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Reconciling the maintenance of on-field success with off-field player development: A case study of a club culture within the Australian Football League

Matthew Pink*, John Saunders, Justine Stynes

Australian Catholic University, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: As a contribution to developing understanding of how professional athletes may successfully develop a dual career and maintain a balance between life on and off the field, the present study sought to analyse a professional Australian Football club culture that has been identified within the industry as successfully supporting player dual career development. At the same time the club has been able to maintain a successful on-field record.

Methods: A case study methodology was used for the analysis with Schein's (2010) levels of organisational culture providing a theoretical framework. Data were collected by means of fifteen interviews which included players (11), and non-playing staff (4) comprising an executive staff member, a coach, a team manager, and the player development manager. Observations were also made and recorded by the first author during a two week immersion in the club environment.

Results: Four basic assumptions that explained the coherence between espoused values and artefacts concerning dual career development were identified. They were that: dual career development is important however football comes first; balancing sport and off-field life ensures players' well-being and facilitates on-field performance; players should be encouraged to find personal meaning in their dual career activity, and; the club has an ethical responsibility to support player dual career development.

Conclusion: Analysis of the findings suggests that the successful support of dual careers requires a coherent club culture, where related activities exist as part of a holistic approach to player development. This approach must recognise the priority placed on athletic performance.

Introduction

The career transition literature (e.g., Lally, 2007; Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009; Stambulova, Stephan, & Jäphag, 2007) has highlighted the need for professional athletes to maintain a life away from the arena and to concurrently develop a dual career in order to prepare for athletic retirement. Such 'off-field' development appears to mitigate the chances of the athlete experiencing difficulty upon retirement not just vocationally and financially, but also psychologically (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013). Those athletes who have a limited sense of self beyond the athletic role and who fail to engage in dual career development appear to be at the greatest risk of experiencing difficulty, both in their present sporting career and beyond (CecićErpič, Wylleman, & Zupančič, 2004; Park et al., 2013; Stambulova et al., 2007). It is also necessary to consider whether the professional environments these athletes are immersed in adequately support their development as 'whole people' (Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Poczwardowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Haberl, 2013; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and this includes preparing for life after sport. This paper reports an exploratory study as to how a professional Australian Football League (AFL) club culture addresses the issue of supporting athletes' personal development including the development of a dual career.

Athletes' career/dual career development

Early athlete career transition literature had adopted a focus on retirement due to commonly observed problems high profile

* Corresponding author. School of Exercise Science, 1100 Nudgee Rd, Banyo, QLD, 4014, Australia. Tel.: +61 432277168.
E-mail address: Matthew.Pink@acu.edu.au (M. Pink).

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athletes have faced when they have no longer been able to participate in an activity that had been their livelihood, their passion, and a substantial component of their identity (CecićErpič et al., 2004; Lavallee, 2000). Through the 1990s research began to focus on not just retirement, but rather the athletic career, as comprising a series of normative transitions between common stages such as initiation/sampling, development/specialisation, mastery/investment, and to the eventual discontinuation from sport (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). An important reflection of this shift is to be found in the introduction of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of transitions faced by athletes. In addition to its consideration of the stages and transitions of an athletic career, the model put forward the need to take a 'whole person' approach and consider athletes' development from a holistic lifespan perspective that is in both athletic and non-athletic domains (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013). Thus, the model considers the athlete as a person beyond the athletic role and identifies parallel transitions in the athlete's psychological, psycho-social, academic and vocational domains. Wylleman et al. (2013) argued that the model reflects the "concurrent, interactive, and reciprocal nature" (p.35) of the athlete's development in these domains. Hence there is the need to develop the 'whole person' to support the athlete's healthy development and well-being, a part of which will be the development of a dual career.

Dual career development

For the purposes of this paper, dual career development for athletes is operationalised as development towards an additional career (as for example through education or vocational training) whilst training and competing as an elite athlete (Aquilina, 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). For professional athletes, although competing in their sport might well be their primary and immediate career choice, the reality is that this career will end much earlier than in other professions (e.g., accountant or teacher) through age related decline, injury, or de-selection (Hickey & Kelly, 2008; Lavallee, 2005). Dual career development can however be problematic (Aquilina, 2013; Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, & Lindahl, 2015; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013) due to the considerable amount of time elite and professional athletes must dedicate to their sport. Elite athletes will often prioritise their athletic role to the detriment of development in their 'other career' (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Hickey & Kelly, 2005; North & Lavallee, 2004; Stambulova et al., 2015). Consequently, the support they receive within their sporting organisation can be expected to influence their abilities to give the other career appropriate attention (Stambulova et al., 2015). This paper examines the culture of a professional sporting organisation within a highly competitive environment which has been identified as supportive of athletes' dual career development and the maintenance of a balanced lifestyle.

An ecological perspective on athletes' career development

Literature that draws on organisational psychology in order to provide a focus on athlete development is beginning to make an increasing contribution to the sport psychology literature (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Wagstaff, Fletcher, and Hanton (2011) have put forward the notion of Positive Organisational Psychology in Sport (POPS) and the need to focus on organisational success factors alongside athlete development. Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler's (2010; 2011) holistic ecological approach has also recently been used to explore the complex interactions between athletes and their environment. In contrast to the holistic lifespan approach (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) that follows the career path of the athlete and challenges in athletic and non-athletic domains, the holistic ecological approach focuses on the environment and surrounding culture as a critical starting point concerning the development of the athlete. Such a shift in focus has the potential to offer new insights into athlete development and in the case of the present paper, the development of a dual career.

Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler (2010; 2011) considered micro, macro, athletic, and non-athletic influences on athletes within the Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) and also those factors (viz. the pre-conditions, processes, and organisational culture) that contributed to the success of an organisation. At the micro level, this related to the spaces where athletes spend their daily lives within both athletic and non-athletic domains (e.g., the sporting club, dual career activity, etc.). At the macro level this considered the influence of sporting bodies, educational institutions and both sporting and national cultures. It is the consideration of macro and micro level structures as well as both athletic and non-athletic domains that characterised the 'holistic' nature of the analysis. Although the present paper focuses on the micro level and only a component of that, awareness of these more holistic perspectives alert the reader to the significance of the macro level influences provided by the broader AFL industry on the development of the individual club culture. From the perspectives of the narrower focus, Schein's (1990) notion of levels of culture has proved a useful way to conceptualise and explore the culture of an organisation. Schein defined culture as.

> A pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p.111).

At the first level are the visible *artefacts* (e.g., the way members communicate, dress, the physical layout, and any directly observable phenomena that may give clues about the culture). Artefacts however are quite superficial in nature (Schein, 1990) and it is not until we understand the beliefs behind these artefacts that we start to understand the 'why' behind organisational patterns of behaviour. *Espoused values* are those that members describe as guiding the behaviour of the organisation. It is at this level that the observer is able to decipher what members typically communicate as organisational values and this may or may not be consistent with surface manifestations of behaviour (Schein, 2010). Consistencies (or indeed inconsistencies) between the values of an organisation and its cultural artefacts can best be understood by uncovering the *basic underlying assumptions* (herein basic assumptions). Schein (1990) described basic assumptions as the taken for granted (and usually unconscious) assumptions that give rise to members' interpretations of espoused values, organisational policies, and ultimately influence behaviour. It is through these basic assumptions that an understanding of *how* and *why* espoused values influence behaviour the way they do can be obtained.

Athletes' dual career development in Australia

In Australia, elite and professional athletic developmental pathways are largely separated from the educational sector (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Gulbin, Croser, Morely, & Weissensteiner, 2013) in contrast to the situation in the United States (Spavero, Cahlip, & Green, 2008; Weiss & Robinson, 2013) where such pathways are via educational institutions and the maintenance of grades is a requirement to compete. In professional sports such as AFL or Rugby League, talented athletes typically begin their first professional contract at 18 after completing high school. As both

vocational and higher education training and professional sport careers are developed after the completion of formal schooling, there have been few common links between them. It thus remains a challenge for elite sporting organisations and educational institutions to provide genuine opportunity and support for athletes' dual career development despite the introduction of initiatives such as the Elite Athlete Friendly University scheme (Australian Sports Commission [ASC], 2010). As described in Hickey and Kelly's (2008) investigation of early, middle, and late career AFL players (the career stage typology used in the present study), professional sporting clubs will often 'talk the talk' of dual career development due to external influences (such as from player associations or sport governing bodies). However they also described that the actual support players received was often little more than rhetoric given the priority on athletic performance. This is despite the fact that some research has suggested that engagement in dual career activities may actually lead to a performance benefit for athletes through contributing to a sense of balance in life and the security of preparing for the future (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Poczwardowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Haberl, 2013; Price, Morrison, & Arnold, 2010).

Support programs to mediate between the sporting clubs and the educational institutions have been developed for Australian athletes by the Sports Institutes and Academies. The National Athlete Career Education (NACE) program has offered athletes support in their education, career transition, and provided lifestyle management, and personal development courses. This program has been recently reported as offering its services to over 3000 athletes (ASC, 2010). It is available to scholarship holding athletes within national and state academies of sport and although there appears to be a lack of objective evidence for the effectiveness of NACE in supporting career transitions (Chambers, Gordon, & Morris, 2013), athlete opinion has reported that having access to NACE has influenced their performance positively (Fraser, Fogarty, & Albion, 2010).

Only a small percentage of athletes who access NACE are professional. However, although Chambers et al. (2013) have described that professional sport governing bodies within Australia (such as the AFL, National Rugby League, etc.) have recently begun to more energetically promote their athletes' involvement in dual career development, they further argued that the quality with which some athletes have engaged in dual career activities has been questionable. Supporting this argument Cosh and Tully (2014) found Australian elite athletes often report doing the 'bare minimum' to pass and although the athletes in their study communicated a value for dual career development, they cited barriers related to a need to prioritise their sport, the values within their sporting environments, and time available.

The AFL constitutes the elite professional competition of Australian Rules football. It is arguably the highest profile sport in Australia (Dickson & Stewart, 2007) and players competing in this competition have the potential to earn up to one million Australian dollars per season with the average wage being approximately $250,000 (Bowen & Ryan, 2013). A playing career in the AFL is however typically short, averaging slightly more than six years (Baldwin, 2014). Hence, the reality is that most, apart from a very high earning few, will need to develop a second career.

Players in the AFL are supported by the Australian Football League Players' Association (AFLPA) which functions effectively as a trade union advocating for player rights and welfare. The mission of the AFLPA is to "assist players to realise their potential through provision of education and training opportunities, and personal support" (Clarke & Salter, 2010, p.34). This is mainly achieved through negotiating collective bargaining agreements at league level which have mandated not only remuneration parameters but also the scheduling of dedicated time for off-field development and a requirement for each of the eighteen clubs to hire a suitably qualified player development manager (PDM) with responsibility for facilitating the personal development and well-being of its players.

