

## 25 Working as a sporting director

*Parnell D, Caplehorn R, Thelwell K,  
Asghar T and Batey M*

AU: There is a mismatch in the author names from the one provided in the TOC of front matter. Please check and confirm which one needs to be followed.

### Introduction

The soccer industry has a problem with stability, helped little by Covid-19 (Parnell et al., 2020a). The approach of regularly dismissing head coaches and their entire backroom staff, may bring rapid short-term results, but is not a paradigm regularly employed in industries outside the sporting sphere. The high turnover of senior staff within the club sporting hierarchy leads to a myriad of policy changes and inconsistency of strategy and in culture (Bridgewater, 2010; Kelly, 2017). This context has created an environment of employment instability and vulnerability, which is, in turn, detrimental to organisational performance and success (Relvas et al., 2010; Gibson & Groom, 2018, 2019; Roderick & Schumacker, 2017). Traditionally, this instability has created problems for club owners who have often focused on delivering success on the pitch, and a ‘win on a Saturday’, rather than strategically protecting their investment. As owners have clamoured for quick-fix solutions, entrenched in the short-term thinking and solutions, rather than the medium-to-long-term horizon, a vicious circle of decision-making, intensified by the risk and reward of success or failure, has created even greater instability and more Head Coach turnover (Bridgewater, 2010; Gammelsæter, 2013; Kelly, 2017). One strategy considered and adopted by some clubs to address these issues has been the introduction of a Sporting Director (Parnell et al., 2018a).

In this chapter, we seek to examine the role of the Sporting Director in soccer. Historically, we can broadly categorise two main groups of clubs depending on where the majority of power was congregated. Those clubs who were run mainly by the First Team Manager, who generally had the final say on all aspects of the club and team, or those clubs who were run by an Owner, President or Chief Executive who maintained power for many aspects of how the club functioned, leaving the Head Coach to work within the parameters he/she was given. Yet, the ever-growing complexity and commercialisation of the sport, increasing demands on performance for players, backroom staff, consultants, and managers, has challenged this conventional leadership structure. It appears an important time to review the Sporting Director role and how this role can help support the Head Coach and help deliver the goals of the organisation.

### Defining a sporting director

As an emerging role within the soccer management landscape, there exists considerable ambiguity regarding the title or definition of a Sporting Director. We use the term Sporting Director in this chapter, but clubs seemingly use the title ‘Director of

Football’, ‘Technical Director’, ‘Director of Football Operations’, and even ‘Chief Soccer Officer’ to describe individuals with strategic management responsibilities. The inconsistency in terminology regarding the Sporting Director role has and will continue to impede scholarly research into this area. For the purposes of clarity, and in the absence of an existing definition, using descriptions from Parnell et al., (2018a, b) we propose that a Sporting Director may be defined as the individual with strategic management responsibility for soccer operations.

Figures 25.1–25.3 provide representations of management structures that incorporate a Sporting Director. Typically, Sporting Directors adopt a position in between that of the Head Coach and Chair/Owner in the hierarchy (Figures 25.1 and 25.3), but may in a flatter structure make up a management team alongside the Head Coach (Figure 25.2). In some circumstances, the Sporting Director will report to a CEO (Figure 25.1), at others directly to the board or owner. At highly-developed, elite clubs with many sporting departments, there may be a clearer demarcation of management responsibilities for the Sporting Director and Head Coach or heads of departments (Figure 25.2) each with their own complex reporting structures. In smaller clubs, the hierarchy may be simplified with the Sporting Director taking a wide range of

