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**Title: Against the Odds of Tradition: Nudging the Glass Ceiling of Sport
Management and Leadership.**

Against the Odds of Tradition: Nudging the Glass Ceiling of Sport Leadership.

Abstract. *Purpose:* The purpose of this study was to capture the journey of the first female leader in sports management in her country in the south-east Asian region for their National Sport and the values and behaviors enabling her to achieve it. *Design:* The study uses a mixed-methods case study design, quantitative and qualitative outcome measures, to assess the career progression of the first female executive director of a national sporting organization in her country, namely BWN and her involvement in a 2-week intensive sports management, leadership and development program. *Findings:* A professional and courageous approach to identify and implement honest and evidence-based solutions were key for BWN's success. BWN complemented professionalism with soft skills, clear communication and outcome-based approach to challenging situations, successfully influencing change within her national sporting organization. This female leader is an inspiring role model for other women and her professionalism her most influential value driving innovation in sports management and organizational change. The positive impact she had in her community highlights the significant contributions female leaders can have within the sports leadership context, given the opportunity and scope to do so. *Originality:* For the first time in her country, the unsolicited and unprecedented evidence-based approach, professionalism and proactivity assisted BWN with her colleagues accepting her as the first woman on the executive board of her national sporting body of one of the most celebrated national sports. Breaking the mold with unexpected (positive) behavior might be the secret to further breakthroughs for women in sports management.

Keywords: *sports management, gender-opportunity, glass ceiling, women leadership, role models.*

Introduction

The under-representation of female leaders within the sporting context has recently received considerable academic attention due to a myriad of barriers and challenges faced in their quest to establish themselves as leaders within the upper echelons of sporting organizations. The importance and strong relationship between leadership roles and organizational success is widely acknowledged (Fiedler, 1996, Ogbonna and Harris, 2000). Leadership is closely linked with the theory and practice of organizations, and the absence of leadership is often associated with the absence of an organization (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Gender has been identified as an important factor with a substantial impact on the way in which an organization operates, and consequent organizational practices and development (Ely and Meyerson, 2000, Britton and Logan, 2008, Kihl et al., 2013). Over the last decade or so, there has been an increase in the number of women in senior organizational leadership positions. It seems organizations are catching up on the new needs of leadership rather than focusing on what leadership used to be (Rost, 1993, Barker, 1997). This growth in female leader representatives is accompanied by a change in theories and practices of leadership (Eagly and Carli, 2003). Examining leadership experiences of women will ultimately contribute to a greater understanding of how and why gender balance is a powerful component for social and organizational processes that often define organizational in business, community and sporting organizations (Burton, 2015).

Leadership is an established phenomenon (Burns, 1978) and embedded in experience (Block, 2014). Like other social phenomena, leadership is socially constructed through interaction (Berger and Luckman, 2016) and emerges as a result of the actions and constructions of both leaders and subordinates (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Extensive

research has been conducted in this field of leadership yielding a variety of different theories, ranging from the simple to the super-complex (House and Mitchell, 1975, Conger and Kanungo, 1987, Bass, 1996). Leadership has traditionally been considered a male prerogative across a number of sectors on society, including the corporate, political and military sectors (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Women who have the capacity to become leaders within their respective fields, and as a cohort represent a valuable economic, political and social resources (King and Mason, 2001). The rise of women into key leadership positions provides evidence of their ability and capacity to lead, and more importantly, their contribution is now widely recognized in society. There is compelling evidence across a variety of sectors of a positive correlation between increased numbers of women in senior leadership positions and excellence in performance (Desvaux et al., 2007).

Despite the recent rise in the number of women moving to senior leadership roles, women are still under-represented in the upper echelons of organizations (Cook and Glass, 2014). There seem to be a set of invisible barriers and impediments, often associated with prejudice and discrimination (Baxter and Wright, 2000), which prevent women from reaching leadership positions. This scenario represents the 'glass ceiling' effect that is well documented in the literature (Coleman, 1998, Bielby, 2000, Cotter et al., 2001). This popular metaphor implies that gender disadvantages are largest at the top of the organizational hierarchy compared with lower-level roles. [Women are increasingly reported as having excellent leadership skills. In fact, women, more than men, are praised for having traits and styles that are associated with effective leadership performance \(Baker, 2014\). However, the evident vertical gender segregation at top](#)

management and women's delayed advancement to senior leadership positions still remains a common phenomenon (Seo et al., 2017).