The AFLPA runs various player development and well-being courses across the league that can be incorporated into club functioning. Some examples include the "Football Apprenticeship" (preparing first year players for life as a professional athlete), "Play well" (mental health, mental skills, and relationships), and educational and vocational training support and incentives (AFLPA, 2011). Although the AFLPA provides considerable support for player dual career development and the notion is supported by the league's governing body, the encouragement for and availability of such activities is ultimately a function of each of the 18 clubs, their cultures, and the capacities of their PDMs. Consequently, as reported by Chambers et al. (2013) and Hickey and Kelly (2008), this support varies considerably from club to club. It is valuable then to consider the culture of an AFL club that is considered to be supportive of such activities and also respond to the call of Chambers et al. (2013) for research on athlete career assistance that arises from a positive psychology viewpoint. The aim of this study was therefore to explore the culture of an AFL club considered supportive of dual career development whilst maintaining a high level of on-field success.

Methods

An explorative integrative case study was chosen for the purposes of this study. Maaloe (2009) described an explorative integrative case study as involving "a cyclic approach of continuous dialogue between pre-chosen theories, generated data, our interpretation, feedback from our informants, which hopefully will lead us to more inclusive theory building or even understanding" (p. 3). In the present study, Schein's (1990; 2010) levels of organisational culture provided an initial theoretical framework for analysing the data set. Methods of data collection included one-on-one interviews and participant observation.

Club selection

The club selected as the focus of this study had been independently identified by the AFLPA and a senior member of the Australian Football League Coaches' Association (AFLCA) as a successful example of support for player dual career and off-field development and well-being. The club had a high proportion (approximately 85%) of players involved in some form of dual career development (not compulsory in the AFL). It was also considered as supportive of AFLPA programs and strategies. The club also had one of the more successful recent on-field records characterised by regular appearances in the finals/play-offs over the last ten years, suggesting that the support of the players' dual career development had been achieved without compromising on-field performance.

Participants

Members of the club were observed carrying out their daily activities during the first author's period of immersion in the environment. Participation in the interviews was organised through consultation with the PDM and determined by the availability and willingness of club members. However a selection of players at various career stages was consciously sought as well as examples of players who did and did not engage in dual career activities. This was in order to seek some degree of

representativeness of the player list (typically 44–48 players). Four early career (i.e., 0–4 years), four middle career players (i.e., 4+ to 8 years), and three late career players (i.e., 8+ years) were recruited for interviews following Hickey and Kelly's (2008) typology. Only one of the early career players was engaged in a dual career activity. Three were engaged in the middle career stage and all three players in the late career stage. With respect to the 'non-playing' staff, the PDM, a member of the executive football staff, a development coach, and a team manager were available and willing to participate in interviews.

Research methods

Observations recorded by the first author produced a detailed description of artefacts within the club environment. According to Schein's (2010) recommendations, the focus of observations included features of the physical environment such as office placements, symbols, and notices. Identification of artefacts also included observable behaviour, such as style of clothing, interactions between club members, and the style of language used (Schein, 2010). Particular attention was also paid to players' daily interactions with the PDM, their engagement in non-sport activities such as educational or social activities, and spontaneous comments from all participants within the club environment concerning life outside of football. Observations were written in narrative style and recorded in a daily journal.

A semi-structured question guide was designed for the interview process according to the recommendations of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). It began with introductory questions such as "what is it like to be at your current career stage?" These were designed to be 'lighter' in nature and encourage interaction with the researcher. The guide then prompted the exploration of the players' engagement in non-football activities through questions such as "is there anything that the club gets you to do outside of football?" Finally, questions directly concerning the club culture such as "how would you describe the culture of (withheld) football club?" were posed. These questions served as guides only and conversations were allowed to evolve naturally, facilitated by interviewer prompts and probes. The framing of the questions was adjusted for non-playing staff members consistent with the purpose of exploring their views of club values and initiatives concerning the practice and support of dual career development.

Procedure

Data were collected during a two week period in June 2012. This was in the mid-season at a time when players were pursuing their dual career/personal development activities in tandem with the pressures of the competitive league season. This allowed for the exploration of the culture at a time of 'characteristic' levels of challenge. The first author was immersed in the club environment with a focus on observing the player development department and its program. Interviews occurred at the club in the privacy of one of the empty player development offices and lasted 29 min on average. It was explained to interviewees that there were no right or wrong answers and that what was expressed within the discussions would remain anonymous (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data analysis

Interview transcripts and observation records were imported into the NVivo 9 qualitative analysis software. A deductive-inductive content analysis was initiated by constructing a node tree containing Schein's levels of organisational culture similar to the steps described by Henriksen et al. (2010). The daily observation records were then reviewed, observable artefacts were identified and segments of relevant text were coded as 'sub-nodes' under the parent artefacts node in NVivo. Espoused values were extracted with reference to the interview transcripts by identifying meaning units (MUs) or "constellations" of words that contained a central meaning or idea (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p.106). Meaning units were then subject to meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), a process that produced a concise description of the content. As the data analysis progressed, meaning units that encapsulated similar ideas were grouped together via the node function in NVivo and the espoused value they represented was identified. As new espoused values emerged, new nodes were created and identified similar to the process described by Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler (2011). Data that had been previously coded were also checked for their potential contribution to the newly identified values as a means of confirming the support for both the early and later emerging values.

