

“Seven Weeks Is Not a Lot of Time”: Temporal Work and Institutional Change in Australian Football

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Recognizing the importance of *timing* in efforts to drive institutional change, this study examined how actors engage in “temporal institutional work” in their attempts to disrupt inequitable institutions in sport. A qualitative case study was conducted on football (soccer) in Australia wherein significant gender equity reforms have been enacted. The findings revealed how the temporal activities of *entraining* (e.g., capitalizing on external interventions), *constructing urgency* (e.g., through advocacy), and *enacting momentum* (e.g., through consensus-based leadership) allowed actors to exploit a time-sensitive *window of opportunity* for change, quickly foster a perception of *irreversibility* that structural change would occur, and generate *synchronicity* with broader reforms. Inspired by the breakthroughs in Australian football, this research highlights temporal-based strategies for combating gender inequity in sport. Theoretically, this study extends research on institutional work in sport by illuminating the key role that timing norms play during institutional change.

Keywords: case study, gender equity, governance, sport federations, timing norms

A common refrain of sport managers is that achieving gender equity is slow. This frustration has energized researchers to explore how institutionalized beliefs around gendered norms in sport are shifted (e.g., Evans & Pfister, 2021). What remains underresearched, however, is how individuals collectively come to normalize and accept that social change is *too slow* and that it should be urgently addressed. In other words, although substantive effort has gone into identifying the mechanisms through which to challenge inequitable gender norms (e.g., Knoppers et al., 2021), there has yet to be substantive research into the *timing norms* that may expedite or hold back the pace at which gender equity progress occurs. In general, the role of timing in institutional change has received insufficient research attention. Acknowledging this issue in a management context, Granqvist and Gustafsson (2016) developed the concept of “temporal institutional work,” a form of institutional work that explains how actors “construct, navigate, and capitalize on timing norms in attempts to change institutions” (2016, p. 1009). The central argument of this paper is that temporal institutional work offers an important extension to the current academic literature by advancing the narrative from “how do we improve gender equity in sport?” to “how do we improve gender equity in sport, *quickly*?”

Timing norms underpin temporal institutional work. Ancona et al. (2001, p. 648) defined timing norms as “shared, expected patterns of paced activity ... [that] govern many activities in organizational life,” adding that timing norms provide “a temporal lens that requires us to think of all behavior, interaction, activity, and

events as embedded within a paced, temporal context” (p. 651). Put simply, timing norms can be understood as perceptions of when change can and should occur. Applying this understanding, it is apparent that timing norms are consistently embedded in discussions of gender equity change in sport systems. For example, the Australian Federal Government, recognizing the extent of inequality in the country, commissioned a senate investigation into women in sport and recreation in 2006. The senate report was titled “About time!” and described how “women’s sport was improving only slowly, and that something needs to be done about it” (2006, p. 100). The investigation led to 18 recommendations to increase women’s involvement in sport in the areas of health, participation (grassroots and elite), media coverage, leadership, and governance. More than a decade later, it is notable that most of those recommendations are yet to be implemented. This emphasizes the difficult process of shifting timing norms regarding when social change should occur among a critical mass of decision makers. Our concern is that the neglect of timing norms as a key factor influencing social change is problematic. The slower that social change occurs, the increased risk of losing momentum, stalling, or any positive gains being reversed. Consequently, this study seeks to expand understandings of how timing norms can be adjusted, and change can be expedited, addressing this question: *How do actors engage in temporal institutional work in their attempts to disrupt inequitable institutions in sport?*

Gender equity change in sport is a theoretically relevant issue in which to investigate timing norms given the tension between the historically slow pace of gender equity change coupled with increasingly effective activities, programs, and funding specifically aimed at disrupting such inequitable arrangements (Alsarve, 2022; Piggott & Matthews, 2020). To investigate temporal institutional work, we chose gender equity change within football (soccer) in Australia as our empirical setting. Specifically, this study focuses on the implications of an Fédération internationale de football association (FIFA) intervention to reform governance and

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democratic structures within Australian football and the subsequent formation of the Congress Review Working Group (CRWG) in 2018, which was tasked with drafting a new constitution for Australia's football governing body to ensure a more representative balance among all stakeholders. During this reform process, women's football secured immediate and remarkable gains in governance that appear to have synchronized with other gender-based developments (Ordway, 2023). We propose that Australian football is, therefore, an ideal context for exploring the temporal dimension of institutional work and its influence on change.

Gender Equity in Sport

Gender inequity in sport remains a pressing issue, attracting significant attention from researchers, practitioners, and the general public alike. As awareness and concern about the topic have grown, a substantial body of research has emerged investigating various dimensions of gender inequity, such as pay disparities, representation in governance, participation rates, and working conditions (Alsarve, 2022; Sveinson et al., 2022). The barriers to gender equity and how to overcome them have been analyzed at macro, meso and micro levels, and studies are often positioned across multiple levels (Burton, 2015; Evans & Pfister, 2021). A range of theoretical perspectives have been employed to investigate gender inequity, including Bourdieusian (e.g., Piggott & Matthews, 2020), institutional (e.g., Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013), and critical feminist (e.g., Shaw & Frisby, 2006) approaches. We primarily situate our study within the literature on gender equity in governance and, consequently, provide a deeper review of studies in that domain.

Research on governance, specifically representation of women on sport boards, is prominent (Burton, 2015; Ordway, 2023). A key focus has been quotas (i.e., policies that ensure a minimum percentage or number of women on a board) and their utility as a mechanism for addressing gender inequity in sport governance. The consensus appears to be that quotas are a useful and necessary tool for improving representation of women, though they are limited in and of themselves for addressing gender inequity in sport (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Sisjord et al., 2017). A number of studies show that transformational change toward gender equity in sport requires a multidimensional approach at the structural, cultural, and individual levels (Cunningham, 2008; Piggott & Matthews, 2020). Supporting this, Alsarve (2022) argued that an equitable distribution of economic and cultural resources, in addition to quotas, is required for real change. Thus, although quotas play an important role, they are not a panacea and should be considered as one part of the journey toward an equitable sport system. Gender quotas (or targets) are in force in many Western countries but are less common across the rest of the world (McKeag et al., 2023). Strengthening the case for quotas and gender equity on boards, studies have highlighted promising outcomes for gender diverse boards, such as a reduction in organizational problems (Wicker et al., 2022) and boardroom conflict (Nielsen & Huse, 2010).

Researchers have examined *how* people resist and support the introduction of gender equity policies in sport governance (Elling et al., 2018), including studies on “discursive resistance,” which describes how board members draw on discourses of neoliberalism, silence/passivity, and meritocracy to oppose gender equity initiatives (Hovden, 2010; Knoppers et al., 2021; Spaaij et al., 2020). Studies also demonstrate how incumbents enact exclusionary power to limit participation of women on sport boards (e.g., Sibson, 2010) and exploit organizational cultures (Kihl et al., 2013), stereotypes (Hovden, 2010), and notions of hegemonic

masculinity (Whisenant, 2008) as barriers. Others demonstrate positive outcomes from affirmative practices wherein male “equity champions” are key to preparing ground for progressive gender policies at macro, meso, and micro levels (Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). These studies illustrate considerable development and increasingly sophisticated understanding of approaches and obstacles to gender equity in sport. Yet, there remains scope to build on this body of knowledge in important ways. Specifically, we contribute to this knowledge base by illuminating the underlying mechanisms that influence the pace at which social change occurs and, by doing so, hasten progress toward a more equitable sport industry.

