

# Mind the Gap: Sport Management Education and Employability: Auto-ethnographical analysis of Sport Management Education and the Sports Fitness Industry

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## Title

Mind the Gap: Sport Management Education and Graduate Employment in the Sport Industry

An auto-ethnographical analysis of the distance between Sport Management Education and the Sports Fitness Industry.

## Introduction

Recent publications in the area of sports graduate capabilities and competencies (Baker, Loughren, Dickson, Goudas, Crone, Kudlacek and Petr, 2017) and expectations of employability skills in sport and recreation (Tsitskari, Goudas, Tsalouchou and Michalopoulou, 2017) mirrored the authors experience having been previously embedded in the sport industry and more recently teaching in the university sector in the field of sport management. The existence of, or potential for, a 'gap' between sport management education and the sport centre managers' requirements of graduate employees is by virtue of the system by which higher education and graduate employment is aligned. The current research project described here is predicated on observations (Alvesson and Spicer, 2016) describing an early career manager telling an intern the basis of a *really good* report was 'One or two impressive PowerPoint slides'. Surprisingly not a well-constructed argument based on well researched and evidence-based specialist knowledge, widely acknowledged as the essence of a degree education.

The use of auto-ethnographical data provides rich and valid data (Denshire, 2014; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). The depth and breadth of this data is explained; "life has blessed me with uncounted opportunities to be with and learn from people of many different cultures and in many different roles." (Wheatley 2014, p. 1). This study utilises the powerful and rich data that is available from observing the social space one is immersed within. Observing that rich experiential data can lead to "see the world a new informed not by science but by sacred wisdoms." (Wheatley, 2014, p. 2). This study is a qualitative analysis underpinned by an auto-ethnographical approach to the analysis of experiences in executive leadership and the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education. This paper reports on one aspect of a wider research project based on the author's commercial sport industry experience of executive leadership. This wider research examines the transfer and application of experience and knowledge from the industrial to the academic; following the authors transition across these two environments. The focus of this paper is one area identified during the authors reflective interviews of the Entrepreneur Turns Intrapreneur project, the experience of employing sports management graduates. This paper uses a mixed method approach in addition to auto-ethnography experience, it seeks to find meaning in narratives; extracted from interviews examining the experiences of sport and leisure centre managers' current experiences of recruitment and line managing early career graduates. The interview methodology used was for managers to verbalise the behavioural competencies they experienced by staff they line manage and graduate level job applicants.

Eurostat (Eurostat, 2017) analysis identifies that the sports industry, using the Vilnius 2.0 definition of sport (NACE, 2008) is a significant employer across the EU area and the specifically the United Kingdom. Justifying sports management as a profession is supported by Eurostat data, in 2015 417,000 in the UK were employed in the industry. Representing more than 1% of the total employment. In regard to the proportion of those employed in the sport industry 33.4 (139,600 individuals) in 2015 had completed tertiary education, (Levels 5 – 8), this is slightly higher than other sectors. The sport industry as an employer is significant, therefore it is reasonable to extrapolate a 'sport management' body of knowledge exists that can be applied to effect good decision making in organisations operating within the industry, beyond the fundamental principles of business and management? Leading us to ask the question: Where should the lens of sport management education be focused, subject specific content or principles of management? Understanding in this area provides the basis from which to explore the implied question of sport management education and the concept of 'fit for purpose' when applied to graduate employment.

## Literature

### Employability and Higher Education

“Employability refers to a graduate’s achievements and his/her potential to obtain a *graduate job*, and should not be confused with the actual acquisition of a *graduate job*” (Yorke, 2006, p. 2). While not diminishing the value or importance of learning generic skills associated with ‘employability’, the local environment of a specific graduate job it is postulated, is underpinned by subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding. This we hypothesize is the case in the service sector which relates to sport management.

Aligning higher education with the world of work (Helyer, 2011) is of importance to a range of stakeholders (Amaral and Magalahas, 2002; Kettunen, 2015). Previous research has focused on employer needs (Mason and Hopkin, 2011), in respect of employability (Gallup Organization, 2010). Employability as a result has developed in educational terms as a set of transferable skills and competencies (Hind and Moss, 2011). More recently wider perspectives, including the *future employee* [student] have been discussed (CASCAID 2016; Daly 2016) including the requirements of subject-based skills and knowledge as a pre-requisite . Subject-based skills and knowledge as factors of employability have previously received little attention (Tsitskari et al., 2017), apart, it could be argued, from the development of vocational competencies (Kubler and Forbes, 2005; Rees Forbes and Kubler, 2006). It is likely that there has merely been an assumption of a linkage between employability and subject based knowledge. Higher education developments that began in the UK during the 1990’s (Williams, 2013) , have recently accelerated (Kubler and Forbes, 2005; McArthur, 2013). Vocationally focused degrees have emerged, leading to the current position of QAA subject benchmarks (Baum, Lockstone-Binney and Robertson, 2013; *Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism*, 2016).