The identification of basic assumptions was then undertaken through further analysis of the artefacts and espoused values. Through considering the themes and the data that supported them, a process of review and interrogation of the data occurred until a series of interconnected basic assumptions that could effectively explain the level of coherence between espoused values and observable artefacts were revealed. Summaries of how these assumptions were interlinked with the espoused values and artefacts within the club culture were then written. The trustworthiness (Krefting, 1991; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) of the findings was supported through the use of data from multiple sources, a confirmability audit undertaken by an independent academic who reviewed the analysis and flagged any nodes that had questionable or unclear interpretations, and a form of member checking where the findings of the study were communicated back to the club via an interactive presentation. Participants were able to provide feedback on all aspects of the analysis of the club culture. With minor suggestions for improvement as a result of both these processes the analysis was confirmed as an appropriate representation of the culture.

Results

The club culture with regard to dual career and 'holistic' player development is summarised in Fig. 1. Schein's (1990; 2010) levels of organisational culture provide the framework to identify artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions of the culture. A description of each of these levels of culture follows. The frequency of MUs identified in the data as supporting each of the higher order espoused values are presented in brackets.

Artefacts

The following summary of relevant observable artefacts is presented in three higher order themes. Their significance however needs to be viewed through the prism of the espoused values and basic assumptions of the culture.

Player development infrastructure

The investment in the club's player development infrastructure could be seen in the presence of dedicated player development areas. There were four spacious offices that were in the centre of the club facility underneath one of the grandstands. Two of the offices were occupied by player development and welfare staff and the remaining two were vacant. These offices were spaces where players could work on dual career and personal development activities in their spare time. In addition to the dedicated player development area there was a boardroom style office, with a whiteboard and projector that was available for the conduct of

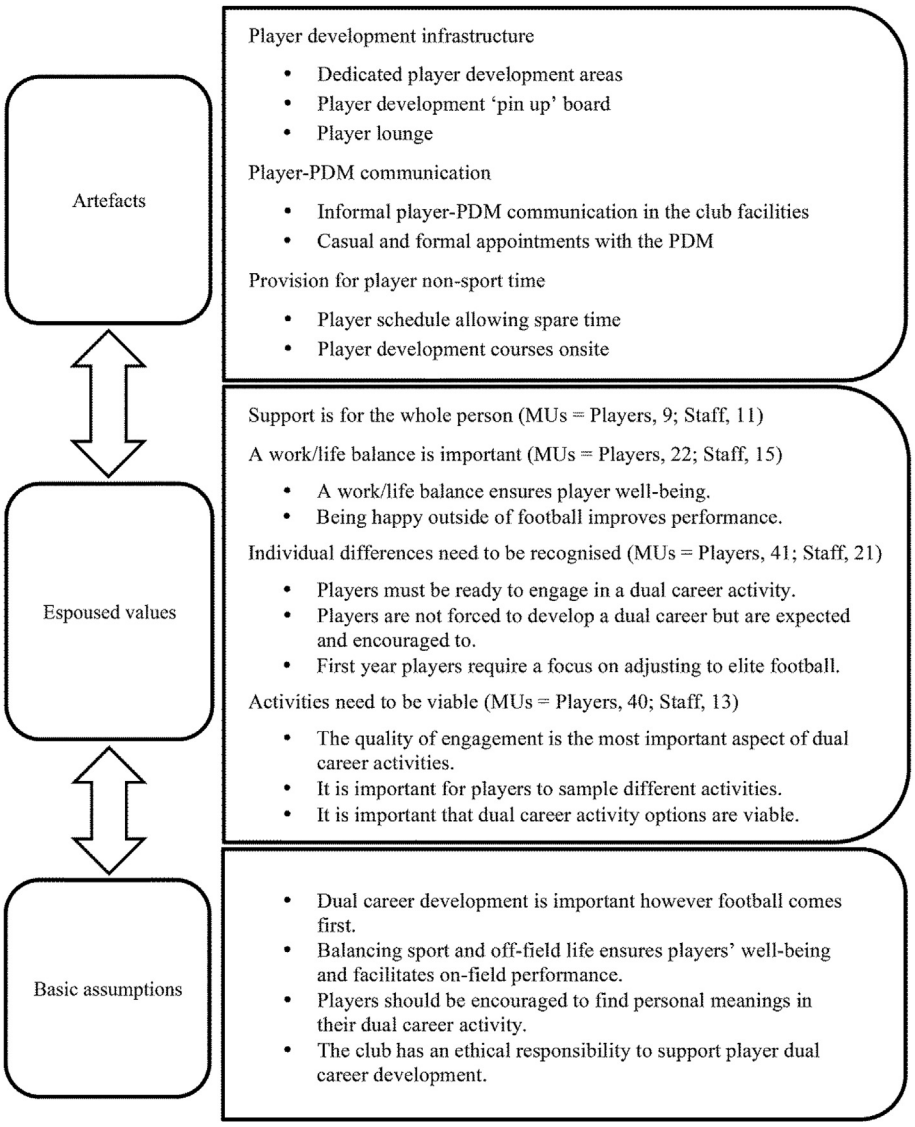

Fig. 1. Artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions of the dual career and off-field development culture presented. MUs = Meaning units.

player development courses. Within the main corridor of the clubhouse a player development pin up board could be seen where various career and enrichment opportunities were listed, such as financial advice seminars, upcoming vocational and educational courses, and responsible gambling information. Finally, there was a dedicated player lounge where players could rest and take meals in between sessions. This room included couches, a TV, dining table, and a kitchen area.