Given the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership within sporting organizations across the world (Pape, 2020), it is evident that the sports sector is not exempt from this glass ceiling effect. For example, the International Olympic Committee came to define gender equity primarily in terms of accommodating women's segregated athletic participation (1967 – 1995) and defined in these terms, gender equity did little to transform the organization's binary and hierarchically gendered logic. This approach continued to shape the informal norms and procedures associated with the organization's allegedly gender-neutral and meritocratic yet male-dominated leadership (Pape, 2020). However, this effect is just one of the many barriers contributing to underrepresentation of women in organizational leadership positions (Eagly and Carli, 2003). In this case study we explore how one woman has dealt with the gender barriers faced during her career and her skillset and strategies to overcome them, in a context where females in leadership role are scarce.

Employment opportunities in the sporting sector have been associated with traditional gender-related roles with management and coaching positions established or promoted mainly for male candidates (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001, Whisenant et al., 2002, Jawahar and Mattsson, 2005). Other factors, including tokenism, the *old boys* network, differences in leadership styles, lack of experience and inadequate career opportunities, have also contributed to underrepresentation of women in this context (Oakley, 2000). Inequalities are systematically larger in some developing countries exacerbated by a number of factors including cultural norms, religious preferences, regional factors and

civil freedom (Dollar and Gatti, 1999, Jayachandran, 2015). Despite these substantial barriers, there are a number of examples of women who have defied the odds by overcoming obstructions and ascended into top leadership positions in South East Asia. For example, in post-colonial South East Asia, political leadership roles have increased, although this is in its majority related to women whose male family members enjoyed a well established leadership role previously (Amirell, 2012). Although it is more common to see female leaders in the post-colonial South East Asia, the scope of this case study is to describe an example of an emerging female leadership role, with no family links in sports leadership, in a developing country, and detail the contributing factors and characteristics of success of an inspiring woman in sport. We also explore the benefits that participating in a 2-week sports leadership workshop brought for her moving forwards.

An inspiring young woman was recently identified by her national sporting organization in the South East Asian region as an emerging leader to participate in a 2-week intensive international sports leadership and development program. This program provided a platform for her to reflect on her leadership experiences, and explore the various factors that shaped and influenced her leadership journey. Through this process, this emerging leader had an opportunity to identify the factors that originally attracted her to the sporting industry, and identify personal and professional barrier, challenges and obstacles. More importantly, she also had the opportunity to explore and explain how she has successfully navigated her way towards a more influential and decision-making position in her organization, especially given that women are rarely promoted to leadership roles in the South East Asian region. The female leader showcased in this

study pushed the glass ceiling and broken the cycle of under-representation of females in management and leadership roles.

The purpose of this case study was to explore preconceptions around leadership, and perceptions and experiences of this emerging female leader through examining the critical factors that have allowed her to gain success and develop as a leader. The case study addresses the journey of a female professional to a leadership role within her sporting organization, and how she managed to drive organizational change. The female professional reflects on her own leadership qualities and styles, particularly in terms of identifying her strengths, highlighting areas for further development, and outlining important leadership lessons she learned along the way. An important part of this process involves acknowledging and understanding the variety, complexity and scope of challenges encountered during her leadership journey. These findings will contribute to a wider appreciation of implicit barriers to career development, retention and leadership aspirations for women. This case study also evaluates the key elements of a 2-week sports leadership and development program this female participated, the impact that this program had on her as an individual and her professional role. [Therefore, included in this case study are the data collection tools used, the main findings from the surveys and direct observations of interactions with the participants during a 2-week period and the discussion around the main factors/characteristics identified by the participant that helped her achieve the first female leadership position within the most popular national sporting organization.](#)

Methodology

This case study investigates the critical factors associated with women being successful leaders in the sports sector. The selected participant had an atypical professional pathway, in order to contribute to the collection of richer more meaningful journey to report on. Participation in the study was voluntary and she provided written informed consent after explanation of the purpose, procedures and benefits in conjunction with a written study information sheet. This study was approved by the committee for ethics in human research.

Study design

A case study design approach was used to examine contemporary challenges current women face in leadership roles in South East Asia. A case study is an ideal methodology for a holistic in-depth investigation (Feagin et al., 1991) [that allows the study of complex and real-world questions/problems \(Noor, 2008\) and develops research \(Flyvbjerg, 2006\)](#). This was the preferred approach to answer the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, particularly when there is minimal control over events, and when the researcher is examining a particular phenomenon in a real-life situation or context (Kohn, 1997). This study provided the female leader with the framework to identify and document the critical factors that have enabled her to establish herself as a leader within a national sporting organization. The study uses a qualitative narrative approach to explain the links and associations between different factors/characteristics in a rigorous manner (Houghton et al., 2013), often disguised when quantitative data analysis is used in isolation (Mintzberg, 1979).