Institutional Change

Institutional change is defined as “a difference in the form, quality or state over time in an institution. Change in an institutional arrangement can be determined by observing the arrangement at two or more points in time on a set of dimensions (e.g., frames, norms, or rules)” (Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006, p. 866). Institutional change is theorized to happen in several different ways. Micelotta et al. (2017) utilized a two-by-two framework to identify four pathways of institutional change based on *pace* (i.e., revolutionary or evolutionary) and *scope* of change (i.e., developmental or transformational). Elaborating on these dimensions, they articulate (a) an accommodation pathway (revolutionary pace and developmental scope), (b) a displacement pathway (revolutionary pace and transformational scope), (c) an alignment pathway (evolutionary pace and developmental scope), and (d) an accretion pathway (evolutionary pace and transformational scope). The institutional change relevant to the present study occurred broadly in line with a displacement pathway. The pace of Australian football's transformation was revolutionary, with the significant component of the change occurring over a 7-week period (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Simultaneously, the scope of change was transformational, fundamentally altering shared understandings regarding how football in Australia could—and should—be managed.

Rapid institutional change of this type is rare in the sporting context as norms and values are deeply institutionalized into the very fabric of sport. Infrequently, the impetus for rapid change can occur from external “jolts” or “shocks,” such as changes in regulation or technology that act to catalyze change within institutions (De Bock et al., 2023). However, rapid change is often resisted from actors with deeply institutionalized norms and behaviors that make institutions within sport particularly difficult to change (Lok & De Rond, 2013; Oja et al., 2023). Within sport, this has meant that analysis of institutional change has traditionally been weighted to slower, evolutionary change—for example, in the professionalization of English cricket (Wright & Zammuto, 2013) and college sport in the United States (Nite et al., 2019). However, such change is typically incremental, taking years if not decades to achieve.

More recently, the work on institutional change is increasingly being combined with institutional work scholarship to investigate the process of social change. Social issues such as concussion (Heinze & Lu, 2017), abuse (Nite & Nauright, 2020), and racism (Agyemang et al., 2018) are applied domains in which institutional analyses are being utilized to investigate change (or resistance to change) toward more socially progressive sport systems. Specifically relevant to this study is the work of Cunningham (2008) and Robertson et al. (2019), who adopted an institutional perspective to investigate how barriers to inclusion can be overcome to make

sport more inclusive. Such studies highlight how social change depends on a complex interplay between structural constraints and individual agency to enact change.

Collectively, what is missing from this body of research is a more nuanced view of the underlying mechanisms that influence the pace of institutional change. Gender equity studies and institutional change studies, more broadly, are generally poorly conceptualized as between “two or more points in time,” if those time points are even conceptualized at all. Change is always “coming;” the problem is, we know little about whether it will arrive in a day, a year, or a century from now. We believe this is where temporal institutional work has utility.

Temporal Institutional Work

Temporal institutional work is a form of institutional work. Institutional work was originally conceived as “the purposive action of individuals or organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215) and has been particularly useful in explaining the work of actors in changing and maintaining institutional arrangements in sport (e.g., Agyemang et al., 2018; Nite & Edwards, 2021; Woolf et al., 2016). Knoppers et al.’s (2021) research on gender diversity in sport governance aligns with this category and is of key relevance to this study. They found that men use discursive resistance to maintain sport institutions that are fundamentally inequitable from a gender perspective.

Growing from this first generation of institutional work scholarship (wherein the focus was primarily around institutional maintenance and disruption), temporal institutional work fits within an emerging second generation of studies that seeks to unpack how new forms of institutional work can influence mesolevel institutional constructs. This has included a focus on boundary and practice (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) and legitimacy work (Nite & Edwards, 2021). Temporal institutional work represents an extension of the institutional work concept due to its specific focus on timing norms and *when* change occurs. Understanding how actors enact institutional change via influencing timing norms and their ability to speed up institutional change by constructing, navigating, and capitalizing on timing norms complements existing theoretical perspectives.

To analyze the concept of temporal work in this study, we draw on Granqvist and Gustafsson’s (2016) original paper. They define three forms of temporal institutional work.

Entraining refers to the process through which actors align their activities with the rhythm that external timing norms impose (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). Previous research has conceptualized entrainment as a top-down process in which actors react to timing norms emanating from a higher authoritative level (Pérez-Nordtvedt et al., 2008). In the context of institutional change, entraining allows actors to capitalize on existing timing norms or external interventions to accelerate change and capitalize on “windows of opportunity” (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). For example, consider a situation wherein a new government comes into power with a focus on environmental sustainability. Various stakeholders, such as nonprofit organizations, businesses, and local governments, may engage in entraining by aligning their own sustainability ambitions with the new federal policies. This could involve adapting their time lines to match government grant cycles.

Constructing Urgency refers to the deliberate actions taken by actors to create a sense of immediate need for change. Unlike entraining, constructing urgency is a bottom-up generative form of

institutional work (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). Sticking with the environmental sustainability example, various stakeholders might construct urgency by highlighting the immediate threats of climate change. This could involve releasing time-sensitive data on rising sea levels, initiating public awareness campaigns, protesting, or advocating for fast-tracked legislation. The aim is to align public and political wills swiftly with new sustainability goals, thereby creating a sense of urgency. Constructing urgency serves to shape the pace and focus of institutional change, often forcing the prioritization of specific issues, and can complement entraining processes (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016).

Enacting Momentum is another bottom-up, generative form of temporal work through which actors seek to ensure continuity in movement within an initiative and energize change (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). For example, in the context of a government prioritizing environmental sustainability, stakeholders might enact momentum by setting up a series of short-term and long-term goals, each with its own timeline and set of actionable steps. This could involve launching pilot projects, securing funding, or establishing partnerships, all aimed at maintaining the pace of change and ensuring that the sustainability initiatives remain in motion. Enacting momentum often involves establishing symbolic and material signals of progress to prevent loss of momentum and stagnation (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016).

In summary, the concepts of entraining, constructing urgency, and enacting momentum serve as critical forms of temporal work that influence the pace of institutional change. These concepts are not mutually exclusive but, rather, interact and collectively influence timing norms regarding when change should or should not occur. We propose that understanding these temporal activities is crucial for both researchers and practitioners aiming to understand and influence institutional change in sport.

Methods

This was a critical realist study that sought to investigate underlying social mechanisms through a preestablished theoretical framework (King & Brooks, 2017). The research design was a qualitative embedded, single case study (Yin, 2018). This design aligned with our research question, which required in-depth exploration of social phenomena (Merriam, 1998).