Due to the vocational nature of sport management education it may be that the future teaching and learning delivery model could evolve and adapt, on a similar basis to that proposed by combining employment experience and part-time HE study which “could help to increase the supply of highly-educated people with the types of *employability skills* that are widely sought by employers.” (Mason and Hopkin, 2011, p. 4)

### Sport Management and Higher Education

It is proposed academics of sport management discuss their research with leaders in sport organisations and businesses, equally discussing with practitioners what issues they face. To appreciate sport management as a degree subject it is important to reflect on the sport management researcher’s perspective, of relying on the wider body of research literature (Slack and Thurston, 2014).

The studying of sport management at degree level is concerned with the application of management practice underpinning future opportunities to work within the sport industry. The sport management practitioner will utilise understanding of sport participation, sport spectating, requirements of high performance athletes, sport policy, sport governance to adapt management practice to achieve the organisations objectives. The opposite being that the study of sport management ceases to be vocational in orientation, but a business management degree with a ‘flavour’ of sport. The question then becomes which is the most advantageous for the future graduate and the sport industry?

There is a general sense of subject specific modules related to an area of study such as sport management have given way, by either employability modules or generic business management modules (Williams, 2013). Extrapolated support for this can be found in some literature (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Hind and Moss, 2011; Knights and Willmott, 1997). Evidence of a developing applied sport management body of knowledge is emerging in academic published works, by Ratten, Ferreira and Rexhepi amongst others. The development of sport integrated with management content is seen with the linking of material such as entrepreneurship (Ratten 2011; Ratten and Ferreira 2017), philanthropy and social responsibility (Ratten, 2010). A similar point is made in linking total quality management (TQM) and sport management education

(Rexhepi, Ramadani and Ratten, 2018). Academic study has looked at the dynamics of sport marketing and noted its importance (Ratten, 2016). The body of knowledge relating to sport management through published research is rich and diverse. Sport management degree programmes are finite in time allocation, selection of content therefore becomes a critical issue for graduate outcomes (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Goodwin, Chittle, Dixon and Andrews, 2017).

Management studies evolved through similar manifestations and were drawn from established disciplines “with knowledge that is relevant for the functional activities of management practice.” (Knights and Willmott, 1997, p. 9)

Our contention, in this current paper, is that an applied subject such as sport management, is more akin to an ‘engineering’ subject. Where there is specific subject knowledge requirements, i.e. sport policy, history, governance, operational aspects, are of key importance. Together these areas of sport specific knowledge create a body of knowledge the student acquires as subject specific skills, knowledge and understanding which when used in the industry enable them to operate as ‘high performance’ managers within the sports sector.

The argument here aligns with the view: “academic identity is constructed through the design of courses and modules that are fragmented into diverse academic or functional disciplines rather than generic issues and topics” (Knights and Willmott, 1997, p. 19) although for a specialised management area such as sport. The sport specific lens is of primary importance, instead of a generalised managed ‘business’ set of modules, with case studies and examples drawn from the industry.

Perhaps Slack & Thurston (2014) were suggesting the academic research of sport management has been following similar lines to that suggested by Knights and Willmott (1997) in the more general sense of interdisciplinary management studies. “The building and defence of disciplinary empires, and the feuds that they routinely invoke, are of key importance for understanding why interdisciplinary research takes the form of mechanistic pooling or, less frequently, systematic colonization” (Knights and Willmott 1997 p19). The purpose of this study is to evaluate the position of sport management education in regard to the teaching of business and management modules. For example, should a greater emphasis be placed on the utilisation of the rich data being generated by sport management researchers and used in class and applied to the vocational development of sport management students? Which of these two approaches determine success; at an early career interview from the interviewer’s perspective? Or an early career graduate entering their first annual review from the line manager’s perspective? The social power to determine career advancement at this point is held by the sports industry manager (Bass, Bass and Bass, 2008; Raven, 1993). The study of presence and body language demonstrates a place for developing practical *employability* behaviours (Cuddy, Wilmuth and Carney, 2012; Hanna, 2010).