Player-PDM communication

Regular and warm exchanges between the PDM and the players could be observed in the corridors of the club. These exchanges would typically be jovial, often invoking a characteristically 'dry' sense of Australian humour and there would be eye contact between the player and the PDM with what would be considered 'open' body language. Players would frequently be seen entering the PDM's office for consultation. Sometimes there would be an open door and on other occasions the door would be shut. The PDM also engaged in regular casual 'catch ups' with the players outside the club premises at local coffee shops. The first author sat in on several of these 'catch ups'. During these sessions the PDM and the player/s would discuss many topics such as travel overseas, girls, and occasionally dual career opportunities or matters at the club. In casual conversation the PDM remarked that contact with the players' worlds outside 'footy' created a level of informality which made it easier to build a relationship with the player. He considered this essential in supporting their development outside of football.

Provision for player non-sport time

It was observed that although there were times of extreme activity in the club there were also times when the work intensity slowed down and players appeared to have a lot of spare time during what would, in contemporary workplaces, have been considered 'normal' working hours. During these times, players generally dressed in casual clothes. During time that was not dedicated to football focussed activities, 'in house' player development courses could be observed being conducted in the boardroom. One such example was an AFLPA 'play well' session with early career players that covered aspects of stress management and the maintenance of each player's personal support networks. Players were observed to be attentive and respectful towards the facilitators of the session. After the session, facilitators were overheard comparing these players and this session to one they had previously delivered at another club -"There were a few restless

boys down there at (Previous club name)". The other staff member responded that it was "due to the culture of the (previous) club". The facilitators' explanation for the contrast between the two sessions lay in their perception of the clubs' cultures and the notion that the present club had a culture that was genuinely supportive of player welfare initiatives.

The readily observable artefacts in the environment suggested that an 'infrastructure' for the support of player personal and dual career development was in place. However, this level of the culture did not of itself reveal enough to understand how this support actually operated.

Espoused values

Espoused values are reported here grouped under four 'higher order' values. Related lower order values and salient comments from the interview transcripts are provided in illustration.

Support is for the whole person

The key value with respect to player off-field development and activities was that it was necessary to support the 'whole person' and not just the footballer. It was believed that supporting the player as more than just a footballer assisted both their integration within the club environment and made for happier people outside of the football environment. This value was manifested in assistance for the players in handling their off-field affairs (i.e., finances, living arrangements, etc.) as well as ensuring they were facilitated in pursuing their off-field interests. Players described that when the staff took an interest in their personal life and recognised them as more than a footballer they felt supported both on and off the field. As a middle career player asserted "they sort of do take time to recognise your life outside of football and not just drag you in and have it as their way is the right way and you've got to adjust to their way". Such a value was frequently espoused in the club, as one staff member stated "they've got other life goals and they're developing for life outside of footy. So that's something that we're really aware of here, it's really in the players and the staff consciousness". Hence, supporting the whole person was an espoused value related to the management of players' dual career and off-field activities at the club.

A work/life balance is important

Both players and staff identified that a work/life balance was highly valued at this club. It was described as a value held from the CEO down. All players and staff were generally encouraged to have a life outside of work, take the time to pursue other interests, and refresh away from the club. Recognition of the pressures of AFL football was described as the main catalyst for this. Situations were described where staff members had told another member or player to go home if it was felt that they were spending too much time at the club. On occasions, the football schedule had also been adjusted to make sure that the players could get appropriate time away. This was in order to recover mentally. Players also described the importance of 'leaving work at work' whenever possible and that this was supported by the club. As an early career player described.

> I suppose they don't want you to really dwell on things, thinking about footy all the time. Just of late they've actually been trying to get us in, train us and then get us out of the club so that we're not always here at the club. They just want us to get out and have a bit of a balanced life.

Any dual career or other off-field activity was expected to be congruent with an overall positive work/life balance. Further, it was also espoused that if players had a sense of work/life balance, they were more likely to be 'happy' as individuals and perform on the field. As a staff member quite clearly articulated.

> Absolutely we think there's something to it (maintaining a work/life balance). What we're fortunate to have is a team of young coaches and then with the guys that run our football department too, they're very much into looking after the welfare of the players. So from the top down, everyone here understands and really believes that happy players play their best footy.

Individual differences need to be recognised

Several of the values and strategies concerning player dual career development were related to the recognition of the individual and that individual's personal situation. For example, players and staff described that there was an expectation and encouragement to develop a dual career however players were not compelled to do so. Players who declined were respected in their decisions providing they could justify their reasons. Such reasons might include: returning from injury and needing to focus on football; a lack of interest in the options provided, or; needing some time to think about what they might like to do. The players also described that avoiding dual career involvement was considered 'OK' by the PDM and the club in the short term. However there was an expectation that players will eventually do something to prepare for life after football. Players described that the PDM would regularly 'check in' with them concerning their thoughts on dual career involvement and to discuss options. An early career player described it in this way.

> They ask what am I thinking, they ask me if I want to do things and I'll be honest with them. I say 'I don't think I'm ready yet' and they respect that. They try and say, 'we've got something coming up, do you want to put in it?' and I say, 'I don't think I'm ready.' They definitely remind me that there are things available for me to do but they don't push me.

This encouragement to engage in dual career development paired with the autonomy to ultimately decide how and when, gave the players some personal agency in the decision making process around their engagement and this was linked in with another commonly espoused value that the player himself had to be ready to engage. Both the players and staff described that being pressured into engaging in dual career development can lead to a negative experience. Rather, it was necessary to educate players on its importance and then let them come to their own understanding in their own time. As described by the PDM.

> So we've found it works a lot better when players actually understand why they're doing something and actually want to do it. Not too much different from the rest of us. If we see a good reason why something should happen we actually want to do it.

In response to the question whether this was perhaps a 'softer' approach to dual career development, one of the staff members replied that "it might seem like a softer approach, it's certainly a managed approach. So there's method to it, it's not just *ad hoc* or make it up as we go".

Although individual players would come to embark on a dual career activity when they were ready, it was a generally accepted expectation within the club that in the first year on the list it was necessary to focus on the adjustment to elite football almost exclusively. Adjusting to the rigours of life as a professional footballer was seen as tough enough without being expected to actively

pursue a dual career activity in addition. Players' recollections of being tired much of the time during the first year experience were noted. Staff and players identified the football apprenticeship program delivered by the AFLPA as providing a platform for first year players to develop skills needed to navigate life as a footballer and this was seen as valuable. Any extra 'non-contractual' activities on top of this (apart from the club providing cooking lessons) were perceived as too much for most first year players to handle. There were individual exceptions where players might have been capable of handling some university units from the outset, but as described by a staff member.

> I think for a while there we probably tried to push them a bit too hard and to some – the first year kids going into uni courses and that sort of stuff and we probably underestimated the impact of coming into a programme – a football programme that was actually quite tiring. And whilst they didn't complain, they complained with their feet, a lot of them said it was too hard.

Activities need to be viable

There were several espoused values within the club culture that concerned the importance of dual career activities being workable and viable propositions for players. For example, it was perceived by players and staff at the club that the quality of engagement in a dual career activity was ultimately the most important aspect. Players were not expected to continue in an activity if it was not a positive experience. As described by a staff member, "one of the philosophies is if a player is engaged in a course of study or a type of work that they don't like, they're not interested in it, that's only going to be a waste of time". There were numerous examples within the interview transcripts of players withdrawing from dual career courses when the prospect of continuing was considered counterproductive to both their football performance in the present and their search for a career beyond football. As articulated by a late career player, "doing something you love is a good escape from footy, doing something you hate and then not enjoying can have a detrimental effect on your footy". In this sense, only dual career activities where players enjoyed and valued their experiences were considered viable propositions.

It was also described that given any dual career activity was an 'alternative career' option, many players did not know what they might like to do for a career after football has finished. The general consensus among players and staff was consequently that trying different activities was an effective strategy, as this assisted players in finding out what they did and did not enjoy. Although there were financial incentives provided by the AFL and AFLPA to finish courses, the PDM in particular was more concerned with the players experiencing different activities in order to find a dual career development option that suited them. In the words of another staff member.

> And from then on (after the first year), they're encouraged to branch out and it might, like I said before, it might take them 12 months to two years to find out exactly what it is they like, but they're encouraged from pretty early on to have a go at a few things and find out.

Players also supported this value of the process of sampling. Players described that it was difficult to find an attractive alternative career, given that they were already in a career they were passionate about. As a late career player described, "we've wanted to play an elite sport, that's what you want to do and then okay, now I've got to think of a second or third or fourth option". Although many players were not sure about what they would do when they finished playing, they believed that through sampling activities they would find out.

Finally, for dual career activities to be viable, players needed to have dual career opportunities that were compatible with the demands of being a professional footballer and this occasionally meant that the club needed to be flexible. As one late career player stated, this club was prepared to allow players to attend exams when they conflicted with training.

> So the club encourages it (dual career development) and they make the things available for you too, which is a great thing because they could encourage you but then make it impossible for you to do. They do both. So they understand guys that have got exams might have a conflict with training, the club is all about going to your exams.

The provision of options that were viable appeared to be an ongoing process, as players reflected on times where the flexibility of a course or traineeship had led to a quality engagement, yet there were also examples in the past where the player had experienced difficulty because of a lack of flexibility on the part of an external institution. The PDM was seen as an ambassador for the flexibility of such dual career activities.

The values described above show that the club was not merely supportive of dual career development. Rather, they illustrate how this support was influenced by the values held around the support of the whole person, the recognition of and inclusion of the player in decisions about dual career activities, and also the quality of experiences the athletes should have in these activities as part of a work/life balance.

Basic assumptions

Deeper basic assumptions identified within the club culture offered insight into the espoused values and observable artefacts within the club environment (i.e., the way the club actually 'did' personal and dual-career development). These assumptions are described below.

Dual career development is important however football comes first

It was recognised that all players' careers will eventually end and that they should prepare for a life after football. However this was secondary to the current demands of being a professional footballer. This assumption could be heard in players and staff members' descriptions of their development activities away from football and the need to keep a 'wary eye' on whether these other activities were potentially impeding their football output. This relationship between dual career activities and the tasks of football was considered obvious, as described by a late career player.

> Obviously this is my job and this is what I'm really looking at to make sure I don't skip anything here, like recovery or anything like that to get to TAFE (Technical and Further Education Institute) or to outside and work because at the end of the day this is my number one priority.

The importance of players' dual career and personal development was nonetheless nowhere-denied within the club. As a senior player described the player welfare and development department, "it's not just some bit of fluff on the sides, it's genuinely part of how we work every week". Yet although it was a very genuine part of the organisation's operations and players described occasions where allowances had been made for their dual career activity, if there was any thought that an activity was detracting from the player's ability

to produce at football, then it was the dual career activity that needed to be adjusted.

Balancing sport and off-field life ensures players' well-being and facilitates on-field performance

There was also another closely related assumption, that player well-being was enhanced by living a balanced life which will in turn improve performance. It was believed that well-being involved maintaining a sense of balance between football and non-football activities (e.g., dual career, hobbies, and social activities) and having positive living arrangements and relationships outside the club. This assumption could be seen in the making of adjustments to the training and preparation schedule when the club felt players needed a break. For example, it was planned that when the playing group were to travel to an away game in a popular tourist destination, they would do so early in the week so the players could enjoy some 'down time' prior to resuming training for the following week's match.

With respect to dual career development, this assumption could explain the preference for activities where the player experienced a quality engagement that was both enjoyable and manageable in the context of the primacy of his football demands. The PDM was primarily concerned with the players' overall welfare and dual career development existed as subsidiary to this. It was implicit in the PDM's entire conduct within the club. This could be seen in his taking a genuine interest in the players as people beyond football (as through the 'casual catch ups' away from the club) and it was on this basis that dual career development was discussed with the player rather than given as a directive or contractual obligation that needed to be adhered to.

Players should be encouraged to find personal meanings in their dual career activity

Rather than mandate that all players are to be involved in a dual career activity, the PDM, with the endorsement of the club took a different approach to managing the dual career development of the players and one consistent with the basic assumptions of the organisational culture. Rather than enforce participation in these activities, players were supported in their decision making and exploration around them. As one player put it, "(you) don't just go do it because someone told you to go do it". In a casual conversation with a retired player it was mentioned that early in his career players used to get 'lumped' into a course because it was convenient and only two out of ten players actually wanted to be there. Although the impermanency of a football career was acknowledged by the players and staff, the issue of players' dual career development was grounded in an understanding that a player's engagement with any activity should be personally meaningful and fulfilling as opposed to merely satisfying the wishes of the club.

The club has an ethical responsibility to support player dual career development

A clear assumption held within the club was that in addition to any external requirements placed upon it to support dual career development, it was also simply 'the right thing to do.' It was confirmed in the genuine respect awarded, position of inclusion provided, and attention granted to the player development department in the club environment. Members of the club talked about the personal development of players as the right thing to do rather than it being sanctioned. The general acceptance of an ethical responsibility to support players in preparing for life after football was seen as consistent with the value of supporting the 'whole person'. As a member of the football executive staff quite clearly stated, "they are only here for a short amount of time compared with the rest of their lives. We take the responsibility to make sure that they've at least had the opportunity to consider the next life."

Discussion

Previous research on athlete dual career development and career transition has been largely focussed on the individual challenges (Hickey & Kelly, 2005; North & Lavallee, 2004) to its pursuit or issues of program effectiveness (Fraser et al., 2010; Lavallee, 2005). The present analysis has looked beyond these factors to consider the explanatory power of club culture with respect to determining the efficacy of dual career and off-field development programs. This study has sought to illuminate how organisational culture might explain the relative success of dual career initiatives within the micro-environment of a professional sporting club. Given that the culture of any group is a strong determinant of behaviour (Schein, 2010) such a shift in research focus provides a fresh and informative perspective that further contributes to athlete dual career research.

Developing the athlete as a whole person

The athletic career transition literature (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Park et al., 2013) has highlighted the importance of developing a dual career through education or vocational training while competing. However this importance is not always recognised within athletes' talent development environments (Chambers et al., 2013; Cosh & Tully, 2014; Hickey & Kelly, 2008). Implicit in the developmental model of career transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman et al., 2004) is the need to take a whole person approach to supporting the athlete through these transitions in both athletic and non-athletic domains. The results presented above suggest that when a professional sporting club's culture truly values such an approach to developing the athlete as a whole person, then dual career activities are more likely to be adequately supported. Furthermore, in the present study, support for the development of the whole person was positively linked to on-field performance rather than seen as irrelevant to or even competing against it. This is consistent with the notion of the reciprocal nature between athletic and non-athletic domains as put forward in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) model.

Organisational psychology and the holistic ecological approach

The present study has answered the calls of Chambers et al. (2013) and Stambulova and Ryba (2013) who have argued for more culturally based dual career research. Furthermore, it is also consistent with the preferences of Wagstaff et al. (2011) for increased study of athletic environments from a POPS perspective and the identification of organisational/environmental success factors (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Henriksen et al., 2010). The Henriksen et al. (2010; 2011) holistic ecological approach offered insights into the contribution of external 'macro-environmental' influences on the club micro-environment and culture. In this study a consideration of macro-environmental influences (e.g., the AFL and AFLPA) provided some necessary context for the framing of the dual career infrastructure and related behaviours within the club and furnished a background against which to interpret the unique influences of the individual club culture. It is therefore acknowledged that the holistic ecological approach provided key input into our understanding of the practice and implementation of the dual career ideal. Using concepts from the holistic ecological approach and Schein's levels of organisational culture, the present club environment and its support of player dual career and off-field

development are now discussed further in light of the current literature.

The individual AFL clubs operate within a context where elements of the macro-environment (Henriksen et al. 2010) create 'problems' of external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2010) for issues such as athletes' dual career development. There are two such problems that were of particular interest within the present study. The first was that AFL clubs need to perform on the field, as success influences their profitability and viability (Pinnuck & Potter, 2006). Given such an overarching priority it can be difficult for both the players and their clubs to focus on a more distal notion such as their players' long term well-being and specifically on their preparation for retirement from the sport. The second was that AFL clubs have a need to comply with the workplace conditions enshrined within the industry standard collective bargaining agreement and also to respond to the expectations of the AFLPA as champion for the welfare of their membership. This requires every AFL club to at least consider means by which to reconcile satisfying the performance imperative with the need to support players' dual career development. Hickey and Kelly (2008) reported that previous solutions to this particular 'problem' of external adaptation had been largely for clubs to provide only token support for players' dual career development reflecting an underlying cultural assumption that these activities were 'suspicious', of doubtful value and potentially distracting for the players. In contrast, the present study has provided from a positive organisational viewpoint (Wagstaff et al., 2011) an example of a club culture where the support of dual career and off-field development has been integrated in a way that is congruent with performance goals.

