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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Examining sport board leadership: how chairs manage passion

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ABSTRACT

Research question: Passion is a key feature of the sport industry that can manifest positively or negatively amongst sport directors. There has been limited research on how passion can be managed on boards. The purpose of this study was to examine the skills, abilities, and strategies used by Chairs to manage passion within sport boards.

Research methods: This paper reports findings based on interviews with Chairs of 19 Australian sport organisations.

Findings: Chairs deployed strategies to manage passion within the board such as managing the agenda, informal discussions, and using consensus-based decision-making approaches. Passion management strategies are contingent on the skills and abilities of Chairs, the prevalence of collective board leadership, and the professionalisation of the board.

Implications: This research expands the understanding of passion in sport through the development of a framework that illuminates how Chairs manage passion through a range of skills, abilities, and strategies and thus enhances knowledge of sport governance, emotion management, and leadership.

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Sport governance; president; chair; affect; emotions; passion management

Introduction

With its potential for drama and intense emotional experiences (Stewart & Smith, 1999), sport is deeply shaped by passion. Scholars have only recently studied passion in leisure and sport (e.g. Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016; Swanson & Kent, 2017). While Stewart and Smith (1999) regarded passion as a key feature of the sport industry, it is unclear how passion resonates in the context of professionalising sport boards. As Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) posited “the transition of many sports from predominantly volunteer administered organisations anchored in an amateur ethos, to professionally managed entities catering to a more sophisticated marketplace has created

unique challenges for the governance of sport” (p. 235). The shift from a traditional representative to a hybrid board composition model with the appointment of independent directors has brought changes to board dynamics and accentuated tensions concerning the relevance of and balance between passion, qualifications, experience, and skills within the board (Stenling et al., 2019). These tensions experienced by directors on the board have received insufficient attention in the sport governance literature (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2022).

Passion – and the emotions that emanate from passion (Vallerand, 2015) – influence behaviours and decision-making within organisations (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Both

favourable and unfavourable outcomes have been associated with passion such as motivation, creativity, innovativeness, as well as loss of reason, burnout, and individual, group or organisational performance in contexts like entrepreneurship, gambling, sports, arts, and education (for a review see Curran et al., 2015; Pollack et al., 2020). However, in the sport context, it is unknown how passion is managed to exploit its positive consequences and prevent its negative outcomes from jeopardising board functioning. Given the formal board leadership position assigned to the Chair (Bezemer et al., 2018) and the lack of research on whether and how leaders seek to manage emotions (Kaplan et al., 2014), it is appropriate to explore the role of the Chair in managing passion on sport boards. In recent work investigating the role of the sport board Chair by Zeimers and Shilbury (2020), one Chair highlighted “there is so much passion invested in it. That makes it tricky. More complex because you deal with personal emotions, personal psyches, volunteerism, grass-roots situations. It is personal. Personal engagement is a strength and danger” (p. 272). They observed that the role of sport board Chairs is challenging because Chairs need to manage passionate directors when steering the board. Zeimers and Shilbury (2020) subsequently recommended future research to investigate passion on sport boards and how they manage passion. This research endeavour was pursued by Zeimers and Shilbury (2022) and Zeimers and Shilbury (2022) which revealed how passion is an important emotional factor impacting sport boards and sport organisations more largely.

The following question guided this research – how do sport board Chairs manage passion amongst directors? Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to explore the skills, abilities, and strategies used by Chairs when fulfilling their leadership roles to manage passion within the board. This study has the potential to facilitate a deeper understanding of how a Chair’s leadership might enable effective board functioning

in a distinctively passionate environment. This study makes two contributions to the sport management and governance literature. First, the research extends the sport governance literature, and particularly recent work investigating passion amongst sport directors (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2022) through the development of a framework that illuminates how Chairs manage passion through a range of skills, abilities, and strategies and thus enhances knowledge of sport board functioning. Second, it makes a broader contribution to the leader emotion management literature by analysing the under-researched concept of passion and advances knowledge on passion – and more largely emotion management and leadership, which received limited research attention in the sport management literature (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018).

Literature review

Passion and sport

Passion is defined as a strong inclination towards an activity that people like, that they find important and identify with, and in which they invest significant time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003). Passion, as an emotionally based motivational construct, involves an affective component (strong liking or love for a specific object or activity), and an internalisation component (the activity is internalised into a person’s identity) (Pollack et al., 2020).

Passion can bring about both positive and negative emotional, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural outcomes (Vallerand, 2015). For example, some studies have linked passion to positive behaviours such as innovativeness (Pollack et al., 2020). Moreover, passion can also negatively influence group and organisational performance (Ho & Pollack, 2014) and can be expressed in a range of ways. As illustrated by Zeimers and Shilbury (2022), a passionate sport board director, for example, may demonstrate a strong inclination for and enjoyment (affective

expression) of the sport and high commitment to managing the debate (attitudinal expression) and to being involved in strategic activities (behavioural expression). Alternatively, a director may be highly passionate about the sport (strong affective expression) but display hostile behaviours and perform poorly when leading the board (behavioural expression).