### Sport Studies and Employability

Research into the impact of sport degrees, usually focuses on sport science or sport studies (Baker et al., 2017; Beaumont, Gedye and Richardson, 2016) the specific area of sport management and sport marketing degrees are bereft of direct study as to what industry managers view as beneficial for an early career or job applicant graduate to either enter the industry or progress. The undergraduate degree of Sport Marketing fails to be listed within the QAA Subject Benchmarking statement (*Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism*, 2016). The author’s research (Raven 2018 forthcoming) addresses this issue in respect of the sports industry, in this paper here specifically sport and leisure centre graduate employment and sport management education is examined.

Baker et al (2017) provides an excellent overview regarding sports graduates and sport industry employability on an international level. Within their review, of particular interest is the observation that there is increasing concern regarding the employability of UK sport graduates (Minten, 2010) and highlights the low infiltration of graduates into the sport industry (Minten and Forsyth, 2014). It is suggested this is likely due to poor vocational preparedness (Tsitskari et al., 2017), the sport industry’s deficiencies in

1 industry management, and the ability to offer the experience of higher level jobs, in terms of challenges  
2 and improved pay in other industries. It is argued in the paper Am I Employable (Beaumont et al., 2016)  
3 that the use of specific employability learning activities [modules] enhances the perception (loci of control)  
4 from employer to student (graduate) regarding their employability. The current research investigates in the  
5 context of sport and leisure centre graduate opportunities what the centre managers offer and do not offer  
6 employment based on, the display by the graduate of what competencies. Similarly, on what basis do these  
7 centre managers offer early career development to graduate employees.  
8  
9

## 10 Teaching Sport Management Vocationally

11 Good teaching practice in undergraduate programmes are the subject of a large body of literature,  
12 (Chickering and Gamson, 1987; Shank, 2014). A variety of terminologies are present in the literature; active  
13 learning (Marzano and Marzano, 2015; Petty, 2009), learner centred (Weimar and Fahraeus, 2013) and  
14 visible learning (Hattie, 2009) to cite some of the most preeminent.  
15

16 Evidence Based Teaching [EBT] (Petty, 2009) seeks to deliver teaching which is underpinned by research  
17 generated evidence. Research Informed Teaching (RIT) is concerned with scholarship of teaching, with a  
18 focus on how students learn, the application of for example visible learning (Hattie, 2009). An issue does  
19 exist with different disciplines interpreting RIT in slightly diverse ways, broadly the principles are the same.  
20 A purpose of this research is to establish the basis of evidence that employability is embedded within the  
21 teaching of the subject content. This can be aligned with the model of Research Inspired Teaching (RiT)  
22 (Healey, 2005). Healey seeks to engage students in a four-way model of teaching that introduces  
23 understanding, skills and knowledge of the research process i.e. research-tutored, research-based,  
24 research-led and research-oriented. The contention of this paper is, in an academic environment, where  
25 vocationally relevant degree programmes are commonplace, visible learning implicitly is concerned with  
26 employability. Healey's research inspired teaching is concerned with developing research skills, which  
27 presumably are transferable to a commercial career experience. However, more research is required to  
28 establish the role of and how employability can be integrated into the main content of a degree  
29 programme such as sport management.  
30  
31  
32

## 33 Research Questions

34 The review of the literature has revealed the need for alignment of degree study, in sport management, to  
35 future graduate employment within the industry. There is a limited consideration of the practicalities of  
36 sport management education and the gaining of industry specific graduate employment.  
37  
38

39 The objective of this research was to explore two opposing views;  
40

- 41 a. Students to be employable require '**customer service**' skills or 'business sense' leading to a  
42 generalised set of 'employability' learning programmes or modules.  
43  
44

45 As opposed to the view

- 46 b. Students to be employable in a specialised area i.e. sports industry management require '**subject-**  
47 **specific based knowledge**' which they can apply in the appropriate situation.  
48  
49

50 There are wider questions; do sport management educators need to be aware of and "Mind the Gap"  
51 proactively between the curriculum designed in sport management via course development and reviews  
52 and the sport industry both locally and internationally?  
53

