions and to capture their subjective meaning in contextual situations (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002). The interviews began with introductory questions about the interviewee's background, in football and more generally, thus allowing the researchers to develop a rapport with them. Subsequent questions then focused on such subjects as motivation, challenges, definitions and characteristics around leadership and management development and open questions in which interviewees were encouraged to articulate any further pertinent issues. While all interviews covered the same questions, the interviews were conducted in a flexible fashion, allowing the interviewees to take the interview in directions they considered appropriate. The first interview was conducted by both authors together to ensure a consistent approach was adopted: thereafter, the interviews were divided between both researchers.

While the majority of interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis at a location convenient to the interviewees (n=13); geographical considerations resulted in the other interviews being conducted by telephone (n=6). Although interviews in person are preferable and were prioritised where possible, telephone interviews are accepted as an alternative and suitable method (Marcus & Crane, 1986), and have been used in similar research studies (Pain & Harwood, 2007). The interview schedule commenced in November 2011 with each interview lasting between 28 and 112 minutes (M=51, SD=19.3). Thematic interpretational content analysis was used to analyse the data, allowing knowledge to be generated via the emergence and interpretation of themes from the interview transcripts. Manual content analysis was used rather than a software package such as NVivo to ensure that the researchers were not distanced from the data gestalt (Davis & Meyer, 2009). The first stage of the analysis involved each interview being read independently by both researchers and the extraction of raw-data quotes. Each researcher then sought to order these quotes around common themes. The next stage involved the researchers piecing together agreed themes, forming a comprehensive picture of the interviewees' collective thoughts on football management. This was important: The complexity of the management role and the distinctiveness of this research data means that there is much that can be revealed in the direct quotes of the participants (Woodman & Hardy, 2001). At the same time, however, the paper draws on the theoretical concepts around career development introduced earlier in the paper to interpret this data. The intention is that participants will be interviewed again on a regular basis over the next few years, with a view to tracking expectations against experience, and a consistent approach will followed for the analysis of subsequent interview material.

Results and discussion

At the time of the first round of interviews, the interviewees (n = 19) held a variety of positions in football and beyond. At that juncture, two interviewees already held

management positions with Scottish professional clubs, while two held the role of head coach of American University collegiate sides. The full breakdown of employment is provided in Figure 1.

The interviewees were aged between 36 and 47 and 18 of the 19 were male. Of the 19 interviewees, 16 had previously been full-time professional footballers. Of these, 15 individuals had played in either or both of the Scottish Premier League, the predecessor league to the Scottish Professional Football League Premiership, or the Barclays Premier League in England, and seven had played football at full international level. Four interviewees had formal educational qualifications at the British University entrance level of Scottish Highers/English A-levels or above. These four included two individuals who had not been full-time professional football players.

Career development

The interviewees identified three themes concerned with career development: 1) logical progression, 2) the development of others and 3) intrinsic motivation.

Logical progression. Among the group of 16 former professional players, it was common for the discussion to emphasise that becoming a manager followed on naturally from being a player. For example:

> I feel that football is what I know best, what is most natural to me. (Interviewee 2)

> I've always looked at [management] as the next best thing to playing. (Interviewee 15)

> I know that I want to stay involved in football and I know that I love football and I enjoy football and it gives me a buzz, … the idea of [being a] manager is definitely foremost in my thoughts. (Interviewee 18)

> It's not a case of want, I need to be part of the game, I need to be there on a daily basis working with players and being involved in games. (Interviewee 16)

For all the interviewees, this was presented in an entirely positive manner: this, we consider, is about enabling them to stay involved in or maintain a connection with the sport

that they loved and that had been their life. These responses are not inconsistent with

previous studies on related areas like sport coaching motivation (McLean & Mallet, 2012;

Saury & Durand, 1998), where former athletes exhibit a sense of belonging or connectedness

to their environment. The interviewee comments are also consistent with Lavallee, Gordon

& Grove (1997) who found that the transition from athlete to coach was aided by maintaining

the support system and connectivity provided by the particular sport. More exceptionally,

three interviewees, one of whom was a former professional player, discussed their

perceptions of coaching competence. Notwithstanding the different types of response, these

contribute to the self-determined motivation of the participants.