The general passion literature has mostly focused on the antecedents, the forms, and the outcomes of passion (see Curran et al., 2015; Pollack et al., 2020), but has not devoted attention to passion management – a domain that merits further study considering evidence that passion influences cognitions (i.e. brain responses) and behaviours (i.e. body responses) in important ways (Cardon et al., 2009; Vallerand, 2015).

Given its significance in sport, researchers have examined the personal and contextual factors related to passion (e.g. Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016) as well as its relationships with organisational outcomes. Swanson and Kent (2017) revealed that passion influences sport employees' workplace attitudes and behaviour. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2016) noted that employees working for charitable foundations were more harmoniously passionate than those responsible for the business operations of the football clubs. So far, studies have been limited to the domain of work passion, including employees of professional sport organisations, municipal sport organisations, and college sport (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2021; Papadimitriou et al., 2017; Swanson & Kent, 2017). No previous studies have directly explored passion and sport governance, although it has been cited as an important secondary finding or as a recommendation for future research (Doherty, 2020; Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020, p. 2022).

Sport governance

This study is situated in the organisational sport governance research stream (Henry & Lee,

2004) which focuses on the board and its role in overseeing governance process and functioning. Such studies have examined various topics such as roles of the Chair (e.g. Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020), board roles and composition (e.g. McLeod, 2020; McLeod et al., 2021), leadership (e.g. O'Boyle et al., 2020), dynamics (e.g. Schoenberg et al., 2016), and performance (e.g. Hoye & Doherty, 2011).

With the ongoing professionalisation of sport boards, the appointment of "governance professionals" has reshaped board dynamics (Ferkins et al., 2009). Yet, the impact of this development has not been adequately explored in sport governance research. One important research direction is to illuminate how board Chairs manage passion in this context because although passion might be desirable – and even hard to retain in the context of "board member disengagement" (Jaskyte & Holland, 2015, pp. 164–164 cited by Doherty, 2020) –, it can represent a potential challenge for sport board functioning if it is not well-managed (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2022). In Zeimers and Shilbury (2022), passion was found to impact sport board functioning in various favourable (i.e. motivation, cohesion, and climate) and disruptive (i.e. cohesion, conflict, decision-making) ways.

The term "Chair" is used to identify the person responsible for leading the board and in many cases, this will be the elected President. Relatively few sport management scholars have directly explored the work of the Chair (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020) although the Chair's leadership position is often raised when examining the strategic functioning of the board, board decision-making, and board–CEO relationship (Ferkins et al., 2009, 2018; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003). Takos et al. (2018) suggested that the Chair is key in influencing sport board leadership dynamics and functionality. Yet, sport governance research has rarely focused on the Chair's role as the leader of a board (Hoye, 2006; Takos et al., 2018; Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020), specifically reflecting the dearth of

research in leadership in sport governance (O'Boyle et al., 2020).

Similarly, the broader governance literature has revealed a sporadic focus on board Chairs (Bezemer et al., 2018). Studies have provided valuable insights on the roles and characteristics of effective Chairs of non-profit boards (Harrison & Murray, 2012) and a typology of Chair power and influence on corporate boards (McNulty et al., 2011). Corporate governance scholars have suggested that the position of the Chair is paradoxical because the Chair is considered as "first among equals" but is also widely considered the leader of the board (Bezemer et al., 2018).

Few corporate governance studies have examined the work of the Chair in the context of emotions in the boardroom (Brundin & Nordqvist, 2008; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1996). McNulty and Pettigrew (1996) reported how Chairs may influence decision-making processes by being assertive or using formal authority. A Chair's leadership style can also influence director commitment and motivation (Guerrero et al., 2015). Some of the only authors to develop a governance research agenda directly exploring emotions were Brundin and Nordqvist (2008). They observed that emotions shape board interactions and identified Chairs' high emotional energy as a factor that accentuates their superiority. To aid our understanding of how Chairs manage passion in sport, this paper now considers the broader emotion management literature.

Leader emotion management

The literature on leadership and emotion has traditionally focused on the influence of leaders over group member's emotions (Humphrey et al., 2008). Emotion management is an emerging research theme in organisational studies that focuses on how leaders manage both their own and others' emotions (Kaplan et al., 2014). Theories of emotion management indicate that managing emotions successfully is

a key function of effective leaders (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Huy & Zott, 2019; Thiel et al., 2012). Leader emotion management is defined as "the processes and behaviours involved in assisting [group members] in regulating their emotional experiences so as to facilitate the attainment of organisational objectives" (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 566). However, empirical research on the topic is scarce and "rather general and non-specific in delineating the specific processes and behaviours that constitute emotion management" (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 577).

Kaplan et al. (2014) suggested various skills (i.e. recognition, perspective taking, support, presentation, and communication) and behaviours (e.g. interacting and communicating in an interpersonally tactful manner, managing interactions, and maintaining open and frequent communication) of leader emotion management in the workplace. However, some behaviours discussed in the theoretical model and in the one tailored for managers regulating other stakeholders' emotions in the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities provided by Huy and Zott (2019) do not fit with the sport board context. For example, the relationship between the Chair and board members as "first among equals" (Ferkins et al., 2018) differs from the subordinate CEO-employee relationship framing these studies. Moreover, while successful emotion management depends upon the emotion experienced and the task completed (Thiel et al., 2012), researchers have not devoted attention to passion – which is associated with intense emotions, typically with productive and disruptive outcomes (Vallerand, 2015) – in a governance setting. Despite a few recent efforts to investigate leaders as emotion managers (Lee & Chelladurai, 2018), the sport management literature has failed to focus on the specific skills, abilities, and strategies employed by leaders to manage emotions. Following this literature review of passion in the sport management literature, followed by the broad range of governance and sport governance research and finally, of the

body of knowledge on leader emotion management used to address the research question, the following section outlines the method of this study.

Method

Research paradigm

The study was conducted using a social constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013) to consider passion as socially constructed and to understand it through the eyes of those being studied. Considering the study's epistemological perspective and the nature of the research purpose, a qualitative approach was considered appropriate to reveal diverse perceptions regarding passion management amongst directors through the eyes of the Chairs.

Research sites and participants

This study focused on sport board Chairs from the State of Victoria (i.e. one of the six federated States of Australia) and Australian National Sport Organisations (SSO/NSO). Participants were recruited from the Department of Sport and Recreation Victoria database of SSOs (i.e. 78 in total) and the Sport Australia database of NSOs (i.e. 62 in total). This case study used purposive sampling to identify elected Chairs who had been a board Chair for at least one year to guarantee sufficient experience and knowledge of the boardroom. In total, 14 Chairs from Victorian SSOs and five Chairs from Australian NSOs participated in this study. The participants came from a mix of small, medium, and large organisations. Of the 19 participants, 10 were men and nine were women.

Data collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. This method is suitable when the

aim is to generate deep and rich insights into social phenomena. Participants were interviewed on their perceptions of the influence of passion amongst sport directors and on their strategies to manage passion. Nineteen interviews were conducted in person or by phone from September 2019 to February 2020 and lasted between 48 and 86 min. Interviews were recorded on a digital audio recording device for transcriptions.

The development of the interview guide followed an inductive and deductive approach (Patton, 2014), with some questions derived from the sport governance (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020) and passion (Cardon et al., 2009; Vallerand, 2015) literature. The questions were open-ended to encourage broad insight from the participant on passion and its influence on their role leading the board. It was emphasised to participants that their responses were to be based on their experiences and perceptions. Questions included: Would you say that passion is at play in your board? Do you think that passion is an important issue you need to deal with as a sport board Chair? How do you think passion influences your Chair board leadership role? Can you describe how you manage passion as a Chair? What skills are needed to manage passion? Following ethics approval, all informants were advised that data relating to them would be de-identified and their confidentiality would be maintained. Accordingly, interviewees from SSOs are represented by SSO1-SSO14 and NSOs by NSO1-NSO5.

Data analysis

This research followed a six-phase thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to analyse the data inductively and deductively. NVivo 10 was utilised to assist with coding. The software facilitated the iterative process of establishing, reviewing, and amending the main themes and subthemes.

Each interview was coded by the first author. The analysis involved reading the transcripts

several times and proceeded with coding passages using an open (or initial meaning code) and an axial (or categorisation of open codes) coding process in NVivo 10. Like existing qualitative examination of passion (Cardon et al., 2017), our analysis was guided by specific words including “passion”, “love”, “excitement”, and “who or what I am”. New codes were added to the codebook like strategies and settings (labelled inside and outside the board). Three main themes were identified: skills, abilities, and strategies. Skills and abilities were considered as one main theme as both were considered to predict the range of strategies. The lead author combined the identified initial codes which were then divided into sub-themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016) within the two major categories. For instance, for the category “strategies”, distinct sub-themes in (e.g. managing the agenda, information processing) and outside the boardroom (e.g. director succession planning and induction) as well as individual and collective strategies emerged. Finally, a selective coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was employed to highlight key quotations that would sufficiently represent the data and themes and to explore the spread of difference reported by Chairs (Patton, 2014).