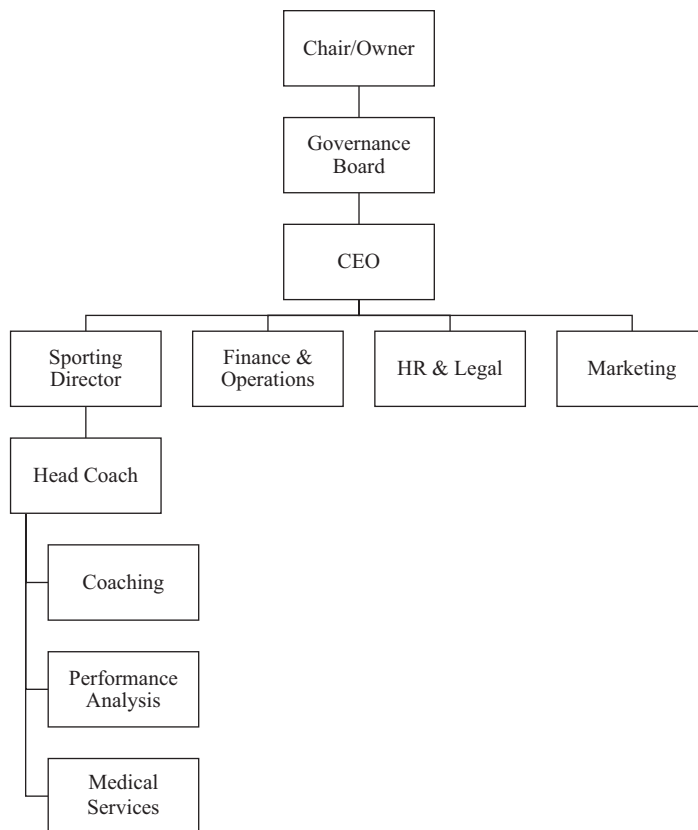
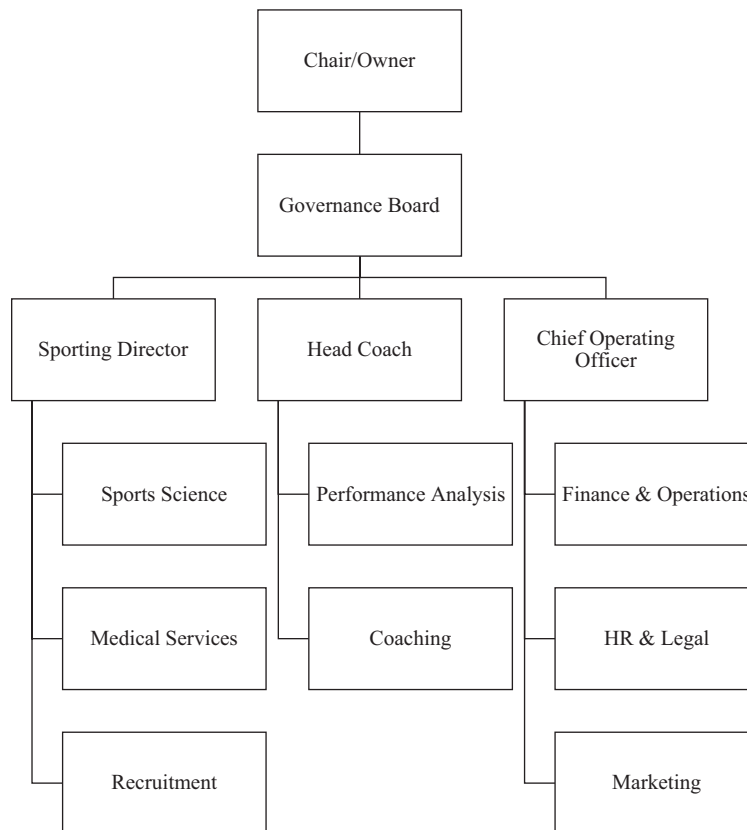


Figure 25.1 A football management structure where the Sporting Director reports to a CEO.



*Figure 25.2* A football management structure where the Sporting Director, Head Coach, and CEO report to the Governance Board/Chair/Owner.

responsibilities including player recruitment (Figure 25.3). In effect, the position taken by the Sporting Director varies from club to club and will be impacted by such factors as the size of the club, the scope and scale of the club's administrative functions and the existence of other technical roles (e.g. Head of Recruitment) and sometimes the desires of the owner or powerful stakeholders.

Given our proposed definition above, the Sporting Director is characterised as having the direct responsibility of overseeing the core business pertaining to soccer operations, and in some clubs, entails the responsibility for Head Coach recruitment, succession-planning, and dismissal (Nissen, 2014; Parnell et al., 2021). In addition, the Sporting Director as an architect or custodian of culture ensures the creation and maintenance of a sustainable high-performance environment from the academy to the first team (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

### **The rise of the sporting director role**

Professional soccer (and sport) has undergone dramatic changes over the past two decades. These changes have arisen primarily due to media rights, with most professional