> I made a conscious decision to retire from playing at quite an early age to focus on coaching because it was my passion to become a football manager. I felt that my skill set taught me to be a better football manager than I was a football player and I faced up to reality. (Interviewee 14)

> I absolutely loved [my first coaching certificate] and I had a passion for it right away. [But] I was in full time employment, [and] I was still playing, so the timing wasn't right to do any more …. But as I … started getting a wee bit older, I started to think, I want a career in coaching, I don't want to be working in a factory all my life, I've done that, I've progressed, I've developed, I've got people skills, … life experience. … I want to coach for a living … that's when I started putting these things in place to develop myself and gain the knowledge for further down the line. (Interviewee 9)

The responses are also interesting from a career theory perspective. The latter two

quotes are indicative of a protean career attitude to coaching and/or football management; a

recognition of the importance of individual agency in personal career development (Hall,

2002). Moreover, they offer an explicit acceptance of the existence of boundaries within the

football field and of the importance of things like coaching and management certificates as a

way of satisfying career gatekeepers that facilitates the crossing of boundaries. For example,

the Pro-Licence is a career field boundary put in place by national associations to ensure that

top level managers are better prepared for the challenges they will face.

The careers barrier is also institutional, however, in the sense of a prevailing

expectation that managers will be drawn from former professional players (Inkson, Gunz,

Ganesh, & Roper, 2012). This is consistent with the literature in that careers, historically, were not merely the property of individuals but of the collective. The social reference group to which an individual belonged shaped the nature and conception of his/her career and supplied the actors with direction as to available career paths, and the necessary language to make sense of their role and progress therein (Van Maanen, 1980; Garavan & Morley, 1997). In this respect, this evidence suggests that career definition, progression, and indeed ownership still lags considerably behind the current thinking and practice within business and management.

One interpretation of the responses reported from the 16 former professional players is of their seeking to legitimise professional football experience as a means of accessing a managerial position; an implicit acceptance of the institutionally imposed boundary. In practice, other institutional forces also continue to constrain the most agentic career actors in professional football (Mayrhofer et al., 2007), most notably ethnicity (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011) and gender. In this study, there was an acknowledgement that status as a former professional player provided aspirant managers with an easier route to securing a position, with individuals able to activate personal social networks to open up access to the 'hidden job market' (Granovetter, 1995). This form of career capital and its use in securing managerial opportunities was a source of annoyance to some of those interviewees:

> That's my frustration … where a former player who's never coached a team at any level … suddenly finds himself in charge of a professional football team with no experience and in almost every occasion it fails. … my challenge is to find out what is my route in to get that first opportunity where you can establish your credibility based on your skills and management and coaching. (Interviewee 5)

> [I recognised] that I had never been a big name footballer. … in the football game, boards of directors are often swayed by employing a manager who is more famous for his credentials in a playing capacity than what he does in a coaching capacity. So I felt I had to build up my coaching reputation to compete. (Interviewee 14)

The development of others. The second career theme identified was concerned with developmental or behavioural aspects. Here the emphasis was on competence, interviewees talking in terms of wanting to help and develop young players and of a desire to pass on and facilitate skill transfer. But at the same time, the quotes also demonstrate the interviewees' desire to prove their abilities as managers.

> Just a passion and drive [to be] involved in the game … helping … and educating [and] improving people, progressing on to the next level and making decisions and seeing them coming off. (Interviewee 16)

> [What] motivates me is seeing players improve … the hard work and effort that they've put in and [I've] put in starting to coming to fruition …. (Interviewee 15)

Several of the interviewees went further than a narrow conception of skill transfer, instead setting out their aspiration to create an environment and space in which people can learn and develop, and of building a team consistent with their beliefs and views on football. This holistic approach to athlete development and of an autonomy-supportive environment for both coach/manager and athlete is evident in other studies (McLean & Mallet, 2012) as well as in contemporary coaching frameworks, which identify shaping the environment as a primary coaching function (ICCE, ASOIF & LMU, 2013, pp. 16-17). Moreover, such responses are also indicative of what could be termed softer approaches to leadership and management, where the focus is on the context of the organisations, the environment, and the people therein (Yukl, 2012). The importance of creating an appropriate environment was emphasised by one aspirant manager:

> It is about opportunity … I think some people will never be able to get to a [particular] level but I think a lot of people will and if you give them an environment [in which they can] prosper, then I think you will make people better. (Interviewee 18)