54 The key questions posed within this research project are therefore:

55 RQ1. When studying a specialist knowledge degree, i.e. sport management, in respect of gaining specific  
56 sports industry graduate employment what is the optimum balance between, subject-based education,  
57 generic management education and employability competencies.  
58  
59  
60

1 RQ2. Does the “depth and breadth” of sport management subject based specific knowledge and  
2 competencies impact the gaining of graduate employment and/or career progression in a specialist area of  
3 the sports industry?  
4

## 5 **Design / Methodology / Approach**

6 The next section considers the methodology employed within this research project.  
7

8  
9 The research project utilised a mixed method consisting of two parts. The two elements (parts), an auto-  
10 ethnographical project by the author and a validating series of interviews with sport centre managers.  
11

12 Part 1 was derived from a series of interviews with the author by a trained interviewer to explore his auto-  
13 ethnographical experiences. The author’s experience includes in total 35 years of entrepreneurial sport  
14 industry business and intrapreneurial sport teaching experience. The resultant wide-ranging interview data  
15 has been distilled into a series of paradigms.  
16

17 The interviews drew out the author’s reflective experience as a business founder and CEO (entrepreneurial  
18 sports industry experience) collated, reviewed and matched to archival business material. The focus of the  
19 current study has brought together two tracts from both sides of the reflective experience, specifically the  
20 “distance” between sport management education and graduate employment in one area of the sport  
21 industry, namely the sport and leisure centre.  
22  
23

24 The background auto-ethnographical reflective evaluation process has been conducted over a five-year  
25 period between 2012 and 2017 (drawing on entrepreneurial experience of the author’s role as a CEO in the  
26 sports industry in the period since 1992). In the same period as the evaluative process and in parallel to it,  
27 the author has engaged in higher education [HE] teaching of sport management education. Deriving from  
28 the reflection and evaluation of the author’s auto-ethnographical experience of teaching, contrasting with  
29 the author’s own sports industry auto-ethnographical experiences the topic of this study has emerged and  
30 will be discussed in the Findings and Conclusion sections of this paper. Principally the benefits and impact  
31 of subject specific skills, knowledge and understanding gained through a programme of degree study in  
32 sport management as a pre-requisite to employment within the managing of sports participation or its  
33 assistance in aiding a ‘successful’ career in this area of sport management.  
34  
35

36 Auto-ethnographical studies have been criticised for their lack of objective data (Denshire, 2014), and  
37 indeed even in social sciences have at times historically been unfashionable (Ellis et al., 2011). This study  
38 took the view auto-ethnographical approach provides rich data when combined with a deep reflective  
39 approach to analysing the experiences the individual has been embedded within. The opportunity to  
40 compare ethnographically an entrepreneurial sport specific commercial experience and an intrapreneurial  
41 teaching experience is a unique and valuable research opportunity from which further study and  
42 conclusions for educational development can be drawn. To strengthen the objectivity of the study the self-  
43 reflective element has been enhanced by the author subjecting himself to a series of semi-structured  
44 exploratory discussion interviews, by a trained research interviewer, to test the paradigms previously  
45 identified by the author, presenting the visualisations and the rationales formulated during the auto-  
46 ethnographical evaluation process.  
47  
48  
49

50 The specific paradigm of this study (Mind the Gap in Sports Management Education), is the concept that  
51 sports management education and the sports industry to what extent do they need to work more closely  
52 together to align the curriculum and learning outcomes with the realities of graduate employment  
53 opportunities, especially around subject-specific based content and its impact at an operational level.  
54  
55

56 Part 2: The study was augmented with additional interview data gathered from sports centre managers to  
57 triangulate with the evaluation of the auto-ethnographical observations of the authors ‘entrepreneur  
58 turned intrapreneur’ experience.  
59  
60

1 This part was conceived to triangulate part 1 with the managerial experience of sports and leisure centre  
2 managers to develop a qualitative study. To further validate and triangulate the auto-ethnographical data  
3 evidence presented this element of the study was designed and conducted. This part of the study  
4 interviewed sport centre managers with a semi-structured research instrument (see section: Sport and  
5 leisure centre manager interview structure) concerning examples of their management experience drawn  
6 from sitting on interview panels and line management experiences. The focus and content of the interview  
7 having been established via the paradigms from the analysis of auto-ethnographical element of the study  
8 (part 1).  
9

## 10 Research procedure

11 Data collection methods were selected to enable the exploration of the focused theme of the present  
12 research project.  
13

14 The author took the view the source of “rich” data that is uniquely available to him, via auto-  
15 ethnographical experience, of industry experience in both the sport industry and the higher education  
16 sector was a useful and powerful starting point of understanding. Mindful of the need to ensure objectivity,  
17 but also to further enhance data available and bring it in to a “sharper” focus the author sat as subject in a  
18 series of semi-structured discussion interviews each centred on an underpinning theme. Each interview  
19 session, flexibility in direction was created with the interviewer ‘asking for clarification’ and to ‘illustrate’  
20 until the interviewer was fully ‘clear’ of and had fully explored the emerging ideas and understood the  
21 authors visualisation of their experience.  
22

23 To triangulate the analysis the evaluative data was acquired from four sources:  
24

25 Part 1 of study:  
26

- 27 a. Auto-ethnographical evaluation: as sport industry business founder/senior executive.
- 28 b. Auto-ethnographical evaluation: as sport management educator.
- 29 c. Testing of the evaluations with author as subject interviews, facilitated the comparison of the two  
30 areas of auto-ethnographical data.  
31

32 Part 2 of study:  
33

- 34 d. Semi-structured interview of sport and leisure centre managers  
35

36 The data gathered as a as sport industry business founder/senior executive was based on reflective  
37 evaluation of the authors experience over a twenty-year period, to 2012, which has been further  
38 augmented by their role as consultant and non-executive director within the industry. The reflective  
39 evaluation of the experience has taken place in the period from 2012-2017.  
40

41 The data gathered as an intrapreneur educator within the higher education sector has taken place during  
42 the period 2014 to 2017 and has involved a wide variety of roles from lecturing and developing content as  
43 a module leader, in a diverse range of subjects related to the sports and events industries including  
44 managing people, entrepreneurship and managing volunteers. Data has also been drawn from experiences  
45 of project leading on the development of new foundation degree programmes, interim work as a sport  
46 education quality manager, panel member for approval of new degree programmes, external examiner and  
47 sports subject external adviser for degree programmes. The reflective evaluation of the experience has  
48 taken place in the period 2015 – 2017, and on an ongoing basis, especially in the development of industry  
49 related material for delivery as lecture content.  
50

51 The author as subject interviews have taken place in the period May to September 2017 and have been  
52 primarily responsible for the development of the visualisations presented within this study to explain  
53 various concepts within the paradigm of ‘Minding the Gap’ between sport management education and the  
54 sport industry.  
55  
56  
57  
58  
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60

1 The semi-structured interviews of sport and leisure centre managers have been conducted in the period  
2 August to September 2017. The interviews asked open questions, with answers based on the managers  
3 own experience of sitting on job interview selection panels and operational management of development  
4 work with employees they hold line management responsibility for. For this reason and the small number  
5 [4] of interviews conducted, anonymity has been guaranteed for the interviewee, and when examples of  
6 behaviour or competencies were discussed the subject of content was not named, allowing for total  
7 anonymity of the interview process. To further protect the anonymity of all concerned, the higher  
8 education-based sports and leisure centres are also anonymised, as well as the individuals concerned. See  
9 below for the interview question structure.  
10  
11

## 12 Sport and leisure centre manager interview structure 13

### 14 *Interview Element 1*

15 Think of a colleague who you consider exhibits excellent understanding of inclusivity, equality and diversity  
16 perhaps in the area of 'specialist or minority users' [i.e. a mother & baby group, supporting people with  
17 autism, users with cultural differences] using the centre. Don't name them. We will label them [A]  
18  
19

20 Considering your colleague [A]:  
21

- 22 • Identify, in no more than a 6-word phrase, the exhibited behaviour competence you see as highly  
23 defining of them in this area: *working with groups with specific understanding*.
- 24 • In a single sentence describe an example that illustrates this behavioural competence.
- 25 • What do you see as the underlying knowledge that supports this behavioural competence i.e.  
26 absence of stereotyping or bias?
- 27 • How have they gained the knowledge and the competences in this area? Is this directly linked to  
28 their degree studies, if so which element of the education or training.  
29  
30  
31

### 32 *Interview Element 2*

33 Think of a colleague who you consider exhibits excellent 'solution finding skills' with either budgeting,  
34 operations, staffing or product promotion [sales & marketing] issues.  
35

36 Don't name them. We will label them [C]  
37

38 Considering your colleague [C]  
39

- 40 • Identify, in no more than a 6-word phrase, the exhibited behaviour competence you see as highly  
41 defining of them in this area: *tactics and strategy*.
- 42 • In a single sentence describe an example that illustrates this behavioural competence.
- 43 • What do you see as the underlying knowledge that supports this behavioural competence?
- 44 • How have they / do you see that they have: gained the knowledge and the competences in this  
45 area? Is this directly linked to their degree studies, if so which element of the education or training.  
46  
47  
48

### 49 *Interview Element 3*

50 Think of a recent short-listed applicant who you consider exhibited a disconnection between theory and  
51 practice.  
52

53 Don't name them. We will label them [D]  
54

55 Considering the candidate [D]:  
56

- 57 • Identify, in no more than a 6-word phrase, explain the basis of the disconnection.
- 58 • In a single sentence describe an example that illustrated this disconnection for you.  
59  
60



- What do you see as the ‘missing’ element of underlying knowledge that caused the disconnection of theory from practice?
- What aspect of a degree programme could assist in ensuring that such a disconnection does not happen in future?

## Findings

This section presents the key findings of the study focused on identifying the ‘distance’ between sport management education and the occupational demand of sport and leisure centre graduate employment, based on the auto-ethnographical findings of the author and the interview responses of the sport centre managers. Meaning has been extracted from the narratives of the interviews.

The importance and relevance of sport management education for the sport fitness industry is deciphered from the statement:

“Managing sport and fitness participation is predicated on the science of human performance and wellness, to sustain participation requires the knowledge and skills of sport specific understanding of marketers, leaders, policy makers, managers and entrepreneurs.” (Auto-ethnographic Interview)

Examples of comments made by sport and leisure centre managers, during the interview wrap-up element indicate recurring themes which arose in the interviews:

“A disconnect exists between theory and its application in the sports centre workplace.” (Manager Interview)

“After I completed my sport management degree and had spent a couple of years working in the industry, I began to feel it was a business management degree with sport examples rather than a sport management degree.” (Manager Interview)

## Interview Topic 1: employee behavioural competencies

### *Inclusivity, equality and diversity*

“The employee who I saw as working to an excellent standard promoting sports hall usage, understood the sport specific barriers to Asian women participating in sport. During their review they explained, as a white male, they gained this understanding by taking an optional module he had studied in his first degree, Sport in Society.” (Centre Manager A). Offering further evidence of relevance and importance of sport management education topics.

### *People or networking skills*

“I am thinking about an employee, who put together a programme for our dry-side staff to gain wider range of coaching qualifications, within their probationary period with us, based on their knowledge, contacts and understanding of local and national sports governance here in the UK” (Centre Manager C)

Both these examples relate to employees whose career progress was accelerated

### *Solution finding skills*

“A member of staff, who was tasked with identifying grant funding appropriate to our sports centre programmes, required specific inputs from colleagues to understand the structure of UK sport, and the relevance of the [specific funding agencies]” (Centre Manager D).

Whereas this example illustrates a limited subject specific knowledge that limited career progress.

## Interview Topic 2: job interview candidate theory & practice

Due to its direct proximity to graduation, this element has a high level of relevance to the subject of Minding the Gap and concept of education fit for purpose. Here are two examples of a disconnect that limited the candidate's ability to be recruited from the interview performance.

### *Disconnect of theory & practice*

"The interview question was about how the candidate would encourage a gym instructor they supervised to cover an additional shift, due to staff illness. The candidate answered saying they would explain Maslow's theory of needs and the additional shift pay would make them more secure."  
(Centre Manager A).

"A candidate when asked to explain how customer relationship marketing, CRM, would be used in the sports centre, they replied that they would need to refer to the textbook, but they thought it would be a good idea to get all customers to like the centre's Facebook" (Centre Manager D).

Although when theoretical understanding is applied the following example demonstrates how it becomes a feature of employability.

### *Insight into practice supported by theory*

"The candidate a Sport Management student, .... , had a grounding in complexity theory and sport management, but not a sport coaching background explained how they would put together a sport skill teaching session. This candidate was offered the position."

## Discussion

This paper demonstrates the value of using the long term auto-ethnographical experience of industry executive leader, and triangulating with qualitative data from a highly targeted sector, using a 'quick snapshot' interview technique to gain insight into skills, knowledge and competency insight perspectives of managers.

### Mind the gap – distance

Lenses: "A useful tool to analyse sport policy is through an entrepreneurship lens because it is linked to the way policy is made and implemented." (Ratten and Ferreira, 2017, p. 641). To facilitate understanding for students in sport management education the concept of sport industry lenses (Figure 1) might be a useful concept. The participation lens of the sports industry, identifies 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the sport management subject-specific curriculum. The other 2/3<sup>rd</sup> being the spectator lens and the elite performer lens. Management roles within the sport industry can be classified as primarily concerned with the management of people (clients, customers or consumers) as spectators, participants or elite performers. To manage these groups, the managers would need to be able to assess their needs from their lens (or perspective). Sport management sectors can be viewed as lens; Sport Spectator Lens [SSL], Sport Participation Lens [SPL] and Elite Performer Lens [EPL].

While it is anticipated a gap exists between the realities of all sectors within the industry and sport management education [SME], we focus here on triangulating the sport participation sector. The distance between managing in the sport and leisure centre sector and sport management is apparent. Theorised by the author's reflections of personal experience, the interviews of current centre managers validated this perspective. And this appears to demonstrate both within employment and for those trying to gain employment within the industry. Examples were provided that, while generic employability skills were present, to be short-listed for advertised posts; significant 'gaps' in subject-specific knowledge were evidence during the interview process that prevented consideration for the post.

Figure 1: Lenses associated with sport management: management of participation, spectator & elite performers

The auto-ethnographical study (Part 1) provided the basis from which the research questions were developed, and the interview tool for part 2 was subsequently designed.

RQ1. When studying a specialist knowledge degree, i.e. sport management, in respect of gaining specific sports industry graduate employment what is the optimum balance between, subject-based education, generic management education and employability competencies.

Part 1 analysis of industry experience, noted that when employing ‘non-sport management students’ these individuals have knowledge that they could use to navigate themselves around the industry. This knowledge is more likely to be available to students who have studied sport governance and the funding of sports participation. It was concluded by the author that non-graduates of sport management initially took longer to conclude projects that required such knowledge and understanding. The extraction of meaning from interview narratives from Part 2 supported these findings.

RQ2. Does the “depth and breadth” of sport management subject based specific knowledge and competencies impact the gaining of graduate employment and/or career progression in a specialist area of the sports industry?

Part 1 analysis of teaching experience, was sequential to the industry experience. If industry specific knowledge is important, considering teaching from a view of developing employability. It follows that employability should inspire teaching. During the interviews with the author, EiT became a regular term, standing for Employability Inspired Teaching, as a rejoinder to the often-used phrase Research Inspired Teaching (RiT). The contention is that delivering subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding is implicitly concerned with Employability Inspired Teaching [EiT]. This study introduces this term for the first time. EiT is taken that the foundation of industry specific employability is based on subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding. The development of further research in developing ideas around Employability Inspired Teaching [EiT] and its focus on integrating employability into the main body of a degree programmes content. This may see improvements in the student experience and their understanding of the relevance of modules and their learning outcomes. The extraction of meaning from interview narratives from Part 2 supported these findings.

## Conclusions

In respect of research question [RQ1]. When studying a specialist knowledge degree, i.e. sport management, in respect of gaining specific sports industry graduate employment what is the optimum balance between, subject-based education, generic management education and employability competencies. The triangulated conclusion is, given the small scale of the study, a shift to a greater emphasis on sport specific knowledge and understanding, in areas including, sport policy & governance, sport politics, sports sociology, sport entrepreneurship and sport historical. A widening of sport contemporary issues is likely to expand sport industry employability and career progression opportunities, in a similar way to an engineering degree provides a wide-ranging grounding in engineering related subjects, where management modules provide a final year capstone function. The likening of sport management education and engineering education was a recurrent theme in both parts of the study.

In respect of research question [RQ2]. Does the ‘depth and breadth’ of the sport management subject based specific knowledge and competencies impact the gaining of graduate employment and/or career progression in a specialist area of the sports industry? Similarly, the tentative conclusions are depth and breadth of specific subject knowledge is more fundamental to employment at graduate level within the

1 sport industry than the more generic employability skills and potentially the generalised management and  
 2 business modules.  
 3

4 The recurrent themes discussed were:  
 5

6 **Theme: alignment of sport management education and sport industry**– sport management education to  
 7 promote sport specific graduate employment opportunities embrace the complexity of the sports industry  
 8 with content that explores sport from the range of lenses.  
 9

10 **Theme: underpinning subject-specific knowledge** – a multidisciplinary approach to the sports eco-system  
 11 capitalising on sport sociology, sport social psychology, sport governance, sport politics and to some degree  
 12 processes of skill acquisition & learning.  
 13

14  
 15 Combining the logical conclusions of these themes – the potential exists for a matrix approach to degree  
 16 programme design could be proposed, requiring further research and development. One axis being the  
 17 sport management lenses and the other being the range of disciplines applied to the context of sport  
 18 studies.  
 19

20 **Theme: a voice from the sport industry in developing sport management education** – reducing the  
 21 potential for a gap between sport management education and graduate employment requirements a  
 22 framework, the interview instrument developed in this study, could provide the basis for an innovative  
 23 approach to business advisory groups objectivity.  
 24

25  
 26 **Theme: postgraduate opportunities for work-based learning** – a demand for work-based learning  
 27 undergraduate and postgraduate levels exists within the sports industry degree programmes. Mason and  
 28 Hopkins (2011) conclusion is supported from our findings  
 29

30 The auto-ethnographical analysis, supported by the qualitative data derived from interviewing of sport and  
 31 leisure centre managers, indicate competencies derived from subject specific knowledge in the field of Sport  
 32 Management Education is a primary determinant in gaining industry specific employment and early career  
 33 progression. It is therefore surmised graduate employment opportunity is therefore impacted within the  
 34 sector managing sport and leisure participation by the extent and depth of subject specific knowledge  
 35 acquired and assimilated. Further research is required to quantify details of subject-specific skills and  
 36 knowledge. It is, however, noted that the interview tool developed for this study, could be developed as a  
 37 useful tool for guiding 'business advisory' inputs to the review and development of sport management  
 38 degree programmes.  
 39  
 40

## 41 **Abbreviations, Vocabulary & Glossary**

42	EASM	European Association of Sport Management
43		
44		
45	EBT	Evidence Based Teaching
46		Petty (2009) teaching that is founded upon research scholarship
47		
48	EiT	Employability Inspired Teaching
49		Subject-specific teaching focused on developing student future employability with industry relevant skills, knowledge and understanding, usually with a pedagogical approach embedded in visible and active learning approaches.
50	EPL	Elite Performer Lens
51		A lens focused on the management of elite and professional athlete within the sports industry
52		
53	EU	European Union
54		is a political and economic union of currently 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe
55	HE	Higher Education
56		
57	SME	Sport Management Education
58		Vocationally based specialist teaching and learning programmes concerned with management in the sport industry
59		
60	SPL	Sport Participation Lens

1		A lens focused on the management and development of participation within the sports industry
2	SSL	Sport Spectator Lens
3		A lens focused on the management of spectators within the sports industry
4	RiT	Research Inspired Teaching
5		Healey (2005) approach to the teaching of research associated processes
6	RIT	Research Informed Teaching
7		Teaching, that is based on research evidence, promoting active and visible learning
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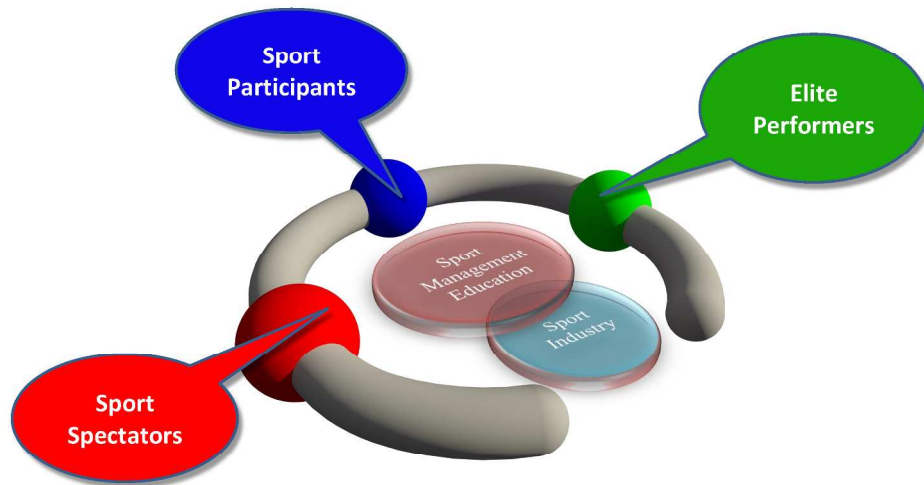
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Education + