

THE
SPORTING
DIRECTOR:
CURRENT AND
FUTURE
CHALLENGES
FOR LEADERS
IN FOOTBALL

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DECEMBER 2020



W H O I S I N T H E R O O M ?

PLEASE POSTWHO YOU AREAND WHAT
YOU EXPECT
FROM OUR
SESSION
TOGETHER...



PLAN FOR TODAY:



Leadership



The rise of the **Sporting Director**



Current challenges



Future Focused

BACKGROUND & KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE



























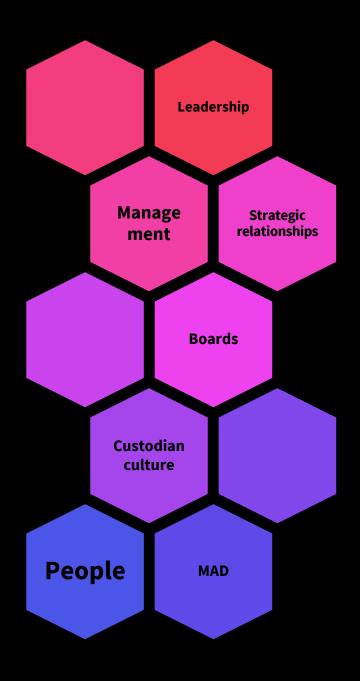


Leadership, you, your club and the Sporting Director





Please post in the chat what leadership means to you?





AREYOU A LEADER?

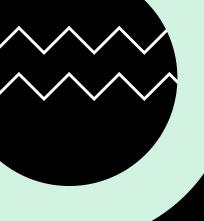




L E A D E R S H I P

THE SHARED PURSUIT OF DELIVERING ON PURPOSE

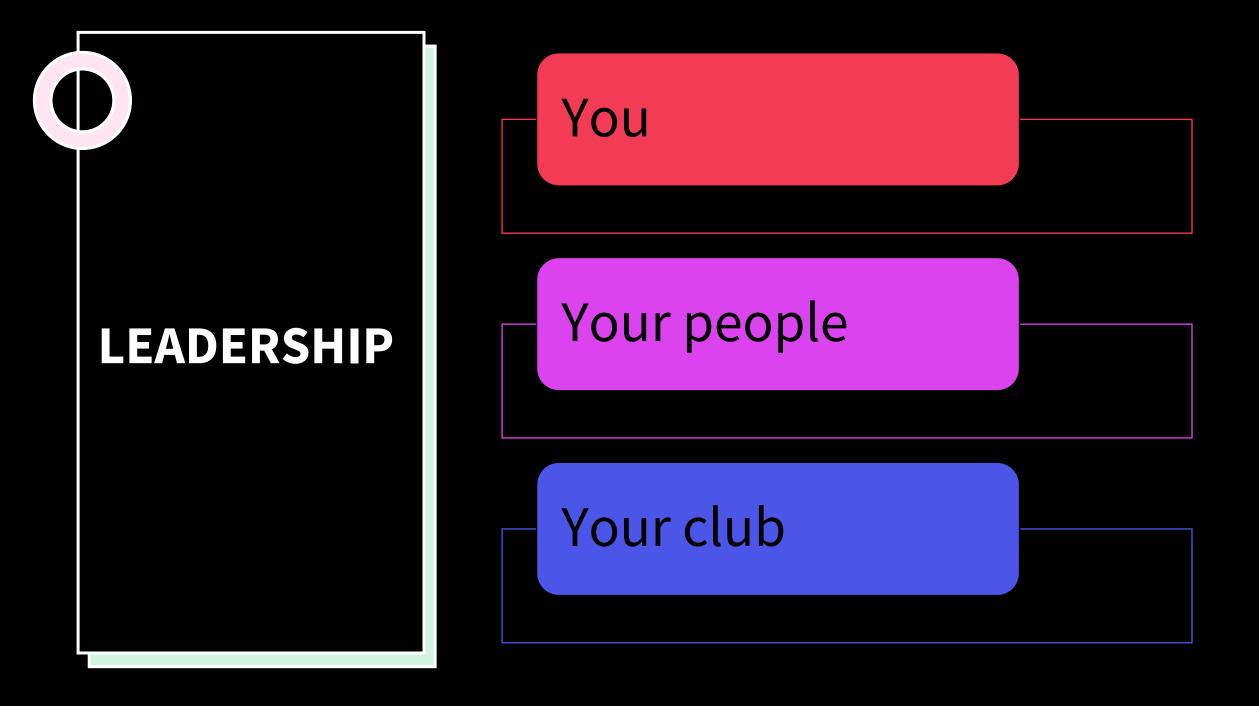
DO WE NEED A TITLE?



THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

- Tonnes of leaders, that provide no leadership
- Lots of people who do lead, who don't have the title or care for it
- Lots of poor decision-making in football (government, business and society)
- Unsustainable and / or poor performance





IDENTITY CANVAS

Competitive Advantage

What makes you special?

How do you differentiate yourself?

What is the unique benefit that you provide?

Success

INTERNAL:

How do you define success?

What counts as winning?

EXTERNAL:

Who are your key stakeholders and what counts as success for them?

INTEGRATED: What is your 'scorecard?'

Association of Sporting Directors

Values

What are your deepest held beliefs?

What is your code of conduct?

Approach to Adversity

What (effective) strategies and tactics do you deploy when under pressure?

Vulnerabilities

What is your 'kryptonite?'

What are your other weaknesses and blindspots?

How would you prioritise your top 3 development objectives?

Flexibility

What are your 'non-negotiables?'

In what ways are you open to change, new ideas, evolving your approach and thinking?

How rigid is your brand?

Strengths

What is your SuperPower? Your One Thing?

What are your other positive attributes?

Epitaph

What do you want to be known / remembered for?

Your Story

What's your personal elevator pitch?

How do you describe who you are and what you stand for?

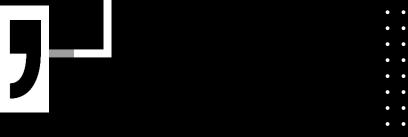


The person employed by the owner or board to be the guardian of the club's future, to protect their investment and bring onfield success through effective leadership and decision making in the short, medium and long-term.





THE SPORTING DIRECTOR





Research is growing but it generally highlights a historic scepticism towards the Sporting Director in English football, in favour for the traditional manager

The majority of clubs in the top leagues of Spain (e.g. Atletico Madrid), Italy (e.g. Juventus) and Germany (e.g. Bayern Munich) currently employ an SD, compared to only a small number of English clubs (Church, 2012).

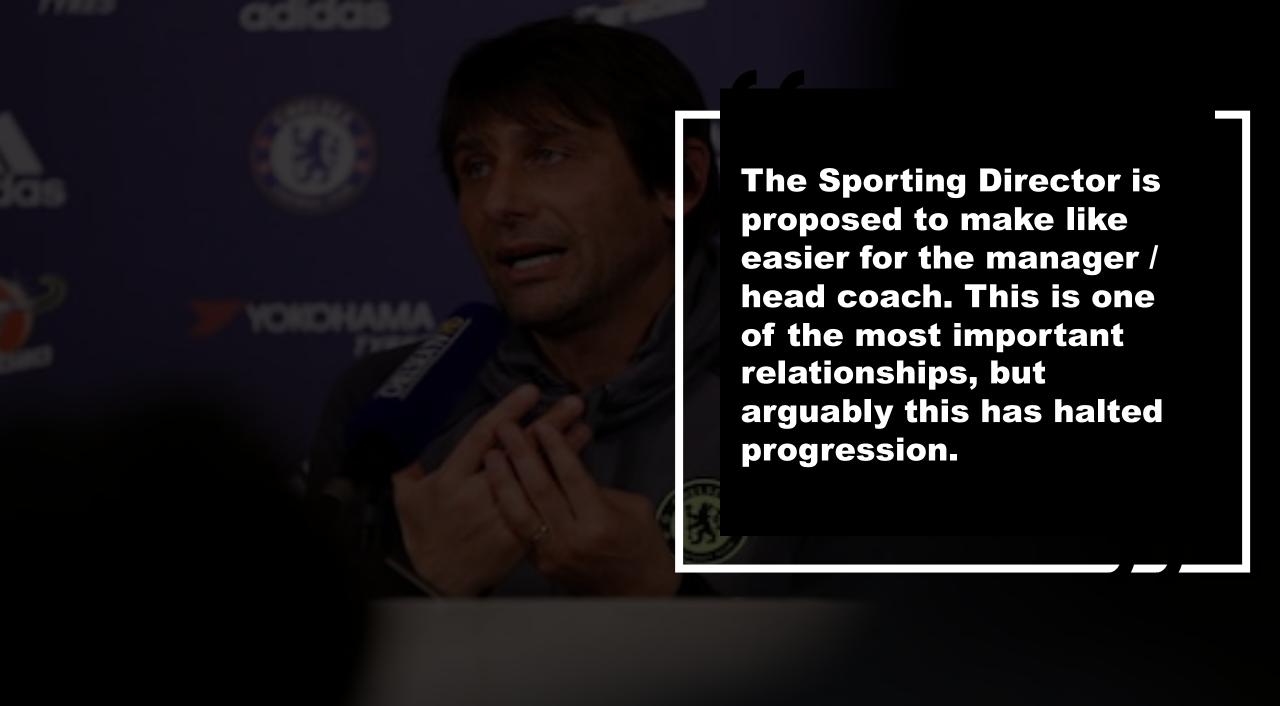
The growing influence of directors and owners of professional football clubs in England, is currently attracting considerable media attention.