Leadership and decision making. A third theme identified, in terms of career development, was the desire to take up a leadership role. The interviewees' responses reflected traditional or authoritarian perceptions of leadership (Carlyle, 1841; House, 1977;

Weber, 2002); focusing on desire to be in charge; a willingness to take responsibility and to make decisions; and a desire to lead, to inspire, and to motivate people to work towards one objective. For example:

> I want to be in charge of a team, I want to get my ideas, I want my team to play how I see football, how I think football should be played. (Interviewee 1)

> I feel as if I am prepared to make important decisions if I have to …if I have to make a big call, that's part of management, part of life really. (Interviewee 15)

> I've always liked looking up to people and … liked the thought of people looking up to me. I always like to treat people the way that I like to be treated. (Interviewee 3)

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of responses, it is informative that in terms of career development, all interviewees focused primarily on aspects of on-field football management. This is perhaps unsurprising: for the most part, these are individuals who have come through a football system; who wish to stay involved in *their* game; and who believe that their experience means that they have something to contribute in terms of developing and/or leading other footballers. Yet at the same time, there was some evidence of interviewees recognising the need for a manager to look beyond immediate on-field priorities. For example:

> [It's about looking] at football in a different perspective … [you need] to see the whole picture, to see exactly how things develop and how you prepare for it, it's almost like going into battle. (Interviewee 6)

Tasks and responsibilities

The responses provided around the tasks and responsibilities of a manager and of the challenges interviewees anticipate they will face as managers, were diverse and multi-faceted. Essentially, however, they can be ordered into two themes: football-related and people-related.

Football-related. When asked to identify perceived challenges, almost all interviewees began by identifying football-related challenges; crucially, the need to get results.

> Definitely the first main challenge is winning football matches. That's what you're judged on. Nothing else matters … if you don't win football matches, you'll be down the road. That's a given. That's just the nature of the beast. (Interviewee 12)

> I think when you're involved in football, you know its results driven and its performance related. (Interviewee 9)

Results on the pitch are, of course, a highly visible and an enduring performance indicator and ostensibly, organisational effectiveness in many professional football clubs is judged on this end-result variable (Soucie, 1994). As a result, football results are used to determine a manager's success. Moreover, recent evidence suggests a trend towards shorter-term monitoring, with managers' jobs security increasingly dependent on the outcome of recent matches (d'Addona & Kind, 2012). However, the consequences of the emphasis thereon is exacerbated for many of today's managers and aspirant managers by the declining managerial job security and by the knowledge that there are many more aspirant managers than there are managerial positions (Bridgewater, 2010). Commenting on the record number of dismissals/sackings of managers in English football during season 2012/13, Richard Bevan, the Chief Executive of the League Managers' Association in England, said: *"It's embarrassing for the game that all of those sackings [33 as of March 2013] are unfair dismissals. The volatility is undermining the profession"* (BBC Sport, 2013).

For many managers, this is an industry in which power relations are universally asymmetrical, with football club directors holding all the power. Pressure to win, coupled with the likely consequences of failure, are significant external influences on perceptions of autonomy, and would be expected to have a negative effect on self-determined motivation (McLean & Mallet, 2012; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Yet while all interviewees acknowledged the chronic job insecurity and the prevailing power structure, there was

widespread acceptance that it came with the 'territory', and an acceptance that the manager

will be the scapegoat (Hughes et al., 2010). Football results are accepted as the primary

objective and measure of success. Hence the role of the manager is to do all they can to

maximise their chance of success and by extension, to accept responsibility if the set

objectives are not achieved. This view emphasises the fundamental importance of the

constraining aspects of the social context in which the career of the manager unfolds (Bailyn,

1989; Adamson et al., 1998). Ostensibly, the power relations in clubs, coupled with the

wider football culture, results in managers accepting that they are sole locus of explanation if

success is not forthcoming (Wagg, 2007). This acceptance occurs despite the fact that recent

research evidence on managerial change for the Barclays Premier League suggests that while

in the short-term change may lead to a brief reprieve in poor performance, over the long-

term, performance deteriorates again due to underlying organisational weaknesses (Hughes et

al., 2010). As one aspirant manager stated:

> But no matter how many leadership seminars you attend, …, the players will
> believe in you if you win. … the training that we're getting through the Pro-
> Licence … increases the likelihood of us … being successful. But ultimately
> that belief and buy in is going to be fed by victories and that's what you have
> to get. (Interviewee 5)

People-related. People issues and people management more generally were identified

by many of the interviewees as being important challenges for prospective managers. This is

unsurprising: it has long been recognised that managing people is the most important

responsibility in any organisation because almost everything else depends upon that (Likert,

1959).

In seeking to achieve the all-important objective of winning games, several

interviewees stressed various people-related challenges. These included: squad recruitment

and retention; ensuring that they had the right sort of players and characters in the team and

in the dressing room; having individuals who would align to their vision; and of creating the

right sort of environment within which players would respond to their supervision.

> You've got to get [the football side] right, get players all working for you, … keeping people happy, making them want to come to work, want to come to training … make it a team achievement as far as the club's concerned, all going in the same direction. I think that's the most important … the coaching, the philosophy. (Interviewee 2)

> I think key things for a manager … you might not like me … but we're going to work – [to] create an environment that you enjoy coming to work with. (Interviewee 13)

Jones and Wallace (2006) suggest that while in any social environment, no one can

exert absolute control over anyone else, in football clubs asymmetrical power relations are

common, not just between directors and manager, but also in terms of the 'commanding

manager's' ability to exercise authority over dependent players. In practice, however, power

is inter-active and athletes are never without power (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004). Several

interviewees recognised that it was players who had the power to make and break them. The

power of players was demonstrated vividly in the sacking in September 2013 of Sunderland

manager, Paulo Di Canio, dismissed after less than six months in post after senior players

made representations to the club's Chief Executive. It was reported that while the players

recognised Di Canio's coaching expertise, serious concerns were raised over his management

and leadership style (Taylor & Fifield, 2013).

It was suggested by some interviewees that playing ability would buy you a little

time; consistent with the view that the reputation and credibility of great players is one of the

factors that may contribute to managerial expertise (Bridgewater, Kahn & Goodall, 2011).

This can be characterised as a form of career capital; symbolic or social capital recognised by

other actors and the rules of the field as legitimate, valid and useful (Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

However, the durability of this capital and longevity of such a grace period was questioned

by one of the interviewees, not previously a professional player:

> That credibility for well-known players only lasts until your first training session or your first match. (Interviewee 5)

The challenge of dealing with player egos and convincing them to subordinate those for the good of a team is an issue for all managers (Bridgewater et al., 2011). However, interviewees identified it as a particular challenge for new managers: specifically, how best to deal with a group of staff, often highly paid, invariably highly opinionated, often willing to challenge or highlight any perceived weaknesses?

> In football people are so willing to cut across you, cut you down if they perceive a lack of experience or knowledge or a lack of anything, even if they still think you're good at what you do. If there's an opportunity there, I think people will try … to push themselves forward. (Interviewee 2)

> … players are very opinionated and … unlike business, players will challenge management decisions. I think you have to be very prepared for that and how to deal with these kind of scenarios. (Interviewee 14)

> For me, at the top level, I think its managing staff who are more high profile and probably better paid than you. (Interviewee 3)

> Getting the trust of the players. Because you're going in as a young manager … they're going to play on that straight away. They're going to say, I'm going to test him … So I think you've got to be strong with that and make sure they trust you and …you do that by making sure the training's good, you're fair with them, you're very open minded, … the door's always open if they want to talk to you. (Interviewee 4)

Position of a football manager in organisational structures

An interesting finding in this context was an acceptance by a small number of interviewees that managing people encompassed learning to trust others within the organisation and to accept that a manager could not and should not seek to be in control of everything. Such a view sits in stark contrast to more traditional characterisations of the role and position of the manager within British football clubs, as being the person 'in charge' — the commanding manager.

One form of collaborative working is 'distributed leadership' (DL). In DL, rather than having individual leaders, leadership is a responsibility and function of the entire organisation. This DL model rejects the notion of the 'heroic leader' as the saviour of the organisation, instead, emphasising the need to decrease the dependence of followers on a

figurehead, hopefully leading to empowerment through the development of leadership skills

(Hartley & Benington, 2010). DL relates to collective goal-setting and achievement and

allows followers to be empowered as leaders and to lead tasks; to knowledge distribution; to

organisation and sub-section direction. In this respect, leadership must be understood in

terms of leadership practices and organisational interventions, rather than just personal

behavioural style or competences. The focus is on organisational relations, connectedness,

interventions into the organisation system, changing organisation practices and processes

(Turnbull-James, 2011).

The importance of not seeking to exert control over all situations was identified by a

number of interviewees:

> Well, the course is really good at making you realise that there's a lot of
> things you can't actually control at a football club … [so concentrate] on
> managing and organising the things that you can … Look at the important
> priorities and [don't] worry about the things that will cause stress and
> problems. (Interviewee 7)

> You can only change some things and you might only change a number of
> things a wee bit, but as long as you feel that these changes are enhancing you
> and making you successful within your job [then that is good]. You can't
> control everything …maybe more managers have to accept that. It is maybe
> too big a role now and the responsibilities need to be shared more.
> (Interviewee 14)

Within the organisation, a key challenge identified was building and developing

relationships with people beyond one's players. This has two dimensions: first, learning to

delegate and developing a support team to improve the manager's decision-making capacity

by providing information and recommendations (Lyle, 2002), and second, investing time in

building and developing relationships with other key individuals within the organisation.

Both dimensions were identified by interviewees:

> I'm not a person who would employ people and not let them do the job. I've
> come across managers [who want] to do everything and, for me, it just
> doesn't work. If I'm not here I've got to be able to trust [my] people …, that
> everything would be fine and they would carry it out in the same way that I
> would if I was here. (Interviewee 15)

> … the relationship with the board, … with staff, … with supporters … they're key things to being successful … [if] you can build relationships, then that buys you maybe a little more time. If you can get your philosophy and your values across … then it gives you the time to build what you're trying to achieve … getting a good environment is really, really important for success. (Interviewee 9)

> It's all about avoiding big problems … [trying to] deal with people in the correct manner like I would expect people to treat me. (Interviewee 10)

How the changing organisation impacts the role of football manager

Unquestionably the business transformation of football and its clubs over the last two decades or so has implications for managers. One of the principal concerns identified by interviewees was what they saw as their inadequate education and/or preparedness to deal with non-football matters that had become pervasive in football clubs at all levels, in particular around financial and budgeting matters and also what interviewees termed 'football club politics'.

> Being educated enough to deal with the financial side of things …, the budgeting …keeping everything on track and running it as a business. (Interviewee 3)

> … the politics … can be hard to deal with … it is learning on your feet. I didn't have the management course … before I got the job or any form of training in how to deal with going into a board room or going into a meeting. … I had to learn quick because there's all different types of people in that room and when you're the manager …and you maybe want something, you need to know how to … play it at times and who you can speak to and who you can't speak to. … I found [it] quite draining because there was a lot of things going on behind the scenes. (Interviewee 12)

This concern focused not only a lack of technical knowledge, but also a lack of familiarity and confidence with the language and discourse used by other (non-footballing) professionals in clubs which left them disadvantaged, particularly around technical issues like finance and budget setting. One of the challenges for managers is to acquire upward power and influence to secure required resources, reward competent and achieving staff, and be supported to make changes (Soucie, 1994). Interviewees identified challenges around developing softer management skills concerned with influence, negotiation and communication, acknowledging the contribution made by the Pro-Licence course and the

management workshops in helping them develop these softer skills and technical knowledge.

It was also clear from the interviews, as well as from post-workshop evaluation feedback, that

many aspirant managers would welcome additional support in these areas in order to be as

prepared as possible for any management position.

> The thing that's opened my eyes especially with the Pro-Licence … is how you have to deal with these people, … accountants, … The challenge is I've got to embrace [the business side of the game] as much as I can because I know that that is part of [football], especially now. … The only thing I'm worried about me is when it gets to the business side of it. (Interviewee 1)

> I think football is a long way behind business and other sports in terms of how it might [be led]. I think football is very different to a lot of … organisations but I think it [has caught up in the last few years]. But I've been amazed by this course how [much detail we have gone into about] management and leadership. (Interviewee 7)

> The coaching badges that I've done … are just football. Whereas the Pro-Licence is showing the lads [the wider perspective]. It's like, oh I didn't think we'd have to do all that … you know, the little things even like the [simulated] board meeting that we had, I was sat in that and I was like, wow, is this what it's really like? (Interviewee 1)

These comments back up previous, anecdotal evidence on the perceived value of

courses such as that provided by the SFA (see, for example, Grieve, 2009), and sit in contrast

to previous work with managers which suggested a suspicion of intellectualism (Carter,

2006). What such comments suggest is an internalising of an external regulation, i.e. that the

content of courses such as the Pro-Licence is increasingly valued and endorsed by the

individuals attending those courses (Deci & Ryan, 1985; McLean, Mallet & Newcombe,

2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Unquestionably, aspirant managers are provided with more support and education

than was previously the case, both through national association Pro-Licence courses and also

through the availability of accredited programmes such as the LMA Certificate in Football

Management at Warwick University. Still, it is chastening to compare these findings to a

study by Wilders (1976, p. 157) of managers in the English Football league in the 1970s

which found that "of those managers who had not received any form of training, 16 [out of

45] managers indicated that some form of business, man-management and financial course would have helped them in taking up their careers in football management".

Contribution

Conclusion

While inevitably there is overlap between the role of a coach and that of a football manager, it is clear from this study that management encompasses functions beyond coaching, most visibly around leadership and people management. Importantly, this is not restricted merely to the management of players however important this is, but takes cognisance of the central role of the manager within a club's organisational structure and its distinct power framework, and hence includes the management of support staff and vitally, of a club's directors and executives. While this paper has greatly enhanced our understanding of the role and responsibilities of a manager, an opportunity exists through our follow up research to build a more comprehensive typology of football management.

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that football management is seen as a career: related to but separate from coaching; a career in which institutional barriers in the shape of prior playing experience continue to be seen as important. While the concept of a career embraces the notion of development and of progression, with some logic to the linkages between positions over time (Adamson et al., 1998), in much of professional football this simply does not apply. Some structure is provided to the concept of a football management career through the accreditation courses provided by organisations like the SFA, while career progression is suggested by the requirement that candidates cannot complete the Pro-Licence (with its emphasis on management) until they have completed coaching-focused courses lower down in the qualification pyramid. But it remains the case that there is often little apparent logic to an individual's progression to a manager's position or at times their

readiness for this progression. The evidence presented here indicates an appetite for a more structured and supported career pathway for aspirant managers.

Implications

These preliminary interviews with participants on the SFA Pro-License course have demonstrated that, notwithstanding the challenging context of football management, there remain a committed group of individuals who are driven by a desire to test themselves. While it is acknowledged that education has its limits, the evidence from this study shows that it has a key role to play in helping to prepare aspirant managers for challenges that they accept lie ahead. The positive attitude and enthusiastic response of the interview cohort to the management education that they have received to date, suggests that much more could, and should, be done in this area to up-skill and to educate them to better deal with the challenges that they will face as managers in the business of football. At the same time, support should also be offered to managers and aspirant managers on contemporary career thinking and career development, drawing on sport-specific and more generic literature. For governing bodies and football player associations, it is important to understand further the need for qualifications in general and for careers support, and to recognise the influence these may have on managerial success and turnover.

Suggestions for further research

The significantly under-developed literature around football management provides numerous opportunities for further research arising from this study. In terms of our study, opportunities exist for more detailed study on 1) qualifications, education and training; and 2) assuming a managerial identity. Four of the cohort of interviewees in this project had formal academic qualifications. Longitudinal research, particularly a comprehensive educational needs analysis, will further help in understanding if qualifications in general, and formal education and training in particular, considerably influence managerial success and turnover.

More generally, becoming a manager accepts that an individual appointed by a club then assumes an identity as a manager: for example, the look, the talk, the walk, how they are perceived by the directors, media, fans and more importantly, players. This assumption of behaviour and attitude will be explored in terms of aspirant managers, with an opportunity to contrast former players with those with no experience of professional football in general, or the dressing room culture in particular.

Final thoughts

The contemporary football club and football industry has contrasting faces. One face is of an unchanging activity. Many of today's clubs came into existence when the sport first professionalised. For communities, such clubs are an enduring and stable presence; for fans, supporting a club continues to be about long-term commitment. On the field of play, the rules of the game are largely unaltered. Yet the other face is of a rapidly changing activity: its clubs and its players increasingly concerned and dominated by business and financial matters and by modernisation agendas.

The manager remains a pivotal figure in almost all British football clubs. Interestingly, academic literature on the role played by the manager and on the implications thereon of football's changing context remains underdeveloped. Yet more than anyone else, the manager is faced with the challenge of keeping both faces of football content. The increased focus on the business of football, ranging from escalating revenue streams to financial sustainability, places distinct pressures on the manager. Today's managers have to be responsive to these challenges, accepting of their potential implications for the nature of their role; acquiescent to the media and public scrutiny of their performance; and at the same time cognisant of the chronic insecurity of their position. Yet, ultimately the manager's principal objective and one which he/she continues to be solely accountable for, remains as it always has been — winning football matches in an extraordinarily competitive environment

in which there will always be many more losers than winners. By definition, team sport is a zero sum game — even if all managers become better managers and leaders, the same number will continue to fail in terms of the principal objective of winning games and competitions (Gammelsæter, 2013).

The belief among many directors and many supporters, articulated directly and indirectly through new and old media, that managerial change will make it easier to achieve that overriding objective is akin to a structural weakness in the football industry. Football club owners and directors are crucial gatekeepers in football management. The evidence from this research should act as an encouragement to these individuals to reflect more critically on their recruitment and retention decision making, including greater consideration on institutional barriers around gender and race, and on weaknesses in the career support offered, both in terms of progression from player to manager and subsequent support. Central to this is a need for greater awareness of the risks to the long term success of any football organisation from an over-emphasis on short-term external success criteria (football victories).

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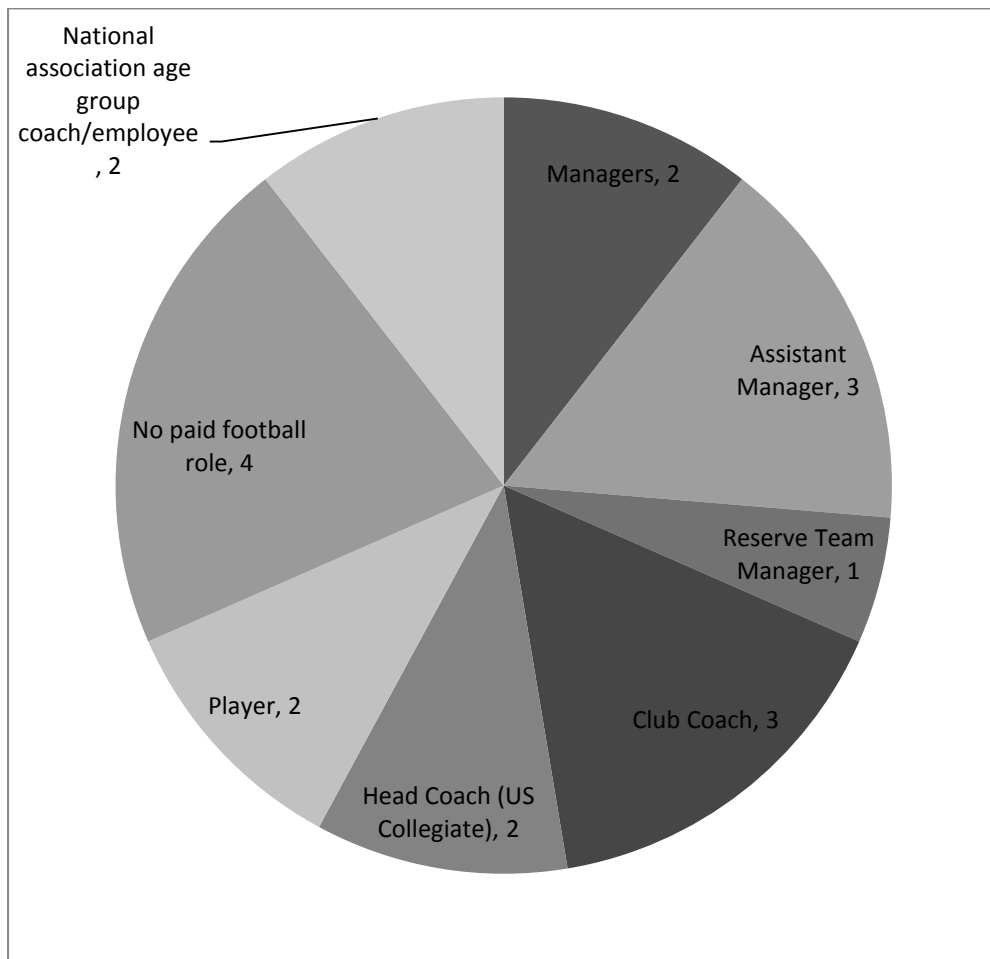Yukl, G. (2012). *Leadership in organizations* (8th ed). Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education.

Figure 1: Pro-Licence Candidate Employment as at November 2011