Results and discussion

The data provide strong evidence that passion is prevalent amongst sport directors. The following quotes illustrate how passion manifests on the board:

I think that they're passionate about the game. We have one of our board members who's been on the board for 15 years. She's our country representative, and she drives four hours to go to board meetings. We'd be hard pressed to find somebody who puts in the amount of effort that she does. (SS08)

While passion motivates directors, it can create emotionally intense situations that can impair the ability of the board to make decisions. A Chair explained the destructive

effects of passion from tenacious directors and the implications for their role:

Some people don't ever become aware of it [damaging effects of passion]. They become a bit obsessed about different topics and often that obsession, passion, they're one and the same. You just need to be careful of that ... Which is the situation I have in the high-performance side; I have someone who has an obsession about women being given an equal opportunity within high performance. (SS08)

As indicated in the quote above, there was widespread acceptance that Chairs must manage passion if boards are to function effectively. This needs for passion management is illustrated in the quote below:

Whether it's a strength or a weakness, the challenge, I suppose, certainly for the leadership, is to harness the passion, and not ignore it. Passion sits alongside emotions, sits alongside a parochial view of the world. We try and turn the passion into a positive resolution, maybe rise a little bit above their world, and see how it sits with everybody else. (NS02)

This insight is novel and represents a development to the existing body of work in sport governance because it implies that the Chair has a particular role in managing and harnessing passion which has not yet been exposed in sport governance setting by previous research. Harnessing passion implies the need to control and capture the power of emotions associated with passion to ensure it has a positive rather than negative influence on board functioning.

Results revealed that passion management by the Chair requires a set of skills, abilities, and strategies and these three domains reflect the three main themes shown in Figure 1 describing passion management in the sport governance context which Figure 1 summarises the findings and illustrates the various sub-themes within these three domains. Each is now discussed.

Skills and abilities

Figure 1 shows four sub-themes associated within the category focused on skills and abilities, including interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and leadership abilities (authentic and facilitative) to manage passion. Leadership abilities are stable dispositional attributes (personality traits and mental abilities) while skills are malleable and therefore trainable (Kaplan et al., 2014). This finding corresponds with some *interpersonal skills* predicting leader emotion management such as active listening, perspective-taking, and emotion recognition (Kaplan et al., 2014).

Perspective-taking refers to the capacity to appreciate the world from another perspective (Kaplan et al., 2014). One Chair explained how this skill involved predicting directors' viewpoints and tailor their behaviour accordingly:

Being a chair, you have to be able to predict. You're not going to get it all right, but you have to be able to predict. You have to say that person is going to have an issue with this and I need to understand what that is, and I need to understand how I can satisfy

them or I can have a process that they are going to be comfortable with because you will spend forever in board meetings if you're blind sighted by passion and obsession. (NSO04)

This also relates to the emotion recognition skill (Kaplan et al., 2014) to anticipate directors' reactions to different circumstances. Decoding both verbal and non-verbal emotional expressions "A lot of it is just reading the room. If I can see sidebar conversations or raised eyebrows and things like that, I need to bring that to the fold" (SS011).

One Chair explicitly reported that *emotional intelligence* was necessary to harness passion "after robust discussions in the room" (SS011) and, noted: "That's where the emotional intelligence stuff comes in to just go: "you are an actual person, that was a rough meeting, are you okay?" (SS011). Emotional intelligence involves a person's ability to identify and to understand emotion (in self and others) and to manage them (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). That same Chair illustrated this ability to recognise others' passion and the potential negative

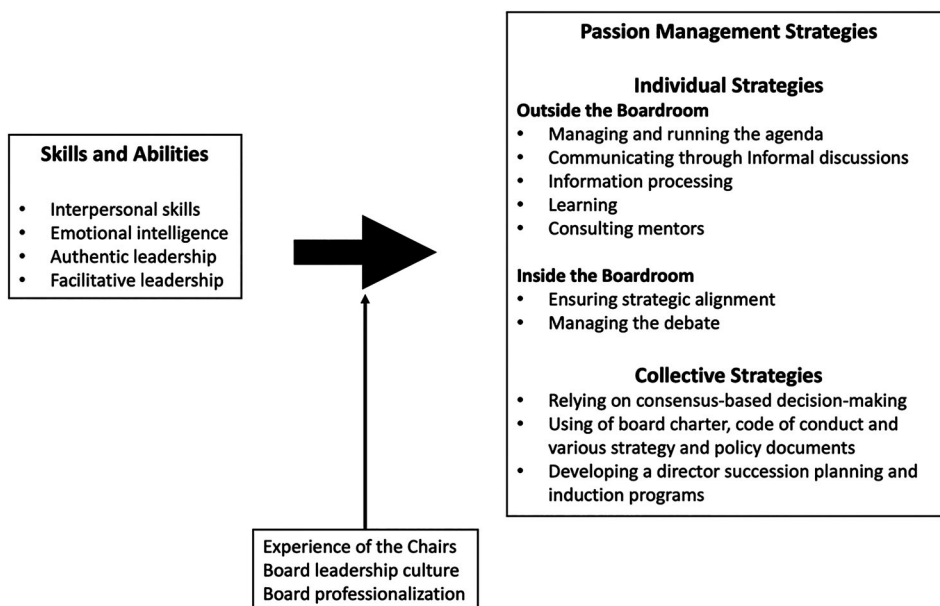


Figure 1. Sport board chair passion management framework.

emotions that can arise from it: “I think also understanding that some people need longer time to think. So, it’s about making sure that you can facilitate an environment where everyone can have their say and everyone feels heard.” and oneself: “I have to be really reflective, and I appreciate the skill sets on my board because I know of my weakness”. Moreover, the analysis of the interviews uncovered that many Chairs indirectly reported several emotional intelligence abilities such as emotion appraisal and empathy that can help to harness passion. Emotionally intelligent leaders may carefully review director’s emotional states (emotional appraisal). As one Chair stated, to manage passion, you need: “the ability to read others and the need to understand how people are going to respond and you need to understand their personality types. It is a matter of control and knowing how they’re going to react” (SSO8).