The SD role is a highly debated topic, dividing opinion in football.





- Top down outdated?
- **Past vs Present**
- Ferguson as an SD
- 'Big man' model over?
- Ferguson and Wenger both opposed the Sporting Director model



Bill Shankly, Brian Clough, Sir Matt **Busby, Sir Alex** Ferguson dominate powerful figures – the new continental style threatens this.

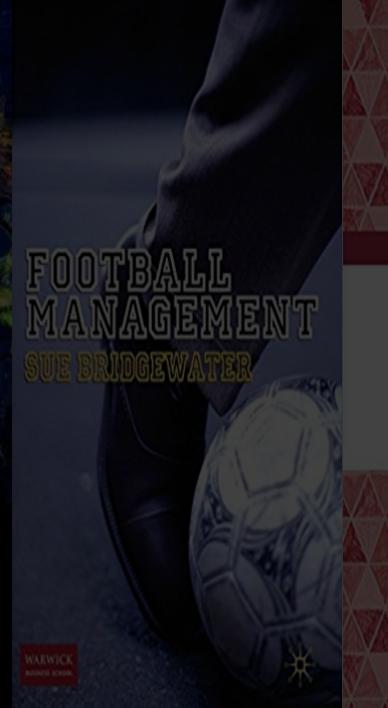
The traditional "gaffer" is becoming an endangered species due to the arrival of modern addition of the sporting director (Bridgewater, 2010; Ranger, 2013; Young, 2015). The SD role is seen to be reducing the power of the old-style managers and incorporating a more democratic structure of decision-making, communication and shared leadership.

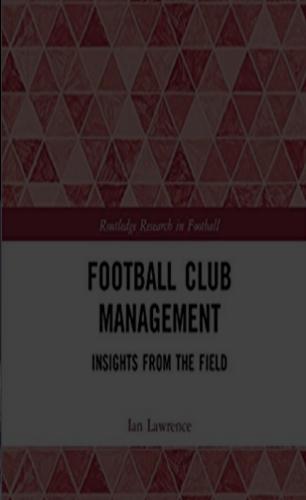
First team manager revolving door culture creates challenges to sustainability – can the Sporting Director help?

Nissen (2016) research:

- Head coach / Sporting
 Director relationship is key
- SD closely linked with Human Resources
 - Talent identification
 - Talent development
 - Culture
 - Practice
 - Performance
- Power is with the SD
- If performance dips, the Head Coach is usually fired.









Church (2012) studied technical directors and highlighted that the role has emerged due to:

- New ownerships bringing in new working models
- A more business-like approach by clubs
- The link between the technical staff and board is vitally important
- The Premier Leagues Elite Performance Plan (EPPP) caused changes in staffing stuctures and quality management issues
- Quiet revolution

Outline of the Sporting Director role

The key priorities for the Sporting Director are:

- Support the first team and head coach
- Maintain and manage a positive working relationship with the owner
- Employ the best people within budget as department heads
- Oversee the implementation of the club's DNA and identity a suitable playing philosophy across all teams, from first team to Academy.
- Implement and maintain a scouting network
- Manage the movement of players in and out of the club
- Oversee the academy and development teams (extending to community foundations for talent identification)
- Oversee the performance departments including medical and sport science
- Oversee the training ground

The Sporting Director is the custodian of the club's sporting performance and must have:

- Football industry knowledge
- Business and financial acumen
- Ability to lead and develop a high performance culture
- Ability to develop and deliver a strategy both strategically and operationally
- Understanding of and the ability to deliver - good governance
- Ability to manage change and innovation
- Ability to manage research (monitor and evaluate) on relevant performance measures

This research

Since 2016 to date interviews have been undertaken with Sporting Directors (or those within similar roles and responsibilities) across elite football contexts in Turkey, Germany, France, England and Scotland (n=56).