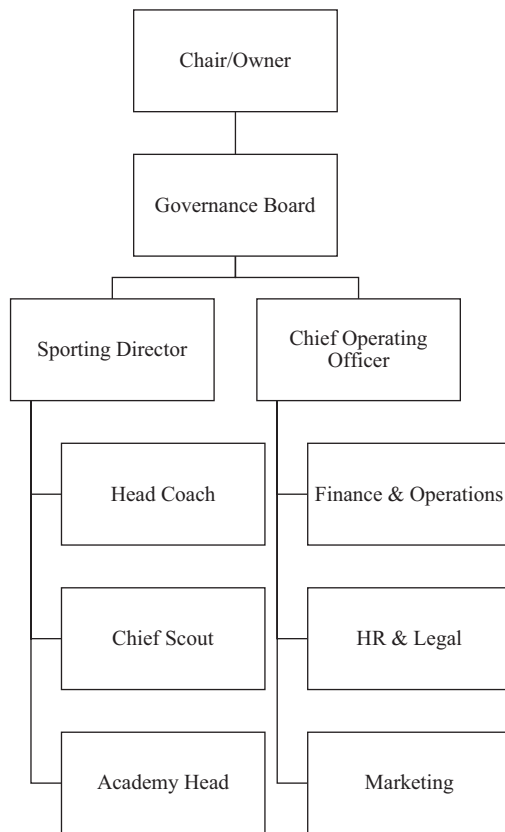


Figure 25.3 A simplified football management structure where the Sporting Director would take responsibility for player recruitment.

clubs now operating as complex business institutions in dynamic pursuit of an ever greater share of the significant monies that media rights provide (Morrow & Howieson, 2014). The English Premier League (EPL) has been at the forefront of these changes and is embedded within a European and international marketplace of clubs, fans, sponsors, governing bodies, and partner commercial organisations. The European market is thought to be worth ~£25 billion, with combined league revenues for the 'Top-5' leagues across Europe valued at ~£13 billion for the 17/18 season (Deloitte, 2019). Much of this growth is due to the hyper-commercialisation and commodification of soccer across Europe. At present, it is common for global investment funds, multi-national conglomerates, sovereign wealth funds, and even royalties, to be part of ownership structures and linked to club acquisition (Parnell et al., 2020b). A complex stakeholder environment within which a Sporting Director may expect to operate and negotiate.

During the past 30 years of the EPL, many factors in the soccer ecosystem have evolved. Notably, the financial rewards and consequences of success or failure have intensified. At the end of each EPL season, the bottom three teams are relegated to the division below – The Championship. This relegation has significant negative financial

ramifications on the club's income, including broadcast, matchday, and commercial revenue streams (Maguire, 2021). While the consequence of demotion is partially mitigated by the protection of 'parachute payments' (see Wilson et al., 2021), the chances of a prompt return to the EPL are slim, despite the recent success of Norwich City FC, who were relegated from the EPL to the Championship in 2019/20, only to bounce-back immediately in the 2020/21 season. Notably, given the focus of this chapter, Norwich City FC implemented a Sporting Director model, recruiting Stuart Webber in 2017. The EPL has also seen an influx of foreign ownership and majority of clubs in the EPL (2021/22) are foreign-owned. We have also seen how the role of the contemporary manager (or Head Coach) has considerably expanded during this period (Bridgewater, 2010; Kelly, 2017). Gone are the days of a kitman and a handful of trusted coaches, to be replaced with a multi-layered high-performance team of internal employees working alongside specialists, advisors, and analysts sometimes from external providers, the Sporting Director will expect to manage and influence within and across formal and informal boundaries with diverse, skilled colleagues.

The implementation of a Sporting Director model has been commonplace in Europe and is gaining popularity worldwide. Many senior leaders occupy these positions across Europe, including major clubs such as AFC Ajax, AS Roma, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Inter Milan, Juventus, Lille OSC, Paris Saint-Germain FC, PSV Eindhoven, RB Leipzig, and Real Madrid. Sporting Directors can be found extensively in Major League Soccer and across the continent at clubs such as Club Bolivar in Bolivia and Guadalajara in Mexico. The United Kingdom-based Association of Sporting Directors caters for in excess of 250 members from every continent (see: <https://associationofsportingdirectors.com>). There is undoubtedly a rise in the popularity of Sporting Directors in soccer globally, much of which remains under the radar with regard to research. Given the position and pre-eminence of the English Premier League, and the reticence with which the role was adopted, there has been a focus on the role in this context.

English clubs are often accused of being resistant to change and slow to adopt modern management methods. However, researchers have identified the multiple challenges of making the switch to the Sporting Director model, including hostility, and distrust (Kelly & Harris, 2010). Many head coaches harboured these feelings due to what they perceived to be interference in their role, by owners and directors, all with their own agenda (Kelly, 2017) and none facing the pressure of losing their job if there were to be a 'bad run' of results. Therefore, and despite the challenges, many clubs now seek strategies to best focus the talents of a Head Coach, who could easily be subsumed by a vast array of responsibilities in the new complex, fixture-congested, highly contested, and commercial era of modern soccer. The Sporting Director model seeks to minimise the Head Coach's non-essential duties and find a more sensible and parsimonious 'division of labour' of leadership. While some have criticised clubs in England for being slow in adopting the role, others have argued this is simply a rebrand of an existing structure. Researchers have identified that perhaps Liverpool FC, had an early version of the model, where Bob Paisley (who became manager of Liverpool in 1974) had some of the administrative duties previously undertaken by Bill Shankly (his predecessor) given to Peter Robinson (Liverpool FC club secretary). Paisley was relieved of player contract duties, allowing him to focus on the day-to-day management of the first team (Lawrence, 2018, p. 78). Lawrie McMenemy, Southampton FC manager between 1973 and 1985 was asked to do a role similar to the Sporting Director

(Lawrence, 2018, p.78). We could argue that one of the most successful managers in history, Sir Alex Ferguson operated as a quasi-Sporting Director, fulfilling responsibilities associated with the role. As is often the case, the role may have existed long before it became popularised and given a formal title.

A report considered the 'Technical Director' (which as we have discussed is a term akin to the Sporting Director) role in England, compared and contrasted this to the same role in European clubs (Church, 2012). Church implied the role would become more popular in England and outlined several reasons for this expected growth in popularity. These reasons include: (1) new ownership bringing in new working models; (2) a more 'business-like' approach by clubs, meaning the link between the technical staff and the board will become increasingly vital; (3) the Premier League's Elite Performance Plan (EPPP) would cause a change to current staffing structures, and these changes would need to be developed and managed; (4) an increase in mandatory qualifications, professionalism, and accountability within clubs would also be a driver for the uptake of the role; and (5) it seems to be the modern trend for clubs to employ a Sporting Director, and the likelihood is that other clubs will replicate this model for fear of being 'laggards' in adopting innovative practices. Since the report, England has slowly shifted its governance structures towards a Sporting Director model and Church maintains a leadership position within The FA overseeing their flagship Level 5 Technical Directors course. For example, in season 2016/17 only 13 out of 20 EPL clubs had someone in a similar role to a Sporting Director, however, in the 2021/22 season, 17 out of 20 have such appointments. Sporting Directors within clubs are becoming a mainstay, with greater clarity now possible regarding their primary roles and responsibilities.

### **The roles and responsibilities of sporting directors**

The initial appointment of a Sporting Director, by an owner or board, is often in the pursuit of change, or a new (or better) way of doing things. The Sporting Director often includes an aspiration to give a club a 'way of doing things', through a cohesive and joined-up structure, a greater sense of stability and a 'road-map' to deliver upon a long-term strategy (Parnell et al., 2018b). The Sporting Director is often someone who has overall responsibility for the performance of various sporting departments within a club. We have described this as someone who can deliver a strategic plan and operate as a custodian of the club. They often have responsibilities for the first team, the academy, recruitment and scouting, sport science, and medical departments (Parnell et al., 2018a, 2021). The Sporting Director will often act as the intermediary between the strategic apex of a club (i.e., the board) and sporting departments (Parnell et al., 2018b). As a more 'permanent fixture' within a club's hierarchy, the Sporting Director is instrumental in shaping the long-term vision, strategy, and culture to support sustainable high performance. They can act as a custodian of the 'way we do things around here' against the backdrop of (relatively) regular changes to the Head Coach and backroom staff.

The priorities of the Sporting Director may include supporting numerous assistants across the first team and academy departments (Parnell et al., 2018b). They are also responsible for developing a positive working relationship with the owners and Board, the recruitment of the best talent (on and off the pitch) within budget (Parnell et al., 2021) and, developing and maintaining a club-wide philosophy to support its

sporting strategy. The Sporting Director is often renowned for recruitment practice taking players in and out of the club (Parnell et al., 2021), which is vital in the globalised race for talent (Bond et al., 2018, 2019). Recruitment of talent is undoubtedly a key task, however, an overreliance on this capability may constrain the effectiveness of introducing someone into the role. At present, little attention is given to the support the Sporting Director may give to medical and sports sciences, or the academy environment – all of which can be critical for achieving short- and long-term sporting objectives and ensuring a cohesive core of how ‘we do things round here’ from top to bottom.

Our intention is not to provide an exhaustive list or description, merely a nod to important areas of consideration. Sporting Directors should: know the football industry (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2003; Renton, 1999); understand the context within which the business operates (Renton, 1999); possess strategic awareness (Renton, 1999); and a breadth of perspective, professional reputation, and expertise (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2003); exercise interpersonal and communicational skills (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2003; Pye & Pettigrew, 2005; Roberts et al., 2005); bring motivation and commitment (Ingley & Van der Walt, 2003); and the ability to question and challenge (Roberts et al., 2005). As a consequence, the recruitment of Sporting Directors raises considerations around their skill set and capabilities.

The emergence of the Sporting Director role has been fraught with challenges. Like any change or disruption is an innovation that changes the world (or in our case, the soccer industry) in such a way, that if successful organisations keep on doing what they always did, they are likely to fail. As such, the Sporting Director often demands a new organisational structure. In this respect, there are mixed views and practices on whether a Sporting Director should sit on the board (apex) of the club or elsewhere (for example, above the first team Head Coach, but below the board). Yet, when asked Sporting Directors have stated:

“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.”...“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”.

(See Parnell et al., 2018a, p. 162)

Although many Sporting Directors know the importance of sitting on the board of the club, it is often negotiable as candidates seek opportunities in old organisations who refuse to change and continue to face an uphill struggle despite their past success. Architectural innovation refers to structural change to the organisation to embrace the innovation and is worth consideration (Henderson & Clark, 1990). Yet, if a club brings in a new strategy (i.e., a Sporting Director), fitting this new innovation into old structures offers very little scope for change – little influence, power, and resources – the hierarchies remain intact. An existing board may see the introduction of a Sporting Director as someone seeking to make a grab for power and challenge the leadership’s decision-making status quo.

AU: The reference citation “Ingley & Van der Walt, 2003” is cited in text but not in list. Hence, please provide a complete reference list or remove it from the text.



New change requires experimentation and the introduction of a Sporting Director is a change that appears to require architectural innovation (i.e., organisational and structural change). This change will create consequences for clubs, people, power dynamics, resource division, and decision-making responsibilities. There has been much experimentation on how this should work or be implemented (or not) in any club at any moment in time. This issue will remain a key item on the agenda for boards examining the Sporting Director model for implementation in what we can consider as the current experimentation period. We have seen and can expect vast amounts of trial and error. Some clubs may view an unsuccessful attempt to implement a Sporting Director model as an indication to completely end their experimentation with the role. This period of experimentation is fraught with challenges as boards are engaged with the management of stakeholder expectations, politics, influence, and power dynamics. However, we hope this experimentation leads to learning, improvements, and success. This period will naturally come to an end as a dominant design emerges.

### **Successes associated with sporting directors in the role**

Clubs have made progress on the journey of change with the introduction of different Sporting Directors models. While we can accept that errors have been made by all involved in the decision-making processes with respect to initiating this new role, there has also been plenty of success. This is often unique to the club context as this can vary from club to club based on ownership, governance, and organisational structure. The following section provides the reader with two selections of successful people. It does not serve to identify every successful Sporting Director, person or club, nor does non-inclusion allude to unsuccessful practice. These examples serve to provide a road map for the reader for further exploration and analysis.

#### ***Dan Ashworth – Technical Director at Brighton Hove Albion FC***

Dan Ashworth joined West Bromwich Albion (WBA) originally to help develop the academy structure – later becoming Academy Director, where he formed a relationship with the WBA Chairman Jeremy Peace. Within 3 years of joining WBA, Dan was appointed Technical Director. Dan then moved to the English FA where he oversaw the development of the ‘England DNA’ strategy. During his time at the English FA, he would see World Cup victories at U17 and U20 age groups, along with senior World Cup semi-finals with both the men’s and women’s teams. Part of this success was developing an enhanced competitive games programme and teams that could compete within these fixtures. Those who have worked with Dan regularly speak about his management skills as being one of his biggest strengths. Dan is known for being inclusive and democratic in his decision-making. He describes his role at Brighton as being the hub in the centre of a wheel – around him are the seven heads of department. He describes his job as connecting those seven areas and recruiting the right person to lead the department and overseeing succession planning in the result that someone leaves. Dan is committed to a development culture, getting the best out of people, and helping them grow. This links to his inclusive approach, through allowing people to express themselves and allowing the space to succeed. This role includes non-playing and playing talent. For example, there are ongoing discussions between Dan and Graham Potter (the first team Head Coach) to explore ways to improve their game, the focus



would be on internal players in their own system (i.e., peripheral squad, loan, and/or academy players), rather than to look immediately outwards for playing talent. Dan's recruitment of Graham aligns both of their desires to develop people, whether staff or players. Dan is naturally well-placed to support talent pathways within Brighton given his experience at WBA and The FA. However, he also has key staff and quality people around him. For example, David Weir, a former player, assistant manager of Rangers FC and Brentford FC as loan manager. David (alongside the other heads of departments) would work with Dan to deliver on the club's strategy, in this case, it may include achieving 30% of playing minutes attributed to academy players in the English Premier League, alongside finishing in the top 10 places. There is of course much more to say, to discuss and analyse, including Dan's commitment to supporting the health and well-being of his staff and his role in Brighton's spearheading of various initiatives such as Women in Football. Dan is a leader and one of the 'go-to' people within the industry.

***Monchi – current Sporting Director at Sevilla FC and former sporting director @ Roma FC***

AU: The reference citation "La Liga, 2000" is cited in text but not in list. Hence, please provide a complete reference list or remove it from the text.

Monchi was a goalkeeper at Sevilla and spent most of his time as the number two choice. When Sevilla was relegated from [La Liga \(2000\)](#), Monchi was recruited as Sporting Director to develop an elite scouting system and improve talent pathways from the academy to the first team. During his time as Sporting Director of Sevilla, he oversaw an incredible six Europa League trophies, along with a reputation for producing large profits on undervalued talent who come to Sevilla and move on to some of Europe's top clubs. For example, Julio Baptista £1.5m to £15m, Dani Alves £435k to £27m, and Ivan Rakitic £1.8m to £44m. Monchi believes in attention to detail rather than luck. He views clubs that have opted for a Sporting Director model as being advantaged over those that do not. Monchi describes his role as sitting between the Chairman, who gives him the economic information, and the Head Coach, who outlines what he needs with the first team, while also focusing on internal player development. He outlines an ongoing tension between short- and long-term goals and the need to continue to focus on player pathways. Monchi describes three pillars for success as having a united direction, planning, and teamwork. During his 30 years at Sevilla, the two times he experienced relegation was a result of internal division, as such its key to have a united direction of work. Each club also needs a strategic and operational plan, to ensure role clarity, and objections, which requires detailed planning. Finally, he believes in the power of the collective and avoids individualism, as such teamwork is key for successful organisations. Operationally, Monchi stays close to the players (e.g., staff and Head Coach), describing himself as a 'locker-room' Sporting Director, to know the people, challenges, issues, and how he can help. Monchi utilises data analytics (i.e., big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning) to inform his recruitment, alongside an extensive professional scouting network. There is much more to discuss on recruitment, but to close this short feature, here are the areas Monchi identifies as important for Sporting Directors to consider:

- Do not avoid risk when making decisions – it is impossible to do great things without taking big risks;
- If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together;

- Continual investment in personal development and do not be afraid of failure;
- Being able to adapt is the difference between success and failure.

### **Challenges that face sporting directors**

A number of challenges impact the success of implementing a Sporting Director approach. The flexibility in the role title and lack of clarity with respect to the role can create tensions internally and externally with stakeholders (including fans and media), which can influence the effectiveness of the club. The position of a Sporting Director in a club's hierarchy (i.e., on the board or otherwise) impacts the influence and effectiveness of anyone in the role. This is a relatively new role, and like any new innovation, it takes time to find the best way to implement and change ways of doing things. Therefore, managing existing hierarchies and power dynamics is key. This process must be managed carefully when implementing a new Sporting Director, as this is undoubtedly a complex change. More broadly, there are a wide variety of challenges facing Sporting Directors in practice that should inform continued professional development and education programmes (see Table 25.1). The challenges pertain to the role and responsibilities of a Sporting Director as we have reviewed in this chapter, in addition to the myriad of macro issues that soccer organisations must adapt to. To 'bridge the gap' between the challenges faced and the skills required, we provide a suggestive set of skills and competencies that Sporting Directors should look to develop – and which providers of formal and informal education should cater for.

### **Future directions and conclusions**

There are a number of key considerations we have drawn from our analysis and experience. The title used for the Sporting Director role is flexible, but with definitional clarity provided in this chapter, we hope to support focused and rigorous research in this area. A Sporting Director may be defined as an individual with strategic management responsibility for soccer operations.

The job role varies across 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 organisation. The role is new and innovation will take time and involve trial and error. We are still learning the best ways for a Sporting Director to maximise his/her working relationship with the Head Coach and the wider network of influential stakeholders. How best to support innovation and change in both operations and cultures will remain an issue. The challenges facing Sporting Directors are plenty, as such we need a shift in how we support Sporting Directors to prepare for internal and external changes (i.e., technology, social, media, data, and political).

If the Sporting Director role is to be successful, we need to think and work for organisational structures that give those in the role the genuine position to influence. While each club context is unique, this will likely result in a Sporting Director assuming a board-level position and influence. Once a dominant effective design is established for the Sporting Director, the initial set of components will need to be refined and elaborated, and progress takes the shape of improvements in the components within the framework of a stable organisation. This process should allow clubs to focus on

*Table 25.1* Some challenges facing the Sporting Director in practice and the skills and competencies required to address them

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Skills and competencies</i>
The formulation and implementation of successful strategies	Strategic thinking Commercial acumen Change and innovation management Operations management skills
Leading high-performing teams comprised of highly-skilled, diverse professionals	Leadership and management skills Change and innovation management
Building culture – taking a leading role as a ‘custodian of culture’	Leadership and management skills Change and innovation management Strategic thinking
Ensuring good governance – ethics, transparency, trust, and compliance	Commercial acumen Governance, legal and financial skills Operations management skills
Managing and influencing across formal and informal boundaries – including complex supply chains of specialists – e.g., outsourcing	Leadership and management skills Commercial acumen Contract management Strategic thinking
Building trust and influence in complex club hierarchies – navigating ‘cultures of ownership’	Leadership and influencing skills Emotional intelligence
Talent identification and recruitment (players and staff) including regulations, contracts, and negotiation.	Commercial acumen Leadership and influencing skills Emotional intelligence
Data analytics (to inform performance, talent development and recruitment)	Industry-specific data analytics skills
Industry regulations (i.e., financial fair play, loan regulation changes)	Commercial acumen Governance, legal and financial skills
TV rights and resultant financial implications	Commercial acumen
Health and well-being of staff and players	Emotional intelligence Human resource skills
Continued professional development, training, qualifications and education for Sporting Directors and all staff	Emotional intelligence Human resource skills
Succession planning (backroom staff)	Strategic thinking Leadership and management skills Human resources skills
Communication – internal and external, fans, liaison committees, and social media	Emotional intelligence Communication skills Digital and media skills
Emergent technology – industry 4.0 or 4th industrial revolution (world economic forum); e.g., how will blockchain and cryptocurrency effect transfers?	Strategic thinking Commercial acumen Change and innovation management
Navigating the external environment (i.e., Brexit, COVID-19, climate change)	Strategic thinking Leadership and management skills Commercial acumen Change and innovation management Operations management
Navigating a football club through complex societal change (for example: black lives matter, LGBTQ+, national politics, religious observance)	Emotional intelligence Leadership and management skills Strategic thinking Commercial acumen Change and innovation management Governance, legal and financial skills
Horizon scanning to ensure prepared and ready for continued improved practice and innovation	Strategic thinking Leadership and management skills Commercial acumen

continuous improvement, development, and progress – in the systems, people, and processes – in line with the principles of total quality management. Ultimately, this change will take time, there will be stumbles and there will be successes. The components and practices associated with these successes must be acknowledged and shared with key decision-makers and where possible implemented.

To further enhance the implementation of the role of Sporting Director within soccer, additional work is required. This includes ensuring clearly defined role descriptors for the Sporting Director role for employers and employees. Clubs need to position the Sporting Director with an appropriate level of power and influence. This conceptual clarity will avoid role ambiguity. We require enhanced professional education and qualifications to support those seeking to gain a Sporting Director role. In this respect, we need to develop clear pathways for the recruitment and development of future Sporting Directors. We require a distinct body of research to inform decision-making and practice. For example, optimal Head Coach recruitment strategy, how to best onboard a Head Coach, how to identify the best-fit between the club, Sporting Director, and Head Coach, change preparation and management as a result of promotion or relegation, and strategic alliances across clubs and ownership groups. The collective work of formal and informal education bodies will be vital for the ongoing professionalisation of sport and Sporting Directors. The unique Master of Sport Directorship (MSD) qualification at Manchester Metropolitan University provides a formal executive qualification in this regard. Furthermore, the Association of Sporting Directors is key to providing an independent and inclusive professional membership body to provide continued support and guidance. Closing some of these gaps will help ensure the growth and effectiveness of implementing a Sporting Director model in clubs.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleagues at the Association of Sporting Directors for their support with this research. Alongside our many colleagues in the industry who have supported our work. We would also like to thank Chris Docherty for the positive discussions around Sporting Director education.

### Disclosure statement

Daniel Parnell is CEO of the Association of Sporting Directors, Rebecca Caplehorn is on the Technical Committee of the Association of Sporting Directors and Kevin Thelwell is a member of the Association of Sporting Directors. Mark Batey is Programme Leader of the Master of Sport Directorship (MSD) at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.

### References

- Bond, A. J., Widdop, P., & Chadwick, S. (2018). Football's emerging market trade network: ego network approach to world systems theory. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 23(1–2), 70–91. doi:10.1080/23750472.2018.1481765.
- Bond, A. J., Widdop, P., & Parnell, D. (2019). Topological network properties of the European football loan system. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 1–24. doi:10.1080/16184742.2019.1673460

- Bridgewater, S. (2010). *Football Management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Church, P. (2012). Technical director report (pp. 70–98).
- Deloitte. (2019). Annual Review of Football Finance 2019. *Deloitte Football Finance*. Retrieved from: <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/sports-business-group/articles/annual-review-of-football-finance.html>.
- Gammelsæter, H. (2013). Leadership succession and effectiveness in team sport. A critical review of the coach succession literature. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 3(4), 285–296. doi: 10.1108/SBM-06–2013–0015
- Gibson, L., & Groom, R. (2018). Ambiguity, manageability and the orchestration of organisational change: a case study of an English premier league academy manager. *Sports Coaching Review*, 7(1), 23–44. doi: 10.1080/21640629.2017.1317173
- Gibson, L., & Groom, R. (2019). The micro-politics of organizational change in professional youth football: towards an understanding of ‘actions, strategies and professional interests’. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 14(1), 3–14. doi: 10.1177/1747954118766311
- Henderson, R., & Clark, K. (1990). Architectural innovation: the reconfiguration of existing product technologies and the failure of established firms. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 34(1). Doi: 10.2307/2393549
- Kelly, S. (2017). *The Role of the Professional Football Manager*. Routledge: London.
- Kelly, S., & Harris, J. (2010). Managers, directors and trust in professional football. *Sport in Society*, 13(3), 489–502. doi: 10.1080/17430431003588150
- Lawrence, I. (2018). *Football Club Management: Insights From the Field*. Routledge: London.
- Maguire, K. (2021). *The Price of Football Second Edition: Understanding Football Club Finance*. Agenda Publishing: London.
- Morrow, S., & Howieson, B. (2014). The new business of football: a study of current and aspirant football club managers. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28(5), 515–528. doi: 10.1123/jsm.2013–0134
- Nissen, R. (2014). Playing the game: how football directors make sense of dismissing the coach. *International Journal Sport Management and Marketing*, 15(3/4), 214–231. doi: 10.1504/IJSMM.2014.072009
- Parnell, D., Groom, R., Widdop, P., & Ward, S. (2018a). The sporting director: exploring current practice and challenges within elite football. In S. Chadwick, D. Parnell, D. Widdop, & C. Anagnostopoulos (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Football Business and Management* (pp. 155–170). London: Routledge.
- Parnell, D., Widdop, P., Groom, R., & Bond, A. (2018b). The emergence of the sporting director role in football and the potential of social network theory in future research. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 23(4–6), 242–254.
- Parnell, D., Bond, A.J., Widdop, P., & Cockayne, B. (2020b). Football worlds: business and networks during COVID-19. *Soccer & Society*, 22(1–2), 19–26. Doi: 10.1080/14660970.2020.1782719
- Parnell, D., Widdop, P., Bond, A., & Wilson, R. (2020a). COVID-19, networks and sport. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 2020, 1–7. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23750472.2020.1750100>
- Parnell, D., Bond, A.J., Widdop, P., Groom, R., & Cockayne, D. (2021). Recruitment in elite football: a network approach. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2021.2011942>
- Pye, A., & Pettigrew, A. (2005). Studying board context, process and dynamics: Some challenges for the future. *British Journal of Management*, 16(1), 27–38. doi: 10.1111/j.1467–8551.2005.00445.x
- Relvas, H., Littlewood, M., Nesti, M., Gilbourne, D., & Richardson, D. (2010). Organizational structures and working practices in elite European professional football clubs: understanding the relationship between youth and professional domains. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 10(2), 165–187. doi: 10.1080/16184740903559891
- Renton, T. (1999). *Standards for the Board: Improving the Effectiveness of your Board*. London: Institute of Directors.

AU: Please provide complete details for this reference.

AU: Please provide page range for this reference.

AU: Please provide volume number and page range for this reference.

- Roberts, J., McNulty, T., & Stiles, P. (2005). Beyond agency conceptions of the work of the non-executive director; creating accountability in the boardroom. *British Journal of Management*, *16*(1), 5–26. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00444.x
- Roderick, M., & Schumacker, J. (2017). ‘The whole week comes down to the teamsheet’: a footballer’s view of insecure work. *Work, Employment and Society*, *31*(1), 166–174. doi: 10.1177/0950017016672792
- Wagstaff, C., & Burton-Wylie, S. (2018). Organizational culture in sport: a conceptual, definitional, and methodological review. *Sport and Exercise Psychology Review*, *14*(2), 32–52.
- Wilson, R., Plumley, D., Mondal, S., & Parnell, D. (2021). Challenging parachute payments and unmasking English football’s finances. *Managing Sport and Leisure*. Doi: 10.1080/23750472.2020.1792745

[AU: Please provide volume number and page range for this reference.]