One Chair advised that to manage passion you must “be clear in your own mind before the meeting or before the discussion on the way things might go. Your thoughts on something may change too in the meeting” (SSO7). Other Chairs highlighted the need to take distance “and hear the other side of the story” (NSO5), “to hold a moral compass” (SSO9) and “be impartial” (NSO2) to intervene in challenging passionate situations. This resonates with studies suggesting that exercising the Chair’s role requires *authentic leadership* which is considered more effective than a more coercive or *laissez-faire* leadership style (Guerrero et al., 2015). Such emotional self-awareness and balancing processing abilities like analysing all relevant information prior to making decisions, avoiding biased decisions, and welcoming different points of view can influence the successful execution of passion management strategies. As the presiding officer, the Chair is often depicted as the most dedicated director in the boardroom whose involvement can influence the commitment and motivation of board directors (Bezemer et al., 2018; Guerrero et al., 2015; Takos et al., 2018).

Many Chairs also considered that managing passion was a collective responsibility of the board in which the Chair’s role is to empower other directors to contribute and at times, lead the passion management process. This perception is encapsulated in the following quote, “it [passion management] absolutely involves the broader board. The group needs to have the same song sheet set out for them. So, there is a lot of discussion and collaboration” (NSO2). This approach involves specific skills and abilities as well as strategies that will be discussed separately in the next section. The *facilitating leadership* style of the Chair is therefore crucial to fostering collective board leadership, to turn a group of directors into an interacting and collective functioning team and to keep the passion alive and harness it positively. The idea of shared responsibility among all directors converges with the concept of “collective board leadership” (Ferkins et al., 2018; O’Boyle et al., 2020) which refers to “how a board comes together to generate leadership and to progress key strategic initiatives within and across a network of affiliated bodies, such as in a federated model (Ferkins et al., 2018, p. 222) with a focus on unity and leadership as a shared process”.

Less experienced (i.e. one to three years on sport boards) and generally women Chairs in “a male-dominated sport” (SSO5) felt that to manage passion it was important to encourage other directors to voice displeasure and relieve tensions when overly passionate issues arise. Several interviewees provided examples of this ability to foster collective leadership to manage passion in the board. An experienced Chair with more than 5 years on sport boards explained: “you let the people express their view, but then, the classic question is, “Has anybody else got anything to say about this?” Then, you’ll see those who are not letting passion drive decision-making bring different arguments to the table” (SSO4). Other informants reported: “So sometimes I’ll defer to someone else to say, “Can you lead this part

of the meeting, because I think you're going to do it in a better way than me." And that sort of empowers them to feel some ownership, and again demonstrates that it's a team, not just about me" (NSO3). This quote illustrates the benefit of the Chair having the ability to calculate when a collective leadership approach is needed to manage passion. In those instances, the Chairs viewed the board as a collective team of equals (Guerrero et al., 2015). Interestingly, some Chairs also reported that collective responsibility was needed to manage the Chair's passion. "I'm sometimes one of the offenders like just shut me up. Please do that because it's equally applicable to me as it is to everyone else" (SSO5).

These findings indicate the value of having multiple leaders on the board and suggest that the Chair adopt a more "invisible role" during board meetings. This means, contrary to what is sometimes implicitly prescribed in the literature (Bezemer et al., 2018), the Chair is not always an active leader, rather the Chair can engineer a facilitative collective team leadership approach to enable directors to collectively contribute to the board dynamics and therefore help manage passion.

Strategies

Three specific strategies used by Chairs to manage passion are shown in Figure 1: individual strategies outside the boardroom, individual strategies inside the boardroom, and collective strategies inside the boardroom. Data analysis identified 10 sub-themes in the strategy category reflecting strategies employed by Chairs to manage passion in and outside the boardroom. Some of these strategies are driven individually by the Chair while others are based on a collective approach described above.

Individual Strategies Outside the Boardroom. Consistent with previous studies (Bezemer et al., 2018; Kakabadse et al., 2006), informants

reported that a significant part of the Chair's role is executed outside of the boardroom. In this setting, Chairs reported managing passion outside the boardroom reflected via five sub-themes within the individual strategies: managing and running the agenda, communicating and informal discussions, information processing, learning, and consulting mentors.

Managing and running the agenda involves developing and structuring the board agenda as well as allocating time for each item to ensure efficient use of time. This strategy is needed to allow for directors' areas of passion and plan coping strategies to reduce potential frustrations, as noted by a Chair: "you've got to allow people to bring up things, as long as it's not the continual same thing over and over again" (SSO3).

Chairs frequently reported that effectively fulfilling their role of managing board dynamics enabled them to manage passion through *communicating and informal discussions*. These discussions are meant to prepare directors for expected passionate debates and difficult meetings as well as to help directors harness their passion positively. Below is a description of how a Chair operates.

If you do have a challenging board member that is probably more passionate at times than they probably should be, you want to try and harness that in a positive way. It might be the fact that you might have to pull them aside privately at some point in time and have a conversation with them. To do it in board meetings sometimes probably may not be appropriate, and be able to have those conversations and say, "Look, I know you're passionate about this, but perhaps maybe approach it a little bit differently." (NSO04)

This Chair demonstrated the importance of making sure that directors feel like they can contribute to the issue at hand and work towards ensuring that if other information is required to support the debate, it is accessed in readiness for the meeting. Through these

conversations, the Chair plays a critical role in orchestrating the engagement of the group (Guerrero et al., 2015; O'Boyle et al., 2020; Takos et al., 2018). To prevent the negative effects of passion impeding the board in reaching its full potential, communicating with directors allows greater participation and commitment during discussions (this is further discussed below) (Gabrielsson et al., 2007).

Another means of managing passion was *evidenced-based information processing* in a timely manner (Bezemer et al., 2018). Evidence-based information was considered by most Chairs as essential to forestall negative emotions generated by passion. Several Chairs explained that they adopted a leadership and guiding role by asking directors to bring a solid business case for their proposals and to scrutinise information critically to make informed decisions. By preparing meetings, Chairs perceived that ensuring directors were well-informed was their individual duty to prevent passion causing dysfunctional meetings, frustrations and, conversely foster participation and engagement during board meetings. As this Chair stated:

Communication is the key to most things. You don't give anybody any surprises, if you think it's going to be a challenge to work through something [an issue directors are passionate about], you start the communication process early and you work through it. If people are informed, and it's explained to them, why certain things are happening, it's better than just saying, "We are going to do this." That's being high handed. (SSO7)

Noticeable differences have been identified between Chairs. Less experienced Chairs referred to two specific strategies to manage passion outside the boardroom. Firstly, Chairs noted the importance of *learning* to equip themselves and to guide the board. One Chair with more than 20 years of experience reflecting on her best practices: "It is just educating yourself and keeping up with the latest information from wherever that might be,

individually from your people, from the news, from other sports, for Australian Institute of Company Directors or Governance Institute of Australia or Sport Australia" (NSO1). The need to continually absorb all relevant information was recognised as important in encouraging a culture of training, suggesting that managing passion is not innate but can be learned.

Secondly, *consulting* other Chairs, mentors, other sport organisations or stakeholders was perceived as a relevant strategy to reflect on issues and identify potential solutions from impartial actors. One SSO Chair with 3 years' experience explains her rationale: "If you're getting really passionate about something, sometimes you just need to see other sides of the story. So, maybe getting in other people as well, stakeholders, to see how your decision will affect others might be another tactic" (SSO6). This Chair went on to explain that, to manage their own passion and as well as others, they should do "your research, or sometimes comparing other sports and saying, "Well, we're not going to reinvent the wheel here. What would other sports do? Do we have any precedence from other sports in this kind of situation?" So, making a comparison" (SSO6).

Individual Strategies Inside the Boardroom. In the boardroom, the Chair is positioned as the actor responsible for conducting the board meeting and facilitating board dynamics (Bezemer et al., 2018; Harrison & Murray, 2012; Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020). Two sub-themes shown in Figure 1 describe strategies used by Chairs to manage passion inside the boardroom were: ensuring strategic alignment and managing the debate.

Ensuring strategic alignment and ensuring the board maintained a focus on the organisation's strategic priorities was consistently considered essential to manage passion. As explained by this informant: "people are passionate about different things but that's why the agenda is really important to stick to because you only have a certain amount of time when you've got all of those people in the room"

(SSO3). Many interviewees perceived that a strict agenda-driven process ensures strategic alignment and mitigates the negative effects of passion in the boardroom. As stated by this Chair: "it's my job to drag them up to this [State] level rather than let them stay at that [club] level" (SSO7) because "anyone who's got a real passion for the topic or the subject at the board can dominate a discussion and can lead to outcomes that are not strategically in line" (SSO4). This strategy, which is aimed at reducing the frustration created by an overly operationally focused board, might also paradoxically generate frustration from directors who could feel that the passion that drives their engagement is lost in higher level strategic discussions.

Furthermore, the data revealed that Chairs harness passion by *managing the debate*. As the presiding officer, several Chairs perceived that they are (or at least should be) the most influential director and must take responsibility for ensuring that passion does not lead to certain individuals monopolising the debate. Interviewees agreed that optimal board dynamics and decisions are achieved when all directors are engaged in the discussion and decision-making process (Bezemer et al., 2018; Guerrero et al., 2015). This perception is conveyed in this quote: "It's about making sure that you can facilitate an environment where everyone can have their say and everyone feels heard" (SSO11). As part of their leadership role in managing board dynamics and passion, the perception was that Chairs must create a climate of openness in the boardroom for directors to raise questions, make suggestions, judge information, and debate issues (Gabrielson et al., 2007).

Chairs explained how they ensured this unfolds. For instance, they will at the start of the meeting, say, "Look, this is going to be hard meeting. We've got a difficult topic to discuss here. It's going to get emotional. Just reminding people about the process that we're going to go through" (NSO5). During

the meeting, the Chair would "call for a break or to call the end of the conversation" (NSO1), refocus or cut off a director "to bring the discussion back on track" (SSO2) to manage passion. Other Chairs reported additional emotional uplifts practices (Kaplan et al., 2014) to impact the director's behaviour by evoking a specific emotional state and to maximise passion such as "reflecting on the values" (SSO6) and on the strategic plan and mission of the organisation, and on the role of the board to remind directors of "their responsibility to the whole sport" (SSO3). One Chair also reported at the end of each meeting to take "10 min to go around the room and reflect on the meeting" (SSO11). This allows for both Chair and director reflections plus a "lot of the feelings that people might previously have taken away from meeting are left on the table" (SSO11).

Strategies to support collective board responsibility. Finally, in a collective leadership perspective conveyed by some informants, three sub-themes shown in Figure 1 highlight strategies to support collective board responsibility for passion management: relying on consensus-based decision-making processes, using board charter, code of conduct, various strategic and policy documents, and developing a director succession planning and induction programmes.

Findings suggest that a *consensus-based decision-making process* was beneficial for managing passion, securing cohesion, and supporting collective board leadership. For some Chairs, managing passion requires building a sense of the collective mind using facilitation and decision processes that foster consensus around the boardroom. While consensus was often reported as the best way to reach decisions and manage passion, some Chairs considered that it was not always possible. One Chair reflected on how they deal with this issue as follows "but I won't as Chair, I suppose I can't, push that that's the only way to do things" (SSO9). As noted by Ferkins et al. (2018), "the old adage that the 'Chair is

first among equals' points to an important principle of collective decision-making and ultimately the enacting of collective leadership" (p. 225).

In leading a team of peers, some Chairs highlighted the importance of remaining neutral to lessen the risk of the negative influence of passion. The Chair should reinforce a collaborative role and motivate peers to reach a collective decision (O'Boyle et al., 2020). The following quote illustrates this collective nature of decisions and hence how Chairs viewed the need to exercise collective leadership to harness passion.

Once the decision is made, we don't have a position anymore individually. It's about occasionally reminding people that that's where we're at. And as I said, that's why anytime where there is a decision having to be made that might take longer to discuss, I will purposefully never talk about my position until the very, very end, when it's already quite clear of where we're landing. Because it's very easy as the Chair to hijack that decision. (SSO11)

Several Chairs reported *the use of a board charter, code of conduct, and various strategic and policy documents* for managing passion collectively. These documents establish the parameters of board functioning by developing board processes, policies and decision-making procedures and defining behavioural and ethical guidelines. These elements enable the board to be clear about its decision-making procedures and are necessary for building a culture of trust through consistent behaviour (Hoye, 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2020). A Chair explained the need to have such strategies to prevent the potential dysfunctional influence of passion on board, "Because this is where, the passion piece is challenging, if a lot of that good rigour in terms of policy documentation just doesn't exist" (SSO1).

Director succession planning and induction were also identified by several informants as a relevant strategy. The involvement of the

Chair in director succession planning will vary depending on his/her leadership style, experience, and the processes (i.e. presence in the nomination committee and involvement in the recruitment process) and in the development of a skills matrix, which, in that case, allows for a "dispassionate view of an outsider perspective" (SSO13). The onboarding of new directors is necessary to clarify the duties, expectations, and values to help harness a board culture that enables "respect for others, trust and honesty", "to operate well as a team" and "to make a collective decision" (NSO1). This advising process implies a specific role for the Chair as well as for the other directors.

The usefulness of these strategies was found to be contingent on the abilities and the skills of the Chairs, their level of experience, the board collective leadership culture and the professionalisation of the board. The availability of professionalised governance practices and processes – which could also accentuate tensions between elected and appointed directors if developed at the expense of passion – are likely to impact the collective strategies deployed by the Chair when managing passion.

These findings extend the sport governance literature by highlighting that effectively chairing meeting relies on mutually managing and harnessing the power of passion in the group rather than relying on the Chair's individual strategies and power. This converges with Bezemer et al. (2018) who found that effective Chairs in the boardroom are best described as enabling equals rather than as dominating leaders. As highlighted, Chairs endorse a collaborative leadership style (Ferkins et al., 2018; O'Boyle et al., 2020) to harness passion by empowering directors. This peer role that Bezemer et al. (2018) described as the "invisible role of the Chair" is crucial to providing structure and space for directors to carry out their roles in the board and ensure their passion manifests positively.