The majority of the data presented comes from Sporting Directors in the English Premier League and Championship (n=17)

At the end of the presentation the theoretical considerations and future directions draws on this and further research and engagement with stakeholders in elite football including:

- Loan managers
- Agents
- Owners
- Board members
- Managers
- Players
- Academy staff

This examination of the Sporting Director role within football in England explored three key areas:

- (i) knowledge and understanding of the role
- (ii) current practice across football contexts, and
- (iii) associated challenges within the role

Then I share the theoretical considerations and future directions

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE CURRENT PRACTICE ACROSS FOOTBALL CONTEXTS ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES WITHIN THE ROLE THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FUTURE DIRECTIONS





The title is NOT more important than the role for those in the job

"...clubs and owners use all kinds of titles from Technical Director, Head of Football Operations, Director of Football, Head of Performance and the Sporting Director...".

(Dave, Director of Football, Premier League Club)

The participants appear to share an indifference to the title of the role and the resultant perspectives of people:

"I don't get hung up on title.... Look, you can call it what you want. It doesn't matter too much as it's not the title it's the role you have [which is most important]...".

(Jonny, Head of Football Operations, Premier League Club)

"I understand that some fella's just want the title, but for most of us it's the right job that matters. It's not the title, it's the actual role that counts".

(David, Technical Director, Premier League Club)

"I think that Technical Director is more limited to first team, academy and recruitment [department's], whereas the Sporting Director is much wider [looking after the entire sporting strategy / business]...

Director of Football or Sporting Director is the same for me because at Collington United [Premier League Club], I was Director of Football but I was doing exactly the same job as I was at Torrington Park FC [Premier League Club] being a Sporting Director. So it is the same thing".

(Rueben, Sporting Director, Premier League Club)

Subtleties in the title might create unintended consequences for internal and external stakeholders

The title can create issues related to communication

"It's ok to have the Sporting Director title, but when everyone thinks you have the full role and you don't, it can cause trouble. If the press and fans, or even just the lads in the academy think you have an influence on recruitment [i.e., transfer in and out of players], when you don't, then basically your heads on the line.

At my last club, because no-one really knew who was in charge of transfers it ended up with other clubs and agents [i.e., intermediaries] getting caught between me, the Chairman and the first team manager. It was a bit embarrassing and not good for business. This stuff has to come from the top and needs to be communicated".

(Jason, Head of Football Operations, Football League Club)

"Titles in the football industry can be confusing but providing that the functions and responsibilities are clearly understood within all of the football structure of the club then the title becomes less important. The titles only differ because of a lack of understanding or confusion about the implementation of the role".

(David, Director of Football, Premier League Club)

There are many titles and yet there is little consistency in job descriptions. In my case I am Vice chairman of Football. I believe my job description is more important than the title. I also believe I am by definition the true Sporting Director...

(Carl, Vice Chairman of Football, Premier League Club)

WHOW KNOWS WHO IS DOING WHAT?

Differences in title, role and how is us communicated creates issues internally, externally, with fans, media or even other clubs seeking to undertake a transfer.

Lack of clarity in decision-making, job role and communication could have consequences for job satisfaction and subsequently organisational performance.

Research states that <u>poor communication and</u> <u>blurred lines of roles and responsibilities</u> are the main triggers for *stress*, *ambiguity*, *role duplication and repetition*, which results in the failure of the organisation to achieve its strategic aims and objectives = IMPACTS PERFORMANCE



Externally this could point towards misunderstanding by the CEOs, Boards and / or Chairman, undermining their authority and leadership of the club. Further, this could hamper football transfer business

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE CURRENT PRACTICE ACROSS FOOTBALL CONTEXTS ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES WITHIN THE ROLE THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FUTURE DIRECTIONS





"...the Sporting Director must carry the responsibility of balancing the risk/reward for the organisation - and as a senior executive or member of the board - with the medium to longer term in mind. They therefore have to work with a wider vision or philosophy - signed off by the board - as their framework to decision making. Key components in this can be playing style, player development policy, club culture and conduct".

(James, Director of Football, Football League Club)

This corresponds with research undertaken by Relvas et al. (2010) who interviewed Head of Youth Development across 26 elite level football clubs across Europe. He identified two organisational structures. Structure A: positions the SD as a link between the exec board and two distinct football environments (i.e., youth and professional). Structure B: offered a dual focus on academy and first team.

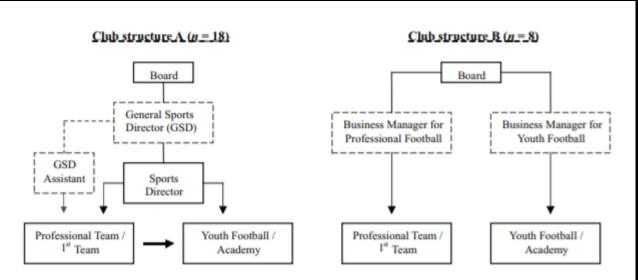


Figure 1. Representation of the two types of club structure evidenced within the 26 clubs across five European countries.



There was a variation is how **Sporting Directors** positioned themselves. Above the manager, but a seat at the board was not always key.

"...the sporting director should work with the first team manager, but sit above them in the hierarchy...".

(Jonny, Head of Football Operations, Premier League Club)

"You need to work below the CEO on all sporting aspects of the business. This is usually part of working with, but below the board".

(Thomas, Director of Football, Premier League Club)

"You need to be an ally of the first team manager, but above them in the hierarchy. You need to be able to work with them. This doesn't mean you need to be on the board".

(Santos, Technical Director, Football League Club)

"A director needs to sit on the board. A director is a director and clubs need to commit to that so you can do the job. I don't understand why anyone would take a [Sporting] Director role in title and not insist on being on the board.

(David, Director of Football, Premier League Club)

"In a football club, key decisions related to strategy are decided in the board room. If you don't sit round a table with the CEO and Director for Finance, how can you possibly ensure your strategy is presented correctly, to influence decisions, to ensure you get the support you need? You can't. You can't really lead properly as a Sporting Director without being on the board".

(David, Director of Football, Premier League Club)



LACK OF AGREEMENT ON STRUCTURE - Governance

Few Sporting Directors held board positions (i.e., not the strategic apex of the club) and often help middle management positions above the manager / head coach (Mitzberg, 1979).

This removes the manager / head coach from being the figure head by layering communication between them and the board.

This would reduce pressure on the manager / head coach (Bridgewater, 2010).

Whilst also raises scepticism surrounding hiring and firing of managers / head coaches (Nissan, 2016)



We must examine the position of Sporting Directors and the most appropriate organisational structures, especially given the lack of communication and clarity in current football contexts



ROLE VARIED ACROSS CLUBS

"So that is a big part of culture. Then what role do you give to the academy, that is part of the football culture, or the people that you hire is part of the football culture?... The Premier League and football is more and more about entertainment and results. The football fan based globally is so well educated that trying to win without entertaining is very difficult, especially at the top clubs.

The aspects make the culture of the football club, and the Sporting Director is there to make sure there is continuity in the culture. If there is one definition or summary of the job, it is having continuity in the culture of the football club. For me it is interesting to see some clubs losing their culture. Mainly because they have lost their business model, signing players for £40,000,000 at the age of 29 or 28. Clubs have to come back to what they are good at, and hiring good people allows you to change that culture back from where there has been a total strategy drift, and that is interesting to see when you look at clubs from the outside".

(Jonny, Head of Football Operations, Premier League Club)

ROLE VARIED ACROSS CLUBS

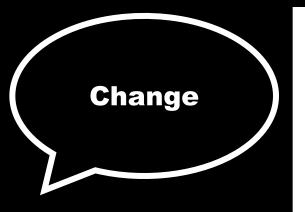
There are two strategies in a Football club: Firstly there has to be a business strategy which underpins the performance of the team. The more revenue generated, the better the investment can be in the team or the Sport. The Sporting Director 'Directs the Sport' and that should be everything to do with the sport. Using and selling players, hiring and firing managers and coaches, setting targets and objectives within the culture values and philosophy of the club and providing guardianship of that culture and those values.

Where sports performance is concerned the true Sporting Director is the ultimate decision maker and the holds responsibility and accountability for that performance. I think many incumbents of the role under this or any of the other titles rarely have this full level of responsibility. They are rarely Board Level Directors and most often the big decisions regarding players and coaches and budgets are made by other Executives (CEO's) or Owners / Chairpersons. Big decisions made by inexperienced or non-sporting directors.

(Carl, Vice Chairman of Football, Premier League Club)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE CURRENT PRACTICE ACROSS FOOTBALL ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES WITHIN THE ROLE THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FUTURE DIRECTIONS





Awareness and understanding of the role at exec level.

Trust and relationships.

People must deliver in the SD role.

"The biggest challenge is that the industry gains a better understanding of the role. Boards and Owners appear to have difficulty understanding [...]. More help for the Board/Owner to understand the requirements will be necessary to achieve this".

(David, Director of Football, Premier League Club)

"Managers are fearful of their power being shifted at a club, Trust is the biggest fear. Not enough education given to chief executives and owners on how the sporting director can help a club and define the role. Opportunities to explain the role and current models at different clubs that are in operation".

(Thomas, Director of Football, Premier League Club)

"Footballs Conservatism, known as tradition has historically hindered progress on many fronts. In Britain the role of the 'Manager' has almost become a 'Cult' figure. It is perceived that these guys have some magic formula or secret algorithm for success. This adulation results in absolute power and ultimate decision making being demanded by these big ego celebrities. Often this control is handed over by star struck executives or owners. The biggest challenge for the development of true sporting directors in football is the cynicism for the role from both executives and "Managers". This is slowly changing as ownership is transferring from local millionaire fans to billionaire business men who do not want one man with little or no business experience handling millions of pounds in funds. The longevity of the manger is decreasing year on year and most cannot expect to be in a job for over two years. Managers are increasingly narrowly focussing on results and owners becoming increasingly impatient. The owner prefers to refer to his manager as Head Coach and is handing responsibility for the wider football operation, youth development and the long term future of the club to someone who is expected to stay longer term. These people are the pioneer Sporting Directors and their successes will determine the pace and trajectory of the profession".

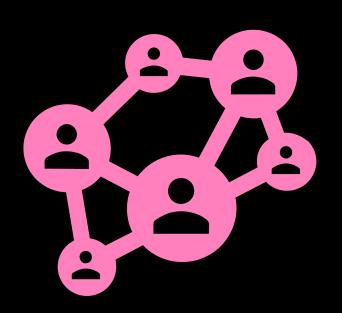
(Carl, Vice Chairman of Football, Premier League Club)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE CURRENT PRACTICE ACROSS FOOTBALL CONTEXTS ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES WITHIN THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FUTURE DIRECTIONS



THE NETWORKED WORLD OF FOOTBALL

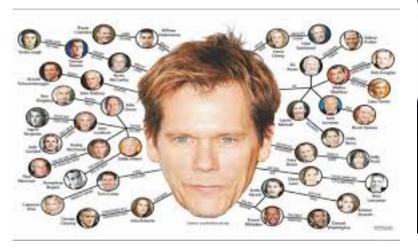
"It is through personal networks that society is structured and individuals integrated into society. Daily life proceeds through personal ties: workers recruit in-laws and cousins for jobs on a new construction site; parents choose their children's paediatricians on the basis of personal recommendation; and investors get tips from their tennis partners. All through life, the facts, fictions, and arguments we hear from kin and friends are the ones that influence our actions most. Reciprocally, most people affect their society only through personal influences on those around them."



(Charles Tilly, 1990)



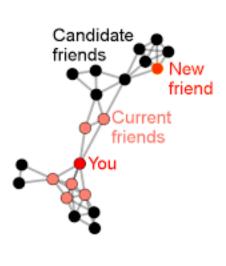


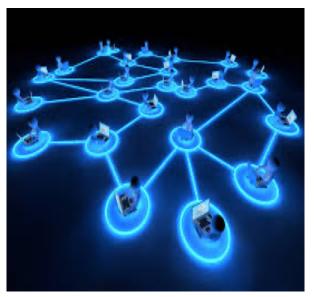




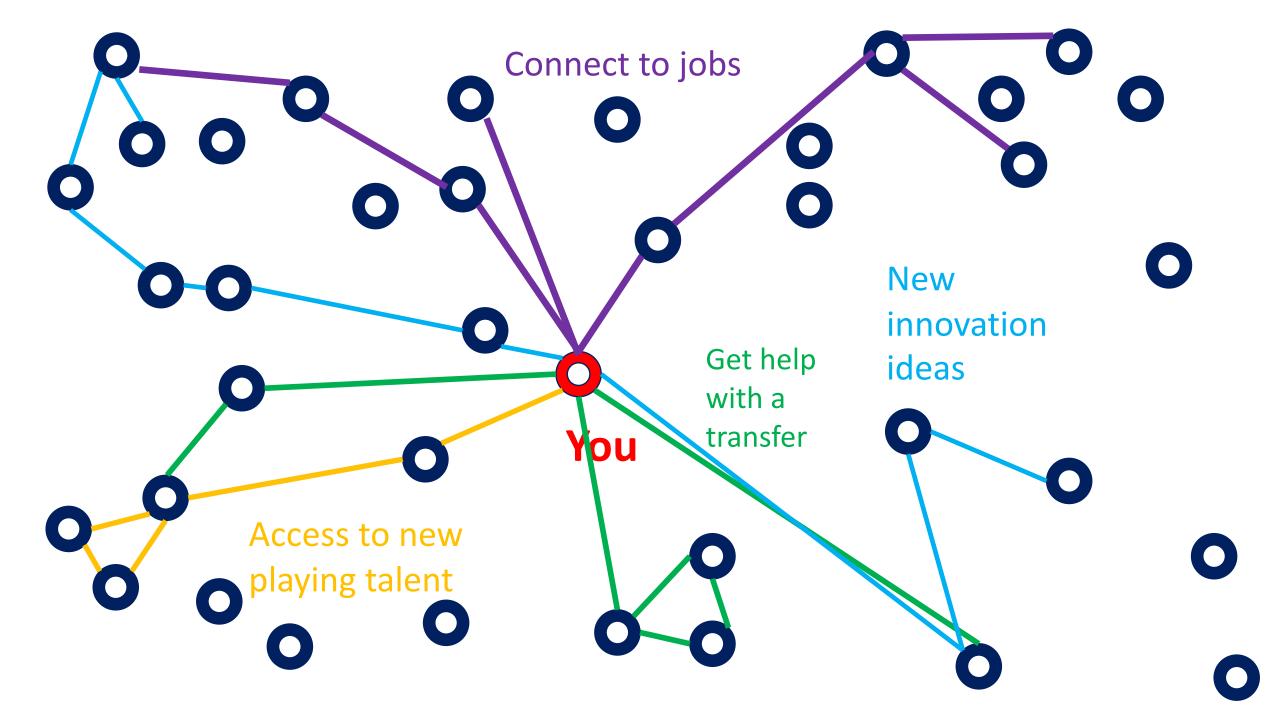


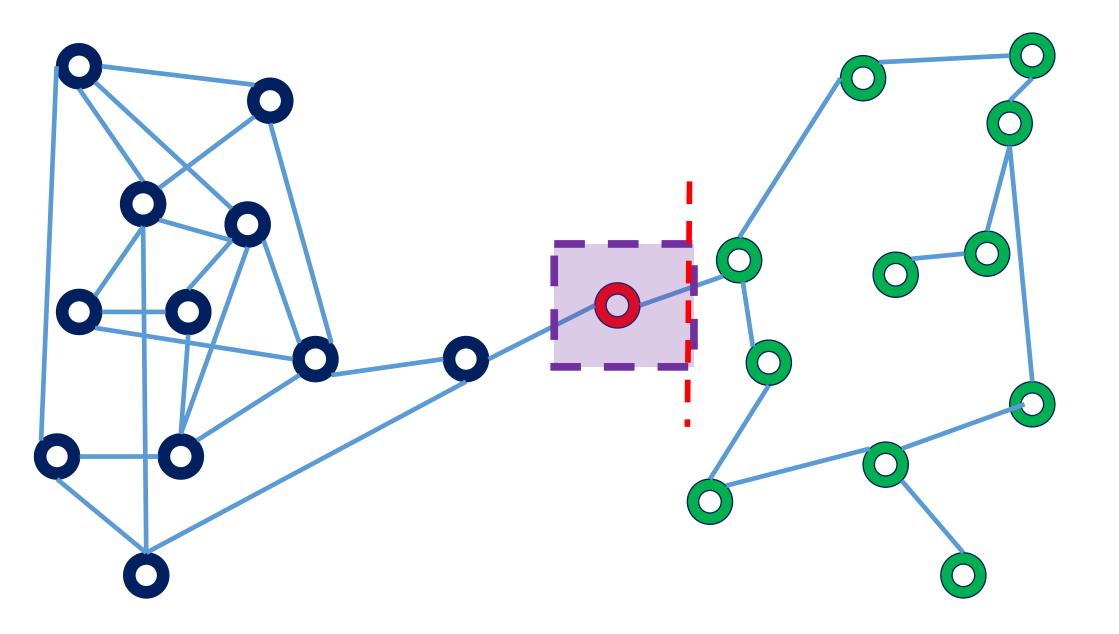












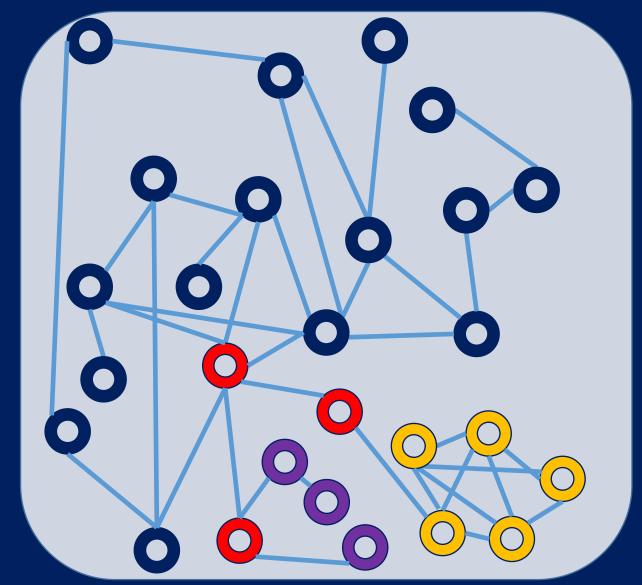
Structure, a few theoretical thoughts...

Some key concepts to discuss further are:

• On closure.....

On structural holes......

On strength of weak ties.....



My message is:

- Networks have structure and structure has consequences

Network thinking

Rejects the assumption of individual being all powerful.

Real-world networks follow a scale-free distribution, implying there is structure (or you could say: non-random).

It implies that all economic and social action is embedded in social relationships.

Claims that those who depend (and focus) only on market transactions ignore at their peril the social relationships that shape deals, and structure successful organisations.







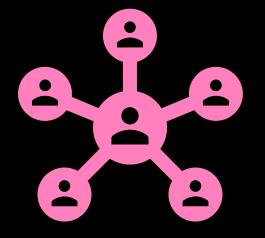


RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORK THEORY.

NETWORK THEORY OFFERS ONE AVENUE:

- EMBEDDEDNESS
- STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES
 - STRUCTURAL HOLES

LINKS TO RECRUITMENT OF TALENT ON AND OFF THE PITCH.



Relationships

Work needs to be undertaken on:

- The importance of relationships
- Developing relationships
- Trust
- Building relationships with colleagues

 Understanding competitor networks

> Enable Contact

> > Build Trust

Create Connection

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE CURRENT PRACTICE ACROSS FOOTBALL CONTEXTS ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES WITHIN THE ROLE THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FUTURE DIRECTIONS





Key considerations:

- The title used for the Sporting Director role is flexible'
- The job-role varies across football clubs, and therefore the knowledge, expertise and skill required to perform the role may vary.
- Sporting Directors currently do not always assume a Board level position.
- Internal and external stakeholders do not appear to fully understand the Sporting Director role and can lead to ambiguity both internally and externally to the organization.

To further the profesionlisation process of the role of Sporting Director within England, additional work is required to be undertaken through in the following six key areas:

- 1) Conceptual Clarity Clearly defined remit and role descriptors for the Sporting Director role for employers for employees.
- 2) Education The further development of professional education and qualifications to support the Sporting Director role.
- 3) Recruitment and Development Pathways- The creation of clear career structures and pathways within sporting organisations for the recruitment and development of Sporting Directors.
- 4) Research A distinct body of context-specific knowledge to inform the practices of the Sporting Director beyond existing disciplinary boundaries.
- 5) Regulation and Support An independent and inclusive professional membership body to support members.
- 6) Ethics and Code of Conduct A clearly defined set a value and ethical principles to guide professional practice.





What drives our decisions:

- Integrity
- Passion and drive
- Future focused
- Custodian culture
- Evidence-informed

Part of what we do:

- Recruitment and big data
- Talent pathways
- Leading High Performing Teams (with FIFA)
- Brexit and regulations
- Ownership and governance relations
- Personal PR and media relations

September – October (2020)

- Recruitment and big data Dr Daniel Parnell University of Liverpool, UK
- Recruitment and big data Zoran Krneta Charlotte FC, USA
- Recruitment and big data Professor Ian McHale University of Liverpool, UK
- Recruitment and big data Professor Ian McHale University of Liverpool, UK
- Recruitment and big data Chris Casper, Eddy Jennings & Stuart Webber -Salford City FC; Fleetwood Town FC; Norwich City FC
- Recruitment and big data Professor Ian McHale University of Liverpool, UK
- Recruitment and big data Steven Gunn Aberdeen Football Club, Scotland

November – December (2020)

- Talent pathways Dr Alex Bond Leeds Beckett University, UK
- Talent pathways Dr Alex Bond Leeds Beckett University, UK
- Talent Pathways Professor Mark Williams University of Utah, USA
- Talent Pathways Nick Cox Manchester United FC, UK
- Talent Pathways Dr Laura Finnegan University of Waterloo, Ireland
- Talent Pathways Steve Cooper Swansea City FC



BIG TICKET ISSUES FOR LEADERS

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C O V I D - 1 9
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               DATA
       PMENT PATHWAYS
      REGULATION
QUALIFICATIONS AND EDUCATION
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LEADERSHIP

CUSTODIAN CULTURE
MAD: MAKE A DIFFERENCE
BUILD STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS
MANAGEMENT
PEOPLE: CHANGE OR CHANGE THEM
BOARDS & GOVERNANCE

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The rise of the Sporting Director



Current challenges



Future Focused



THANK YOU



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