Research Context

Australian football, and its variant codes, including futsal and beach soccer, is governed by Football Australia (FA). The institution oversees administration and development of all aspects of women’s, men’s, youth, and Paralympian football at the national level. FA comprises nine state federations that organize a network of state-level competitions and promote the game. Historically, Australian women’s football has struggled for recognition, resources, and equal opportunities, with amateur and professional women players, coaches, and administrators often facing marginalization as well as limited access to funding and facilities, appropriate training, and leadership opportunities (Crawford & McGowan, 2019). However, in recent years, there has been movement toward improved gender equity across various areas. As we discuss in our findings, the CRWG has played a critical role in that process. Yet, it is important to recognize that although the CRWG has driven considerable advancement in terms of governance, representation, and compensation, this has primarily been at the elite level. Many disparities, including

access to facilities, remain at the grassroots level. The journey toward comprehensive gender equity in Australian football, although world leading in many respects, cannot be considered complete (Ordway, 2023).

In 2018, FIFA intervened in Australian football's governance and dictated the development and composition of the CRWG. As the CRWG report (2018) shows, FIFA prescribed for eight CRWG members to propose a new constitution for Football Federation Australia (FFA—it was later renamed Football Australia [FA] in 2020). The eight members included: (a) four representatives of state associations. These representatives were four presidents of the nine state associations that exist in Australia. In the structure of Australian football, their primary focus was on the development of grassroots football. (b) Two representatives of the Australian Professional Football Club Association. These representatives were senior leaders of professional clubs. Their primary concern was the growth and success of the A-League competitions, which at the time of the CRWG, they did not have autonomy to run as this was controlled by the FFA board. (c) One representative of the FFA board. This representative was an alternating board director of FFA. Up to the point of the CRWG, the FFA board held significant power over all aspects of Australian football, including the professional game, and thus, had the most to lose from constitutional change. (d) One representative of the Professional Footballers Association (PFA). This representative seat was rotated between the chief executive and deputy chief executive of the PFA. Their primary interests were on the influence and conditions of professional players within Australian football. Beyond these core members of the CRWG, the independent chair played a critical role in managing the process. Other stakeholders, including the remaining five state association presidents, five members of Women Onside (an advocacy group for women in Australian football), and two representatives of nonprofessional football clubs, were consulted during the process. FIFA gave a tight 7-week deadline to the core CRWG members to propose a new constitution.

Another salient contextual factor to consider is the broader Australian sporting landscape. As a field, Australian sport has made strides in improving gender equity in recent years, and the institutional pressures at work also influence football. Although not

binding, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) recommends 40% women's representation at the national board level. Furthermore, the ASC introduced a "Women Leaders in Sport" program in 2018 to encourage women into sport leadership development.

Data Collection

A range of empirical materials were collected to examine how actors engaged in temporal work (see Table 1). The CRWG report acknowledged 22 individuals who contributed to the reforms process; 16 were interviewed for this study. These included presidents of the state associations, club representatives, representatives of FA, the independent chair, and PFA representatives. In addition, members of Women Onside were interviewed as well as representatives of key organizations within the field, such as the ASC. Interviewees were identified through official documents (such as the CRWG Final Report). The researchers used a combination of their own contacts and a snowball sampling approach to request interviews with all the key actors. In total, 20 interviews were conducted. Research ethics approval was received from the lead researcher's institution, and consent was provided by participants on the condition that quotations would not be linked directly to individuals.

The interviews, conducted by the lead researcher, followed a semistructured format and were conducted between August and November 2022. During interviews, the researcher sought to generate deep insight into how the CRWG came about, how it was negotiated, how actors experienced the process, and how it impacted later events. The interview guide was developed in line with the research question and relevant theoretical constructs. Interview questions included, for example: What was your role in the CRWG? How was the extent of the reforms established and negotiated? To what extent has the CRWG been a catalyst for other gender-based reforms? Questions such as these elicited insight into the process of how change was secured without having to mention the concept of temporal work and its forms explicitly.

Sixteen interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Four interviews were not audio recorded, but those participants consented to detailed note-taking. Two members of the CRWG provided detailed written responses to interview questions as face-to-face interviews could not be arranged. The lead

Table 1 Data Sources

	Primary data			Archival data	
	Interviews	Focus group	Annual reports	Policy documents and official correspondence	News and media articles
No. data items	20	1	30	17	12
Description of data	All key stakeholders, including CRWG members, Women Onside members, industry experts, and government officials	CRWG member, Women Onside, and industry experts	Football Australia annual reports spanning back to 1982. Nine annual reports could not be sourced.	The CRWG report, PFA reports, Women Onside correspondence, and reviews of governance in Australian football	News stories on the development of women's football and the CRWG
Type of information provided	Individual accounts on the CRWG process and activities of key actors as well as perspectives on wider institutional change	A collective reflection on the CRWG process, how it came about, and its impact	Information on shift in focus toward gender equity over time as well as representation changes	Information on process and outcomes of change in Australian football and the input provided by key actors	Expert opinion on the development of women's football in Australia and how the CRWG process unfolded

Note. CRWG = Congress Review Working Group; PFA = Professional Footballers Association.

researcher also asked follow-up questions via email to clarify and expand detail.

Focus groups can complement interviews by facilitating the exchanging of ideas among participants. In a focus group, participants can bounce ideas off each other, challenge each other's viewpoints, and build on each other's insights (Liamputtong, 2011). A focus group, lasting 70 min, was conducted when interviews were finalized. It comprised four individuals who had been interviewed individually. The lead researcher facilitated the discussion. Through encouraging a cross-pollination of experiences and perspectives, the focus group provided a more nuanced understanding of the topic under study.

Finally, an extensive range of archival materials were collected (see Table 1), including reports, documents, and news articles related to the CRWG and other developments in women's football in Australia. Much of the archival material was publicly available, although several documents were privately sourced from key stakeholders. Archival materials were particularly useful in mapping out the timeline of change within Australian football toward greater gender equity and corroborating insight offered by participants during interviews.

Data Analysis

The template analysis approach provided the study with a balance between flexibility and structure in the interpretation of textual data, thus offering a blend of deductive and inductive reasoning (King & Brooks, 2017). This approach entails the iterative development of a "template," a hierarchical organization of themes, to accurately represent the data set. It is especially useful when working with an established theoretical framework while being open to the emergence of unanticipated themes. As researchers analyze data, they can modify and fine tune the template, thereby accommodating new insights patterns. Although other methods may be suitable, the template's prescriptiveness, combined with its emphasis on incorporating preestablished constructs and emergent themes, rendered it practical and productive for this study. The seven stages of template analysis were implemented as follows:

1. *Data familiarization*: The lead researcher thoroughly read and reread the collected textual data (interview and focus group transcripts as well as archival materials) to immerse themselves in the content and gain a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives, their experiences, and the institutional context of Australian football.
2. *Preliminary coding*: Adhering to template guidelines (King & Brooks, 2017), the lead researcher initiated the process by coding a subset of six interview transcripts using NVivo (version 12, QSR International) software. Codes were applied to segments of text that resonated with the research question, namely the different ways temporal work was enacted.
3. *Clustering*: Following preliminary coding, a priori and emergent themes were grouped into meaningful clusters. The three main a priori themes—*entraining*, *constructing urgency*, and *enacting momentum*—served as higher order categories under which specific examples of temporal institutional work were categorized. For instance, the codes "FIFA intervention," "factionalism," and "equal pay deal" were categorized under entraining.
4. *Producing an initial template*: The lead researcher organized clusters into an initial hierarchical template within NVivo, featuring a priori themes identified earlier. The template included 42 themes. Openness to new forms of temporal work

was maintained, but the a priori themes effectively served as higher order themes. Inductive themes primarily emerged at lower levels and illuminated the different stages and ways in which various forms of temporal work occurred.

5. *Developing the template*: The initial template was then developed and refined as the lead researcher coded the rest of the data set within NVivo (including all interviews, focus groups, and archival data). When new themes emerged that were important to the research question, the template was adjusted to reflect them. This iterative process was followed until all data were analyzed. A key development made to the template was to frame the forms of temporal work as middle order themes and the stages of institutional change as higher order themes. This allowed for a neater illustration of causal mechanisms.
6. *Applying the final template*: Once all data were analyzed, a final template took shape, containing a consolidation of 31 themes (see Table 2). The lead researcher then reviewed the template and the data again to ensure they captured what was important. To ensure reflexivity, the lead researcher invited coinvestigators to undertake the same process. The research team discussed discrepancies to reach a consensus on the final template.
7. *Writing up*: The final template guided this paper's structure and findings.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several quality checks were employed (King & Brooks, 2017). The iterative development of the template acted as an audit trail, providing a transparent and systematic record of analytical decisions. The research team engaged in an independent coding process that ensured a more comprehensive and accurate representation of the data. In addition, respondent feedback on the final template was sought via email, allowing for further reinforcement and refinement of the findings.

Findings

The subsequent sections unpack our findings to address the research question: How do actors engage in temporal institutional work in their attempts to disrupt inequitable institutions in sport? The first section offers a comprehensive insight into the CRWG, characterizing it as the "institutional project." This section analyzes the CRWG's origins, composition, scope, and outcomes. The second section explores how temporal work opened and expanded a window of opportunity for significant gender-based reforms through the CRWG. The third section elaborates on how the reforms were formally integrated into the sport's structures within a 7-week time frame. Following this, the discussion shifts to examine how the CRWG reforms appear to have been a catalyst for broader changes in Australian football.

The CRWG as the "Institutional Project"

Granqvist and Gustafsson (2016) defined an institutional project as "a purposive endeavor to change rules and regulations in a nested and relatively bounded political institutional setting" (p. 1014). According to those same scholars, institutional projects play a key role during institutional change in that they can act as "pacing tools" to speed up the process by influencing field-level timing norms. We conceptualize the CRWG as an institutional project.

Table 2 Final Template

Higher order	Middle order	Lower order
1. Window of opportunity	1.1. Entraining	1.1.1. FIFA intervention 1.1.2. Overriding factionalism 1.1.3. Seven-week deadline 1.1.4. National trends 1.1.5. International trends
	1.2. Constructing urgency	1.2.1. Competitive advantage 1.2.1. Intersport competition 1.2.3. Research and evidence 1.2.4. Ethical case 1.2.5. Advocacy—Women Onside 1.2.6. Diversity within Women Onside 1.2.7. Women Onside—accountability
2. Irreversibility	2.1. Enacting momentum	2.1.1. Chair leadership 2.1.2. Timely solutions 2.1.3. Town hall forum
	2.2. Constructing urgency	2.2.1. Time sensitivity 2.2.2. Avoiding politics
3. Synchronicity	3.1. Entraining	3.1.1. Zeitgeber/pacing tool 3.1.2. Equal pay 3.1.3. WWC23 3.1.4. Mindset change 3.1.5. Docuseries 3.1.6. Investment in facilities

Note. FIFA = Fédération internationale de football association; WWC23 = Women's World Cup 2023.

The establishment of the CRWG in 2018 was a critical turning point in the evolution of Australian football, a point widely acknowledged by our participants: “It was a watershed moment and, in many ways, completely transformational” (Participant 3). The group was formed in response to FIFA’s threat to suspend membership of FFA—and was tasked with addressing the organization’s alleged failure to adequately represent its diverse stakeholders, including state associations, women, clubs, and players.

Our review of official documents indicated that the CRWG’s formal mandate was to “propose a new composition for the FFA congress which ensures a broader and more balanced representation of stakeholders in line with the requirements of the FIFA Statutes” (2018, p. 60). Of central importance was Article 15(j) of FIFA’s statutes: “Legislative bodies must be constituted in accordance with the principles of representative democracy and taking into account the importance of gender equality in football” (FIFA, 2021, p. 16). The mandate also required the CRWG to consider: alignment between the FFA statutes with the requirements of FIFA’s statutes, particularly Article 15 (which generally refers to good governance practices); involvement of women at every level of football governance; composition and independence of FFA board; potential for alternative governance for the A-League and W-League, the men’s and women’s national professional competitions; pathways for other stakeholders to join the FFA; and better club representation of National Premier Leagues in football governance.

Part of FIFA’s mandate was that the new constitution had to have stronger representation of women. However, it is important to note that FIFA did not specify a standard for representation, leaving it to the CRWG to determine. We can reasonably infer that FIFA expected FA to align with the FIFA *Women’s Football Strategy* (2018). That strategy aims for all national football associations to have, by 2026, (a) at least one woman present on their executive committee and (b) at least one seat on the board dedicated to the interests of women’s football.

Despite this standard, CRWG outcomes far exceeded the ambitions outlined in FIFA’s *Women’s Football Strategy*. Reforms included the following: expansion of congress to establish a women’s council with a 10% voting share; introduction of a rule that the chair and deputy chair of the FA board must be different genders; and adoption of 40:40:20 strategy for boards (40% women, 40% men, and 20% of any gender). In addition, each member of Congress was, henceforth, required to nominate one man and one woman to attend general meetings, ensuring equality. Collectively, these reforms are significant, and few (if any) national football associations match this level of female representation. The FFA 2018 annual report indicated that, prior to the CRWG, the only governance rule geared toward women’s football was the presence of a women’s committee, which did not have a voting share. The reforms went much further than ASC guidance on gender equity and put FA at the forefront of not just world football but also Australian sport. The far-reaching extent of reforms surprised many, including Women Onside representatives: “We didn’t expect such a dramatic outcome, not in our wildest dreams” (Participant 13), and “I was very pleasantly surprised at the extent of the reforms. No way did we expect to get so much so soon” (Participant 16).

Beyond the CRWG governance reforms, Australia has emerged as a global leader in working toward gender equity in football—including an “equal pay” agreement between women’s and men’s national teams in 2019; substantial improvements in both playing and working conditions for women across Australian football—including the provision of a new state-of-the-art home facility for the women’s national team (the Matildas); and the competitive bid process to host major football events, followed by highly successful cohosting of the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup (FIFA, 2023). Symbolizing the extent of progress, in 2022, women were in the majority on FA’s board of directors. Table 3 provides an overview and chronology of key changes and events

that occurred before, during, and after the CRWG. The milestones achieved in improving gender equity during and after the CRWG are significant and were accomplished in a short period of time. Our analysis now turns to *how* this was achieved so quickly. Specifically, we examine the social processes that expedited change through the theoretical lens of temporal institutional work.

Leveraging Temporal Work to Exploit a Window of Opportunity

Entraining is a top-down form of temporal work wherein actors align their activities with external timing norms that have been imposed on them (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). Entraining was central to how substantial gender equity reforms were achieved in Australian football. The FIFA intervention constituted an imposition of external timing norms on Australian football to overhaul its structures. Interviewees discussed how this intervention created a “window of opportunity” (to borrow Granqvist and Gustafsson’s terminology) to disrupt gender inequity in Australian sport as gender-based reforms could be aligned to the same timeline. This perception is reflected in the following comments:

The sense at the time, because I sat around the table, was well, this move from FIFA has given us a golden opportunity to do this [make gender-based reforms], we have a chance to make real reform and we need to grasp it. (Participant 2)

The broad spectrum of interviewees agreed that there had been some limited progress toward greater gender equity prior to the CRWG (such as gradual improvement in women’s working conditions in football), which paralleled global and national trends toward greater focus on women’s sport. They also agreed that

FIFA’s intervention had a “turbo effect” (Participant 20) in the Australian football context:

The CRWG blew everything up. So, FIFA come and in say, you have to sort your shit out . . . remember FIFA didn’t care about women’s football, it was about the clubs. But the instability it created meant that everything was on the table. And that is where there was an opportunity for women’s football. It happened fast and it was exciting. (Participant 11)

In line with the foregoing quotation, interviewees generally opined that although women’s football was a consideration for FIFA when intervening, it was by no means its foremost consideration. The sense in the interviews was that its priority was the dominance of state associations (particularly over clubs). Nevertheless, FIFA’s intervention was widely perceived to have created an environment of transformative change, and actors (e.g., the advocacy group and allies within state associations) seeking to promote greater women’s representation realized that they could potentially capitalize on it. In other words, FIFA’s imposition and mandating of constitutional reform had the effect of reframing timing norms among those involved in the CRWG regarding gender equity in governance. Instead of viewing it as a distant goal to be achieved at an undetermined future date, there was a window of opportunity to achieve it within the 7-week deadline of the CRWG. Timing norms—shared expectations about the pace of an activity—became aligned, or *entrained*, to the FIFA-mandated CRWG process. The idea of entrainment is reflected in these participant quotations:

There was some planetary alignment. The moment was right. You had this growing movement in sport for gender equality, we saw that in Australia. That was the mood. And then with FIFA forcing FFA to change the constitution it was like, OK, here is the chance. (Participant 5)

Table 3 Chronology of Key Changes and Events

Date	Key change or event
Pre-CRWG	
2015	Matildas go on strike over working conditions, which led to modest improvements in pay.
2017	Collective bargaining agreement leads to modest improvement in W-League working conditions.
2016	PFA release Workplace Conditions Report highlighting struggles of women footballers.
2018	Criticism of lack of women representation as there were no women on FFA Congress, a minority of women on the FFA board (failing to meet ASC guidelines), and very few women on state/territory boards.
CRWG reforms	
2018	CRWG formed on 25th August, and by 27th July, the following governance changes were enacted regarding gender equity: • Expansion of congress to include a women’s council with 10% voting share. • 40:40:20 (40% women, 40% men, and 20% of any gender) quota introduced for national and state bodies. • Requirement that the chair and deputy chair of the FFA board be of different genders. • Requirement for each member of congress to nominate one man and one woman to attend FA general meetings.
Post-CRWG	
2019	Australia and New Zealand formally announce joint bid to host 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup (bid announced as successful in 2020)
2019	Announcement made for new “Home of the Matildas” in Melbourne, funded by joint investment from FA, state, and federal governments.
2021	Collective bargaining agreement leads to landmark equal pay deal for Australian women’s and men’s national teams.
2021	Australia’s football leagues rebranded as A-League Men and A-League Women, ensuring inclusive and equitable language.
2022	A docuseries is announced by Disney focusing on the Matildas, signaling the strategic importance of women’s football to FA.
2022	For the first time, the majority of directors on FA’s board are women.

Note. FIFA = Fédération internationale de football association; CRWG = Congress Review Working Group; PFA = Professional Footballers Association; FFA = Football Federation Australia; FA = Football Australia; ASC = Australian Sports Commission.

It was totally a sliding doors moment. You see there is an opportunity, and you just run through it. (Participant 13)

The foregoing quotation from Participant 5 illustrates another important point—there was field-level pressure generally on sport governing bodies in Australia to address gender inequity. However, to shift timing norms substantially and create a window of opportunity, there also needed to be intervention from an external body (together these processes amounted to a moment of “planetary alignment”). Without FIFA’s intervention, the consensus among participants was that it was too difficult to get existing power-brokers to meaningfully change, to disrupt the status quo, despite field pressures. As one respondent indicated, “The FA Board, so that was led by members of the same family, they ran it for years, clearly they were very happy with how things were and did not want to be told what to do by FIFA” (Participant 7). Critically, FIFA’s intervention forced the hand of these existing FFA power-brokers and demanded constitutional reform. These FFA leaders, namely led by the chair and his predecessor, had maintained the structure of Australian football for years, supported by a critical mass of state associations, but were now forced to embrace change by the international federation or face sanctions. It is relevant to note that the composition of the CRWG did not include the FFA chair but, rather, other members of its board. As such, a significant actor embedded in the existing institutional arrangement, and a leading counter voice to governance change, had been ostracized from the CRWG process. The people given agency to propose the new constitution were of a different institutional understanding (i.e., of the need to disperse power) and were more amenable to change. Another participant described the challenges of instigating change without FIFA’s intervention:

But if FIFA hadn’t come in, it was too factional. You needed someone to come in at the top and say, “Right, get in the room and make an agreement. Here’s the mandate. Here’s the timeline. Here’s the working product, get it done.” (Participant 1)

Although the FIFA intervention opened the door for change and shifted timing norms, the actual extent of the shift toward gender equity had not been defined. Thus, entraining alone does not explain why significant reforms were put on the table during the CRWG. To achieve this, stakeholders had to construct a sense of urgency surrounding the need for bold reforms.

Constructing urgency involves actors voicing a pressing necessity for change that can have considerable upsides. In the case of the CRWG, actors appeared to construct urgency through two interconnected activities: *articulating competitive advantages* and *strategic advocacy*.

Several interviewees expressed that, during 2018, there was a growing sense that football needed to find new ways to maintain its relevance within the increasingly crowded Australian sporting landscape. Key CRWG members believed that by going “all in on women’s football” (Participant 6), including through governance representation, Australian football could attract more women to the sport and gain competitive advantage over other sports. This perceived time-sensitive window of opportunity appeared to create a sense of urgency and a will to enact more significant gender reforms than deemed necessary to meet FIFA’s expectations, as the following comments illustrate:

So given we had that reformist agenda in place, it just made sense to see the benevolent self-interest in increasing the role of women because, you know, football is a challenger code in our country, and me personally, and I think others also shared

the view, that women’s football could be a massive competitive advantage for our game vis à vis the other football codes. (Participant 4)

The CRWG reforms were a perfect way to leverage that opportunity. So, at no point did we kick the can down the road and say “Okay, let’s leave this for another group.” It would have been very easy for us to just move the voting shares around, and not elevate the role of women in a significant way But we really thought if we took this chance there was a halo that could shine in our game that other sports wouldn’t have access to. And I think that was the sensibility that wrapped around the group. (Participant 2)

These quotations highlight how the FIFA intervention fueled a window of opportunity and that the far-reaching extent of the reforms (i.e., 40:40:20, splitting of leadership positions and voting share for the Women’s Football Council [WFC]), was secured, in part, by recognition of a fortuitous opportunity to gain competitive advantage. This advantage manifested in “showing the country that we value women in our game and hope to attract women to the sport at all levels” (Participant 5).

The formation of the advocacy group, Women Onside, which occurred just prior to the CRWG process by a group of prominent women in Australian football, was also pivotal in constructing urgency. The group allowed women in football to advocate collectively and more powerfully than they could as individuals. This enhanced their ability to construct urgency for stronger representation of women as an outcome of the CRWG process:

What we were able to do by coming together as Women Onside to do that advocacy work more effectively. Have a solidified voice for women and really concentrate on emphasizing that it is now or never . . . I prefer the word advocacy, but you could say lobbying. (Participant 16)

When discussing the role of Women Onside within the CRWG process, members of the core eight-member group often claimed that their interests were aligned—“From our perspective, there was not much to lobby for; we wanted the same thing” (Participant 9). However, this was not a universally held view. Other participants indicated that the formation of Women Onside led to a greater sense of accountability to deliver significant gender reforms: “What they [Women Onside] did was, again, make very clear that there will be accountability there. There will be eyes on what’s done” (Participant 4). “We met with Women Onside on a couple of occasions. They knew what they were talking about. So, we took it seriously” (Participant 5). Thus, although key decision makers appeared to see an urgent opportunity in bold reforms, the advocacy group strengthened their sense of accountability to do so.

Irreversibility: Embedding Gender Equity Into FA’s Structure

After FIFA opened the window of opportunity, which was further expanded by key decision makers and advocates, the next critical phase involved formalizing and solidifying the changes. In Granqvist and Gustafsson’s (2016) study on temporal work, this point of official endorsement is termed “irreversibility,” signifying a collective understanding that change is both imminent and necessary. A moment of irreversibility was achieved at the culmination of the CRWG process. Our analysis points to “enacting momentum” as a vital form of temporal work in reaching this stage. In addition, our

findings highlight further instances of “constructing urgency” that played a role in attaining irreversibility.

Enacting momentum refers to the ways in which actors keep an initiative moving forward, prevent stagnation, or minimize a lack of activity. During the CRWG process, this form of temporal work appeared to manifest in three ways: through the *leadership of the chair*, the identification of *timely solutions*, and hosting a *town hall forum*.

Interviewees involved in the core activities of the CRWG frequently emphasized the importance of the chair’s leadership in maintaining momentum throughout the process:

[The chair] did a remarkable job, very skillfully got us to a point of establishing what the new constitution would look like and why it needed to happen. I’m sure it wasn’t easy. You have to remember it was a room of eight men, a lot of ego, and she held court. Could we have gotten there with someone else? I’m not sure. She kept things going when they might have broken down. (Participant 7)

[The chair] came with a lot of credibility. And it helped that she came from sport and knew some of the dynamics and relationships that come with that She pushed when she needed to. If something was a problem, she would dig into it and say, “well, why is it a problem? Let’s work through this as a group.” (Participant 6)

The foregoing responses serve as examples of a common theme. The chair’s personality, experience, credibility, and leadership skills were frequently cited as essential to ensuring functionality, cohesion, and, ultimately, momentum of the CRWG, which encompassed a range of diverse interests. The reform process was further supported by the chair’s ability to maintain momentum through fostering a diplomatic atmosphere and strong working relationships across the whole group. This environment facilitated goodwill and, therefore, progress in the CRWG discussions. In the focus group, a participant summed up that “the secret was goodwill” (Participant 3). Our analysis indicates that this was highly beneficial in achieving a perception of irreversibility, ensuring that all reforms, not only those related to gender, would be implemented within the timeframe.

Momentum was also enacted through the identification of timely solutions. A central concern for the CRWG was addressing the balance between clubs and state associations within the governance of Australian football. The voting share of the WFC proffered a timely resolution. By granting the WFC voting shares, it could serve as a balancing point between the clubs and state associations so that neither could unilaterally overpower. This detail was shared by a club representative:

The fundamental issue was, for the state associations, “we don’t want to give the professional game enough votes that they can overpower us.” And for the professional game, it was “we’re not going to just live under your subjugation.” So, where’s the pivot point? And this is where the Women’s Football Council idea came in. Because we all felt, there was consensus, that the game didn’t have proper representation for women. So, we could achieve that, and it could also be the balancing point between the two. It was very clever. (Participant 7)

According to this member of the CRWG, heavily involved in the decision-making process, the WFC initiative facilitated momentum during negotiations, negated potential stagnation, and

helped resolve a lasting power struggle between clubs and state associations. As a result, the reforms and the prospect of significant gender-based reforms were realized.

The final point on enacting momentum that warrants mention is the town hall forum. One core CRWG member explained:

Another thing we did around the CRWG was a town hall forum. About 150 people from around Australia, all walks of life, all industries, came together to map out what a vision for women’s football in Australia might look like. That was an important piece. Getting everybody together to focus on women’s football was a big push around momentum. It was for me; it was always about getting momentum around it. (Participant 4)

As noted in this quotation, and acknowledged by two other interviewees, hosting this event was strategically and symbolically influential in energizing the case for significant reforms in gender representation within women’s football in Australia.

In terms of constructing urgency to reach irreversibility, what appeared relevant was the time sensitivity of the process. The CRWG (2018) report itself emphasizes this: “7 weeks is not a lot of time. That is the period within which the CRWG has produced the great work in this report” (CRWG, 2018, p. 4). The report also indicates that within the period of June 12–July 31, 2018, 15 meetings were held. As one focus group participant asserted, “The tight timeframe definitely forced everyone’s focus and helped avoid some of the politics from what I have heard, if it was a longer process, I’m sure there would have been more trouble” (Participant 20). The combination of a tight timeframe, alongside the chair’s leadership in creating a productive atmosphere, and the identification of timely solutions, supported by other initiatives such as the town hall, ultimately led to significant gender reforms being formally adopted. Irreversibility was achieved. In July 2018, the CRWG members approved the finalized report and motions on the reforms. This concluded a truly transformational 7-week period for the representation of women in Australian football. As one club representative reflected, “Before the CRWG you had those 10 men running football. One year later we turned that AGM [annual general meeting] of 10 men into an AGM of 50 people plus, which we live streamed, and half of them were women. That is significant” (Participant 7). The next point of interest is other changes that have occurred in sync with the CRWG reforms.

Synchronicity: The CRWG as a Catalyst for Broader Gender Reforms

Following the conclusion of the CRWG project, there have been several significant developments in gender equity in other areas of Australian football (see Table 3). Temporal work can generate “synchronicity,” which is defined as how different activities become aligned with each other (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). In this case study, our data suggest that synchronicity occurred between the CRWG reforms and other gender equity developments. Entraining, as a form of temporal work, again, appeared to be key to this process.

There was a perception among multiple interviewees that the CRWG reforms contributed significantly to a broad shift in mindset among stakeholders in Australian football regarding *when* gender equity initiatives should be implemented. The CRWG was thought to have “absolutely set a precedent” (Participant 11). According to participants, this shift likely permeated into a range of positive initiatives, including: how actors deliberated over the equal pay

deal in 2019, the Women's World Cup 2023 bid, investment in women's football (such as the 2020 announcement that a home facility for the Matildas would be built), and the strategic importance of women's football within the national governing body, FA, evidenced, for example, by the decision to make the Matildas a focus of a new six-part docuseries, *Matildas: The World at Our Feet*.

The equal pay deal between the women's and men's national teams occurred in 2019.¹ Various factors were reported to have contributed to the landmark deal for Australian sport, including sound negotiation, goodwill, and articulating the benefits of the deal for all stakeholders. However, what also emerged as a theme was that the CRWG "accelerated a rising tide" (Participant 2) toward greater equity, marking the CRWG as a focal point for the pay deal and other initiatives that became entrained. Granqvist and Gustafsson (2016) described this phenomenon as a "zeitgeber," which means one that activity "dominates the other rhythms that then become entrained to the zeitgeber" (p. 1011). The proposition that the CRWG reforms became a "zeitgeber" is supported across multiple data sources:

Quantifying it is hard, but there's no doubt that the CRWG reform sort of helps feed into those outcomes [equal pay deal]. You then have this cascading, compounding benefit, you know, that sort of representation at the board level, I think it becomes, not easier, but there's less of a mental barrier in the way of doing things like equal pay deals. I think these victories just compound and create some really powerful outcomes in a pretty quick period of time. (Participant 4)

Furthermore, the following excerpt from archival data, a report published by the PFA (2021) on the equal pay deal, states:

A gender equality pay deal for the Socceroos and Matildas was only possible because of each of the incremental and compounding gains that had been made in governance, collective bargaining, and the narrative of women's sport over the past four years. Without each win, the next—and more significant gain—could not have been reached.

One core CRWG member corroborated the view that the reforms became a zeitgeber to which other developments became entrained:

[The CRWG reforms] provided the decision-makers with a clear indication of how committed and aggressive the Australian football stakeholders were to attention for and on women's football and women in football, and as a result, this helped embolden them to make what may have (previously) been considered "risky" decisions regarding equal pay, increasing investment in women's football, and bidding for the FIFA Women's World Cup. (Participant 8)

Our analysis positions the CRWG reforms as a "pacing tool" (to adopt Granqvist and Gustafsson's terminology) that provided the rhythm for broader gender-based change in Australian football. Through entraining, multiple initiatives aligned as timing norms in the institutional context were reframed. It is important to note that the findings do not assert direct causal connections between the initiatives; participants' perceptions of relationships between them are far more nuanced. Enactment of reforms in governance was seen to create a shift in thinking about *when* change should happen in other areas (a change in timing norms). This contributed to synchronicity and a chain of gender reforms across the Australian

sporting landscape. The capacity for temporal institutional work to create synchronicity highlights the importance of the temporal dimension in terms of understanding how institutional work contributes to institutional change.

Discussion and Implications

The findings reveal how actors in Australian football engaged in temporal institutional work to alter timing norms related to when gender equity could and would be realized. This temporal work initially led to a window of opportunity. That window was then widened in scope before temporal work helped to foster a sense of irreversibility within the CRWG's tight 7-week time line. Ultimately, temporal processes served as a catalyst for synchronicity by shifting timing norms more broadly—this contributed to the acceleration of additional developments, such as equal pay initiatives. These insights carry theoretical and practical implications for our understanding of institutional change and the advancement of gender equity in sport.

Theoretical Implications

The concept of institutional work has grown in prominence within the literature on institutional theory (Robertson et al., 2022). In both the sport and general management research domains, the first generation of this research stream primarily focused on three forms of institutional work: maintenance, creation, and disruption (Dowling et al., 2023; Nite & Edwards, 2021). These concepts effectively explain *how* agency is used to change or maintain existing institutional structures.

This study builds on those first generation studies that broadly examine *how* institutional work leads to institutional change (Agyemang et al., 2018; Nite & Edwards, 2021; Woolf et al., 2016) by illuminating the processes of *when* institutional work leads to institutional change. This study particularly emphasizes the importance and relevance of timing norms and *windows of opportunity* (Granqvist & Gustafsson, 2016). Our analysis uncovers the ways these windows, limited in their duration, can emerge due to a combination of top-down and bottom-up temporal activities, manifesting as entraining (top-down) and constructing urgency and enacting momentum (bottom-up). While FIFA's intervention, a top-down process, was necessary to open a window of opportunity for change, it was bottom-up endeavors of allies and advocates that determined and cemented the scope of the reforms within the deadline. The study, therefore, supports previous research that highlights how institutional change in sport hinges on a complex interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes (Borgers et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2022; Slack & Hinings, 1992) and extends this knowledge by drawing attention to the ways these pressures can, on occasion, lead to limited time periods for change that must be seized and exploited. This crucial juncture was described metaphorically as a "planetary alignment" by one study participant.

Our findings support the proposition that the temporal dimension of institutional work is crucial in the sport context (Odio, 2021). The structure of Australian football, like other sports, is complex and multilayered, involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including the national board, state associations, clubs, players, fans, and sponsors (Ordway, 2023). This can create challenges for institutional change efforts as different stakeholder groups typically have differing priorities, agendas, and perspectives (Robertson et al., 2022). In this context, windows of opportunity are arguably rarer and harder to realize. This signals the

Table 4 Temporal-Based Practical Strategies for Addressing Gender Inequity in Sport

Temporal dimension	Strategy	Explanation
Constructing urgency	Form advocacy groups	Establish groups like Women Onside to amplify the need for gender equity, creating a sense of urgency and accountability for reform.
	Set time-sensitive goals	Implement and capitalize on tight timeframes for achieving goals, such as the 7-week period for the CRWG, to create urgency and maintain focus on reforms.
	Align goals	Emphasize how gender equity reforms can provide a competitive advantage in the sports landscape, thus increasing the urgency for change.
	Develop targeted communication campaigns	Use media and public relations to raise awareness of gender equity initiatives, emphasizing the need for urgent action and reform.
Entraining	Leverage external interventions	Capitalize on external events, such as FIFA's intervention, to accelerate change.
	Align with broader movements	Connect gender equity initiatives in football with wider societal shifts in gender equality.
Enacting momentum	Utilize strong leadership	Ensure that leaders with relevant experience and skills maintain momentum and keep gender equity high on the agenda.
	Identify timely solutions	Propose creative solutions to challenges, such as the WFC voting shares, to maintain momentum and drive change.
	Host town hall forums and events	Organize events to bring stakeholders together, discuss the vision for women's football, and build momentum for change.
	Develop partnerships	Foster cooperation between stakeholders to build on the momentum of gender equity initiatives.
	Share success stories	Inspire further action by demonstrating the positive impact of gender equity initiatives on sport.

Note. FIFA = Fédération internationale de football association; CRWG = Congress Review Working Group; WFC = Women's Football Council.

importance of considering the temporal aspect of institutional work as a key factor in institutional disruption efforts. Our study indicates the value in considering the ways actors seeking change in sport may be able to reframe timing norms or capitalize on windows of opportunity when they arise.

Sport is characterized by a particular seasonality that operates within specific time frames, with major tournaments, for example, which can influence when windows of opportunity arrive (Odio, 2021). These time-bound events (e.g., the Women's World Cup or the Summer Olympics), given their international prominence and high-stakes nature, attract significant international attention from stakeholders, thereby presenting rich opportunities for accelerating institutional change efforts. These global sports events provide a time-specific opening and generate a sense of urgency and immediacy that can aid and progress reformative agendas. The ability to navigate and capitalize on temporal conditions becomes vital for actors seeking institutional change. In this study, the Women's World Cup was conveyed as a process that aligned with the CRWG reforms, with the latter characterizing a *zeitgeber*. However, an alternate analytical lens might consider the event itself (i.e., World Cup) as a potential *zeitgeber* that exerted its influence on timing norms across many facets of Australian football.

Implications for Gender Equity Research in Sport

The literature on gender equity in sport has advanced considerably in recent years, and there is now a developed understanding of the issue (Sveinson et al., 2022). However, despite notable advancements, systemic inequity continues to persist across most sports (Alsarve, 2022). This study offers further insight into the process of addressing gender inequity in sport by examining temporal institutional work. Specifically, by exploring the temporal activities of

constructing urgency, enacting momentum, and entraining, our study illuminates potentially innovative and effective methods for disrupting gender disparities in sport organizations.

Existing approaches identified by scholars for addressing gender inequity include the concept of "male champions," meaning men who hold powerful positions in institutions and have power to support and introduce gender equity initiatives (Sotiriadou & De Haan, 2019). Our study reaffirms the value of such people (particularly in the context of the core CRWG members being men). Furthermore, research shows how discursive strategies can be used to combat the ways in which language and discourse are used to perpetuate gender stereotypes and impede progress (Knoppers et al., 2021; Spaaij et al., 2020). Our findings on the value of temporal institutional work can supplement these existing approaches. Integrating these concepts with the temporal activities explored in our study results will likely lead to a more comprehensive, multifaceted strategy for combating institutionalized gender inequity. This is important given the wide recognition that addressing gender inequity is a complex problem that requires a multilevel and multidimensional approach to solve (Cunningham, 2008; Piggott & Matthews, 2020). The development of an integrated approach lays the foundation for more effective interventions and, ultimately, a brighter future for gender equity in sport.

An intriguing aspect of this study's findings lies in the perception that governance-focused gender equity reforms facilitated synchronicity with broader gender equity reforms (e.g., equal pay) due to the cascading impact of timing norms. That is, they contributed to the development of more windows of opportunity. Much has been written about how governance reforms, such as quotas, are a relatively limited tool for achieving genuine gender equity (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Alsarve, 2022). However, our temporally focused study highlights the ability of quotas to shift people's mindsets regarding the timing of other types of changes. This more nuanced, indirect benefit of quotas is harder to

observe than tangible representation data, but it is intriguing, nonetheless.

In the context of Australian football, the enactment of comprehensive gender equity reforms was likely aided by the country's advanced stance on gender issues (Ordway, 2023). This progressive climate shaped the temporal work efforts within the sport. Although such efforts could be beneficial across various settings in addressing gender inequity, replicating the exact nature of Australia's CRWG reforms may not be feasible due to distinct national cultural dynamics. Many nations may not yet be as prepared as Australia to adopt such developed gender equity measures.

Conclusion

This research used Australian football as a case study to examine the ways actors engage in temporal institutional work to disrupt gender inequity in sport. The study offers compelling evidence that entraining, constructing urgency, and enacting momentum, as forms of temporal work, were crucial in driving reforms within the sport and in influencing broader institutional change. These findings enrich our understanding of how to enact institutional change in sport. Practical implications, limitations, and areas for future research are now considered.

Recommendations for Practitioners

This study illuminates the key role that temporal institutional work can play in disrupting gender inequity in sport. Table 4 identifies a series of temporal-based practical strategies, based on the present case, that other stakeholders in sport may be able employ to change timing norms.

Limitations

This study's limitations include the risk of retrospective bias (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Participants may have altered recollections of past events or may reinterpret them based on current circumstances, which could potentially influence accuracy and reliability of data collected and subsequent analysis and interpretation of findings. The study focuses on relatively recent events; long-term effects and sustainability of observed changes may not yet be fully understood or assessed. This raises questions related to potential durability of institutional changes and whether the observed progress will be maintained or advanced in the future. The emphasis on temporal aspects of institutional work also runs the risk of underemphasizing other relevant factors that could play a role in shaping institutional change.

Future Research

Areas for future research include the exploration of temporal work across various sports and cultural settings to evaluate and compare the findings of this research. This could help identify further sport-specific contextual elements that impact temporal work and its outcomes. Our study showed that field-level conditions, such as external shocks (e.g., FIFA mandate) and social positions of key actors (e.g., Women Onside), play a key role in determining whether, when, and for how long windows of opportunity for change are open (Battilana et al., 2009). Indeed, in other countries, sports, and cultures, it is possible that a window of opportunity that was presented in Australia never opens. Consequently, we believe that one significant area of future research could be to investigate

the notion of institutional fields (Zietsma et al., 2017) specifically with regard to the preconditions for social change in sport. Potentially interesting avenues within this domain could investigate the interrelationships between time, legitimacy, and institutionalization. Building upon our findings, we suggest that legitimacy work, particularly as detailed in Nite et al. (2023), warrants further investigation for its role in social change in sports. Understanding how legitimacy is perceived and granted by individuals and groups may reveal key factors that either facilitate or impede the progression and adoption of social change initiatives.

Notes

1. A small number of national associations have struck equitable pay deals in their national setups, beginning with New Zealand, Norway, and, more recently, the United States.

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