Conclusions

This study makes two timely contributions. First, this study addresses the lack of research on passion in the sport governance literature (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2022). The sport management literature has shown little evidence of the implications of passion in the governance domain compared to the recent developments on passion in the sport workplace (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016). The empirical insights support the need for governance research to focus more attention on emotions in the boardroom (Brundin & Nordqvist, 2008) which largely echoes a movement towards a more behavioural perspective in sport governance research (Takos et al., 2018).

This study developed a framework identifying the skills, abilities, and strategies used by Chairs to manage passion. This is an original contribution as it represents an important step towards theory development and understanding passion management amongst sport directors. This study advances the field of sport governance by generating insights that further the understanding of board functioning in the unique passion fuelled context of sport. Previous sport governance studies have predominantly focused on the collective roles of the board as-a-whole (Ferkins et al., 2018). Few researchers have concentrated on individual directors and the link between the Chair, other directors, and board functioning (Bezemer et al., 2018; Guerrero et al., 2015; Hoye, 2006; Takos et al., 2018).

The study offers new insights on the Chair as a key leader, which remains largely underexplored in the sport and governance literature (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020), thus enriching the understanding of the role, and, complementing research that has focused on personality traits, leadership skills and abilities of Chairs (Bezemer et al., 2018; Guerrero et al., 2015; Harrison & Murray, 2012). Our findings suggest that personal Chair characteristics enable Chairs to implement effective passion management strategies drawing on qualities that incorporate

authentic leadership and emotional intelligence. Consequently, we extend knowledge on the emotional idiosyncrasies of leadership in sport governance research (O'Boyle et al., 2020). This is important because our study establishes that passion management represents a key Chair leadership role and reveals how Chair leadership roles and passion management are interlinked.

The second contribution of this study is the development of new insights into passion and more broadly emotion management. Passion is relatively well-established in management. However, most studies have quantitatively examined the forms, origins, and consequences of passion (Curran et al., 2015). This research addressed that gap by developing in-depth qualitative insights on how leaders manage passion in a small group governance setting. This contribution is significant given the importance of emotion management for organisational functioning and performance (Kaplan et al., 2014). This study also makes a broader contribution to the leader emotion management literature by pointing towards the context-specificity of emotion management. We have highlighted how context (in this case sport and board work) influences which skills, abilities, and strategies are needed to manage passion when Chairs fulfil their role of managing board dynamics. This study revealed that some strategies used by leaders among equals in the sport boardroom arguably differ from those of leader-subordinate in the workplace or in an entrepreneurial context examined previously in the literature (Huy & Zott, 2019; Kaplan et al., 2014; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018). Our findings, therefore, suggest that different strategies, abilities, and skills might be needed based on a leader's duties and organisational setting.

Practical recommendations

Recognising that most sport board directors are volunteers, governance practitioners need to

be alert to the potential paradox of “keeping the passion alive” which might also present some boardroom challenges. Therefore, there is a need to establish strategies for working through such challenges that passion may create. Beyond innate and stable leadership abilities, trainable skills can be acquired by Chairs such as active listening, perspective taking and emotional intelligence. Accordingly, our identification of the relevant skills and abilities could be used to shape election decisions or in training programmes designed to enhance these attributes. As revealed in this study, the role of the Chair in this process is critical. Similarly, although not fully explored in this study, the efforts of other directors and the CEO in harnessing passion should also be investigated in the future.

To cope with these challenges relating to passion, the Chair needs to be aware of the interests and different personalities within the board. Making expectations explicit and collectively agreeing on the board’s involvement in strategy and a “whole-of-sport” perspective may alleviate passionate tensions within the boardroom setting. Effective chairing appears to rely on managing passion of the group collectively rather than relying on the Chair’s individual role *per se*. A skills matrix and using a nominations committee to assess requisite director skills and the appointment of independent directors could minimise risks of disharmony.

The overwhelming barriers to positively harnessing passion identified in this study were the lack of a strategic framework for decision-making, low levels of governance professionalisation and, the lack of awareness of the principles and processes of good governance. Finally, specific strategies for nurturing the positive outcomes of passion were also shared by the informants of this study such as emotional intelligence as an internal self-regulation strategy or team building activities as group management regulation techniques.

There are limitations to this study that warrant consideration. This research had to

overcome a major impediment to access to boards and their directors. It addressed this challenge by adopting a narrow focus to enter the boardroom through the eyes of Chairs to better understand the important leadership role of the Chair as it relates to passion management. Despite this approach, this study did not have total access to the boardroom to view passion in action. Future research could investigate passion by surveying or observing the behaviours of directors and CEOs. For instance, research could examine the effects of passion on board dynamics, board performance or on collaborative governance arrangements and the relationship between NSOs and SSOs. This study did not extend beyond the confines of the individual Chairs and their respective boards, which ultimately limited insights to passion which may be evident through board-to-board interactions and similarly external partners. These roles warrant attention in the future. The interviews showed different views on the uniqueness of passion in the non-profit sport context. Future research could extend this investigation in other sport governance contexts, in particular professional clubs, to analyse differences in passion management processes and consequences.

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