This study design, focusing on a single participant provides the opportunity and scope to explore leadership as a phenomenon, using multiple sources of data. Moreover, case studies highlight the detail and complexity of the participant's experience and the influence of various social factors on her interpretation of her own experience (Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, it is a valuable research method to develop theory, evaluate programs and develop interventions; largely due to its flexibility and rigor (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Case study analysis permits the facilitation and extraction of rich information, thus creating a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and processes that shape and influence behavior (Geertz, 1973). Despite numerous types of case study analysis available, an intrinsic case study design was preferred for this study. Adopting this approach also allows the specific focus to be on the actual case, given an unusual or unique situation to explain organizational change.

Sports Leadership and Development program

A number of South Asian countries were invited to identify individuals within the sports sector to undertake a Sports Leadership and Development program organized by Australia and delivered in Sri Lanka. BWN was identified by her country to participate in the program. The 2-week intensive program took place in Sri Lanka where 15 representatives from several other South East Asian region countries had gathered for a duration of 2 weeks. The 2-week program consisted of numerous presentations and lectures from experts in the field, cultural activities, reflective sessions, and group and interactive activities for all delegates from the different countries to share their insights.

Participant (BWN)

Data were obtained from a female who had been identified as an emerging leader by the sporting authority in her country. The participant from the South East Asian region is currently working for a sporting organization within her country of birth. For anonymity purposes, the participant will be referred to as BWN throughout the study. The participant had previously worked in the corporate sector for a number of years, prior to moving into the sports sector. She had only actively participated in sport in a recreational capacity before the study. BWN has a Masters degree, a postgraduate tertiary education qualification, and she is currently employed as an executive director of a national sporting organization in a full-time and fully paid position.

Data Collection

Data collection for this case study consisted of a combination of survey questionnaires and the direct recordings of the interactions the researchers had with the participants during the 2 week program. Having consulted and reviewed relevant literature and through in-depth discussions with professionals in this field (sports management and qualitative data collection), a questionnaire survey instrument was developed as the predominant data collection source for this study. The participant completed a series of questionnaires before, during the 2-week program and at 6 months after the program ended (2016 – 2017). While the surveys before and during the program captured her leadership experiences within her capacity as a professional pre-program as well as her insights on change management, organizational leadership during the program, the six months post-program survey reports on the impact the 2 week program had in her development on her as a leader. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data were gathered via these questionnaires. All questionnaires incorporated a series of both open-

ended questions as well as ranked, interval and ordinal scale questions. During the open questions, BWN was encouraged to offer her personal views, opinions and thoughts about international sporting systems, sport development and sports leadership at the organizational level. The questionnaires were completed by BWN while she had the opportunity to ask for any clarification about the questions - a researcher was able to assist her. A response rate of 100% was recorded during the data collection process. This high response may have been influenced by the fact that the participant had been specifically identified to be involved in this study and the purpose of this research paper had been explained in great detail.

Below are the four different questionnaires that were developed and administered:

Pre-Sports Leadership and Development Program Questionnaire:

Purpose: to gain an understanding of the participant's views on a number of areas, including her current understanding of leadership; identifying and prioritizing of essential skills and values associated with leadership in sport; outlining what success looks like in relation to her current role; identifying factors that would allow her to have success within her leadership role; and identifying what limiting factors could prevent her from having success within her role. The questionnaire also included a range of program-specific questions linked to the purpose, expectations and key learning outcomes of the 2-week program.

This questionnaire was administered in person by the researchers, on the first day of the Sports Leadership and Development program, prior to commencement of the first

session. The participant had as long as she needed to complete the survey and the researcher was available (in person) to provide any form of clarification, as required. A thorough explanation of the purpose, style of questioning and the scaling/ranking systems was also provided. This questionnaire comprised of 17 questions in total: 10 open-ended questions, 3 interval scale questions (Likert scale) and 4 ordinal scale questions (rank).

Post-Sports Leadership and Development Program Questionnaire:

Purpose: to evaluate the effectiveness of the Sports Leadership and Development program by asking a series of questions related to whether the participant's expectations had been met; important lessons that she had learned; how she was going to implement some of the learning outcomes within her organization; and whether this 2-week program had changed her views on leadership, sport development and change management.

This questionnaire was administered in person by the researcher, at the conclusion of the 2-week Sports Leadership and Development program. The participant had as long as she needed to complete the survey and the researcher was available (in person) to provide any form of clarification, as required. A thorough explanation of the purpose, style of questioning and the scaling/ranking systems was provided. There were 17 questions in total: 8 open-ended questions, 3 dichotomous questions, 3 interval scale questions (Likert scale) and 3 ordinal scale questions (rank).

Six-Month Post-Sports Leadership and Development Program Questionnaire:

Purpose: to understand if and how the participant had implemented the skills and knowledge that she acquired throughout the program, into her current workplace. Furthermore, this questionnaire was also designed to determine whether her views, in relation to her own leadership values and skills, had changed as a result of her involvement in the program.

This questionnaire was administered electronically (via email) six months after the participant's involvement in the program. The participant had as long as she needed to complete the questionnaire before sending it back to the researcher electronically (via email). A thorough explanation of the purpose, style of questioning and the scaling/ranking systems was provided to the participant electronically. There were 8 questions in total: 2 open-ended questions, 1 dichotomous question, 2 interval scale questions (Likert scale) and 3 ordinal scale questions (rank).

Leadership Journey Questionnaire:

Purpose: to provide the participant with the opportunity to share her personal experiences of leadership by identifying the various factors and experiences that have allowed her to have success, and develop as a leader within her respective sporting organization. The questionnaire also provided the participant with the opportunity to acknowledge and explore the variety, complexity and scope of challenges she has encountered while on her leadership journey. Questions were also asked on how she has been able to overcome such obstacles, through the development of various characteristics and skillsets.

This final questionnaire was administered electronically (via email), six months after the first questionnaire had been completed. The participant had as long as she needed to complete the questionnaire, before returning it to the researcher, electronically (via email). A thorough explanation of the purpose, style of questioning and the scaling/ranking systems was provided to the participant, electronically. There were 19 questions in total: 16 open-ended questions and 3 closed questions.

Alongside the responses to the above surveys, direct observations were also recorded by the researchers throughout the 2 week of the Sports Leadership and Development Program. These data were systematically and thoroughly recorded by the researcher and stored electronically through the use of a program diary-log. It was important to collect direct observations, as these provide a powerful opportunity for the researcher to examine events in real time, within the participant's context. Although direct observations can occur in a formal setting, for the purpose of this study, direct observations were casual in their nature. The researcher had a deep understanding of the context and experiences of the observations described in the manuscript, which increases the underlying relevancy and tone.

Findings

A professional and courageous approach to identify and implement honest and evidence-based solutions have been key for BWN's success. She has taken a professional approach when it was not expected of her. Professionalism, a priority value for BWN has been identified as a promoter and powerful influential asset for

organizational change (Evetts, 2006). BWN has reached the executive director position within her sporting organization in a country where women leaders are scarce, and the sport she works for is a highly influential and iconic cultural activity. A proactive mindset to opportunities and a 'can do' mindset served BWN well. Moreover, BWN has successfully influenced change within her sporting organization by exercising it, successfully complementing professionalism with soft skills of clear communication and outcome-based approach to challenging situations. As a pioneer in her country, it is important that this case study provided BWN with the opportunity for knowledge transfer as her insights are an important asset for future organizations to benefit from a positive organizational change. In a context where traditionally only a small select group was able to access leadership roles (Burns, 1955), her approach to speaking the truth with logic', with an evidence-based approach, has proved effective for both the individual and organization.

A thematic analysis is presented here to identify major themes, theme prevalence and illustrative quotes within the data. Data were grouped into five thematic areas as follows:

Values

The notion of values has become an important item of debate in relation to many phenomena and leadership is no exception (Groves and LaRocca, 2011) [importance of values based leadership is on the rise \(Copeland, 2014\)](#). The relationship between leadership and values is a strong one and has drawn considerable academic attention (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998, Ross and Gray, 2006, Groves and LaRocca, 2011). Values serve as the foundational essence of leadership and leaders lead from their values and

beliefs (Woodward, 1994) and as blueprints, or foundations of various leadership functions, including decision making, problem solving and resolving conflict (Malphurs, 1996). It was interesting to note the order in which BWN prioritized the ten values associated with leadership (Table 1), highlighting the fact that being professional and trustworthy were top priorities for her. The notions of professionalism and trust have always been linked and interconnected (Evetts, 2006). Extensive research has been conducted in relation to professionalism, particularly in relation to this value as a discourse of occupational control. It has been argued that professionalism is a unique form of occupational control, which has distinct over other forms of control, including market, organizational and bureaucratic forms of control (Freidson, 2001). Furthermore, in some instances, professionalism is used as a discourse to influence, promote and facilitate organizational change (Evetts, 2006). This approach is of significant interest, given that BWN highlighted her ability to successfully make and implement change within her organization.

BWN also suggested that courage is an important value that contributed to her leadership success. It is important to note that courage, within the organizational context, refers to the ability to challenge the conventional models of working behavior (Dubin, 1982). Courage places an emphasis on the undertaking of potentially risky actions within the organizational setting. This is significant as BWN identified the importance to risk taking in relation to leadership and indicated that this skill is a strength of hers. BWN was also encouraged to articulate any other values that she deemed to be important in relation to leadership. In addition to the ten values provided by the researcher, BWN identified that diplomacy was also a value that was important to her. BWN's ability to articulate her views on this topic of values and their relevant

contribution to her success was not unexpected. Successful leaders need to have a good understanding of their own values and beliefs, as they provide a means to justify their behavior (Meglino and Ravlin, 1998), while serving as a powerful and influential factor (Lord and Brown, 2001).

Success

Defining success is a critical component of leadership. When asked to explain what leadership success looks like for her, BWN suggested that there were a number of factors that defined success for her: *'Results...Sound financial management...Good governance practices... ability to seek alternative sources of income...Sustainable and strategic thinking and practice.'* BWN.

BWN indicated that her leadership success had stemmed from her ability to: work with and influence people; to network effectively; to make decisions and maximize resources; to take calculated risks; highly motivated; transparent decision making; confident in her capacity to plan and implement the plan/program; and her competitive and efficient nature. In addition, BWN indicated that she has vision and is creative. A number of scholars have highlighted the fact that great leaders have a vision to achieve large scale ideas that they dream of accomplishing, in addition to having the personal power and competencies to enact it (Gibson, 2012). In addition to BWN being asked to outline what success looks like, she was asked to rate the importance of five skills, as identified by the researchers, in relation to leadership (Table 2). BWN was also asked to rate herself in relation to each skill.

Role Models

Leaders communicate strong messages through actions and through role modelling that leaders reinforce the values that support their organizations, particularly from a cultural point of view (Schein, 1985). BWN was asked to consider if she perceives herself to be a role model for other aspiring female leaders – she agreed with this proposition. She specifically highlighted a number of important factors that she felt she demonstrates or has been able to achieve:

'I speak truth with logic...I have taken on challenges and have had the ability to face extreme challenges in different positions... I have the ability to work under pressure and the ability to bring solutions to the problems which was beyond the expectations of many stakeholders within the organization. I have succeeded in bringing many plans and changes to life.' BWN.

Although it is evident that BWN did not specifically highlight the importance of being a role model, she articulated the behaviors and actions that warranted her role model status, and that may potentially have a strong influence on the development of future female leaders. In addition, BWN was asked what advice she would give to other aspiring female leaders. Promoting creation of knowledge and knowledge transfer through opportunities like offering advice, is very powerful as organizations, leaders and individuals can fully utilize collective expertise and knowledge to be more innovative, efficient and effective (Grant, 1996). The advice that BWN has willingly provided is detailed in Table 3.

Opportunity through professional development

Organizations need to invest in career development initiatives and activities as a way of enhancing career satisfaction and supporting the career development of employees

(Schwartz, 1993). Without professional development opportunities, organizations often fail to acknowledge, utilize and further develop the talent of employees, particularly female employees. As a result, there are significant cultural and financial implications, including loss of investment in training when female employees leave the organization; dissatisfaction in relation to their career and career progression; reduced performance capacity as a direct result of high degree of dissatisfaction and frustration levels; and more importantly, failure to recruit best talent, regardless of gender, represented at senior management levels (Schwartz, 1993). Investing in leadership potential and nurturing new and upcoming leaders should promote the best interests of organizational change and development, supported of course by change management.

Leaders often see the world through a lens of opportunity (Harris and Kuhnert, 2008). It is evident that BWN values and understands the importance of professional development opportunities. BWN actively searches for opportunities to further advance her career. She was grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Sports Leadership and Development Program and suggested that it has had a profound impact on her, both from a personal and professional point of view. Her views on the impact the program are detailed in Table 4. BWN has been able to use the skills, networks and information that she acquired throughout the program to affect change within her own environments. BWN reported that she was able to implement structural change within the high performance environment of her sporting organization, strengthen international networks, attract corporate financial support programs, and conduct professional development sessions: *'Successfully create a high performance program...raised funds to conduct the program within a short period...conducted a level II coaching course...'* BWN.

Overcoming challenges

Despite the execution of equity measures to bridge the gap between the number of male and female leaders, career-related barriers remain for women in reaching top management position (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Perceptions of unfairness and discriminatory tendencies can lead to pessimistic and negative attitudes towards career advancement (Poisat et al., 2014). It was interesting, however, that the two major challenges that BWN identified as barriers, might not have been specifically related to gender. Lack of supervisory support, particularly from the board, was identified by BWN as being one of her biggest challenges to date. BWN suggested that supervisory support is a critical factor for women, not only in relation to career satisfaction, but also career progression. This comment supports recent assertions into the importance of accessing supervisory support for women (Poisat et al., 2014). Supervisory support can significantly contribute to females remaining committed to their organization. Having the opportunity to receive supervisory support, through feedback and constructive communication, can enhance the opportunity and scope for the development and advancement of capabilities (van der Heijden et al., 2010).

Governance is the system by which elements of an organization are directed, controlled and regulated (Hoye and Cuskelly, 2012). BWN identified poor governance as a significant challenge that she has faced and impaired her development as a leader.

While good governance does not necessarily guarantee success or career advancement, effective governance is an essential element for any organization to function properly (Hoye and Cuskelly, 2012). Good governance needs to be embedded in the culture of an organization and actively upheld and implemented by all people involved within the

organization, regardless of their leadership status (Briggs, 2012). BWN suggested that poor governance within her organization has reduced her capacity within her role and blurred lines in terms of role clarity.

Although BWN highlighted two significant challenges encountered in her career to date, she was articulated how she has managed to overcome such obstacles. She suggested that her positive mindset, particularly in terms of converting challenges into opportunities, had a significant positive impact on her ability to overcome such situations. She identified her motivation to achieve goals, both individual and collective, as another important factor. Furthermore, BWN suggested other factors that have helped her to overcome challenges, including: *'Networking skills...continuous learning attitude...creative approach to doing things...ability to do things differently...visionary...able to implement'* BWN. [These strategies explained by BWN should be noted and encouraged by organizations and policy makers who seek to empower and promote women in leadership positions. Organizations can in turn benefit from the leadership skills women can offer and find a more balanced and successful approach to the more traditional 'all male' leadership style. Increasing female role models would have a deep impact on how the society views women and inspire young females to pursue a career in leadership.](#)

[One of the limitations of the current views and outcomes presented here is that it refers to a single case and it is therefore harder to generalize the findings to the wider population.](#) Although case study methodology has been viewed with circumspect and the issue of generalization has frequently appeared in the literature, the rich data extracted as a result of this case study contributes to a greater understanding of the topic

(Flyvbjerg, 2006). The insights presented have identified further areas of research that enhance the roles of women and leadership such as the characteristics that allow women to successfully lead, views on how to contribute to the leadership team of an organization and the impact a leadership and development program can have on an emerging leader whose achievements have no precedence in her country. One of the more frequent criticisms of case study research has been that results and outcomes are not widely applicable in real life (Tellis, 1997). Therefore, to counter this argument and further strengthen the case, future studies could incorporate a larger sample size, including samples from other demographics, to confirm the generalizability of the findings of this study. Future work to build on the findings of the current study could study a cohort from different backgrounds and gender and discuss how they can be integrated into a single leadership program to maximize professional development for all.

Conclusion

This case study explores the realities of a female crafting her leadership pathway in the sporting industry within a context/framework where female leadership is rare. BWN explored the various factors influencing her leadership journey to date. This study highlights critical aspects that challenged her as a leader, and highlighted the way in which she has overcome such obstacles. Capturing BWN's insights on how she has become such an influential should hopefully inspire and empower other females to follow her steps. Her success also highlights how empowering a 2-week international Leadership and Development program can be and the support it provides for organizational change and development, as well as the professional growth of the individual. This case study supports the need to continue to raise awareness of the

underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions and provides examples on how future women leaders can overcome some of the barriers to achieve leadership roles within their organizations. Given the benefits of having women in leadership roles, organizations should consider maximising the valuable assets women bring to these leadership roles. Organizations could use similar leadership and development programs to increase women representatives in leadership roles. However, gender is not necessarily the only factor that prevents women from rising into senior leadership positions, within the sports sector and society in general.

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