The basic assumptions identified in the club culture reported here were both internally harmonious and cumulatively conducive to the support of player dual career development. As Schein (2010) suggested, such basic assumptions are a result of how a culture has solved its 'problems' over time and are reflective of 'what works'. In this club, dual career development was seen as an ethical responsibility and important but in the light of a 'core' understanding that football came first. This is at one with previous reports of the priority sporting performance takes in elite environments (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Hickey & Kelly, 2005). Yet, other basic assumptions when taken together meant that dual career development received more than merely token support. Rather, dual career development was recognised as a part of a balanced lifestyle and a contribution to player well-being. In turn, player well-being was assumed to contribute positively to on-field performance and this is in line with previous reports of the importance of sport/life balance (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Poczwardowski et al., 2013; Price et al., 2010). This assumption helps explain espoused values concerning the importance of the quality with which players engaged in these activities, the benefits of sampling among a range of dual career activities, the viability of activities in light of football demands, and the coherence of these values with the actual behaviours and infrastructure observed within the club.

The assumption that balancing sport and off-field life was conducive to player well-being and performance and that dual career activity should form a part of this balance was an important element of the club culture. Such an assumption is consistent with holistic views of athletic development and performance within the literature (i.e., Douglas & Carless, 2006; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Price et al., 2010). For example, Friesen and Orlick (2010) discussed the "multiple selves" (p.233) of the athlete and argued that if any non-athletic elements of the athlete's self are suffering then it is likely that their athletic self and consequently their performance will as well. In the present club culture, this meant that involvement in a dual career path, if supported correctly, could exist as a valuable part of the athlete's balanced 'whole' and be conducive to athletic performance. Such a culture provides an important positive example for professional sporting organisations where player dual career development has been viewed with contempt by those outside the welfare departments, for example, in the areas of sport science and executive management (Chambers et al., 2013). Of course, a dual career activity that has been 'forced' upon the athlete, where they hold little value for that activity themselves (Hickey & Kelly, 2005), and with which they receive only token support within the micro-environment to engage (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Hickey & Kelly, 2008) would serve to reinforce such prejudice and represents an antithesis of the culture presented here.

The PDM's practice within the organisational culture

Also worthy of highlighting in the current study were the practices of the PDM. Overall his behaviours and practices were firmly situated within the framework of autonomy supportive coaching behaviours, where players' feelings would be acknowledged, support provided for their own decision making, and they would be given reasonable rationales to develop (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This PDM would first form a genuine relationship with the player and dual career development would become part of an ongoing dialogue. Any decision as to commitment ultimately rested with the player. The PDM did not expect players to continue in an activity that they did not enjoy as this was not consistent with the basic assumptions concerning well-being, work-life balance, and the facilitation of on-field performance. The deeper cultural assumptions of the club meant that the PDM could use such an autonomy supportive approach effectively. Such findings also show the value of cultural analysis from an organisational psychology perspective (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Specifically, the present study has shown that the effectiveness of the PDM's practice can only truly be understood in light of the club's culture. Furthermore, the approaches of the PDM offer important suggestions for those involved in player welfare and development roles seeking to encourage the development of dual careers.

Methodological reflections and future research

There were several limitations associated with the study which must be acknowledged. Firstly, as this was a case study of only one AFL club it is of course difficult to generalise beyond the specific environment studied. Yet it is our hope that this exploration can provide a platform for further comparisons with professional sporting club cultures both within the AFL and other contexts. Secondly, the potential for bias among the interviewees selected is recognised, as they were sourced in consultation with the PDM. This approach was adopted because it was the most practical way to organise interviews with participants. We believe the potential for bias was minimised through the interviewing of players who both did and did not engage in dual career development. Further, staff from outside the player welfare department were also interviewed, so that a broader perspective of the culture concerning dual career development could be considered. Finally, investigation into other elements in the athletes' dual career environment, such as external providers of education, could have contributed more to understanding the effectiveness of the club's approach. However this was deemed outside the scope of this study. A focus on these external providers and their practices and strategies in an Australian context offers a further interesting line of inquiry.

Conclusion

The present paper has provided an example of a club culture that was supportive of player dual career development and how the praxis surrounding this support was seen as congruent with the club's primary objective of on-field performance. Further, the coherence that could be seen across the levels of culture (i.e., artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions) was an important factor in the club's success in reconciling its off and on-field goals with regard to the playing group. This coherence supports the findings of Henriksen et al. (2010) in their analysis of a sailing talent development environment where the coherence across its levels of culture was critical to the success of the organisation. The present club solved the tension between dual career development and the focus on athletic performance through supporting players' dual careers as part of a holistic approach to athletic development and performance. As such, rather than being in competition with the overarching need to perform on the field, dual career development was viewed as complementary to it. Further, quality exploration of, and eventual engagement with dual career activities was encouraged via the autonomy supportive practices of the PDM and his department. This approach was consistent with the basic assumptions of the club culture and had been refined over time with respect to 'what works'. The findings of this study also suggest that sport psychology practitioners (or player welfare staff) looking to encourage the more holistic development of athletes would be advised to first examine, and where necessary seek to actively influence the club culture that athletes are immersed in.

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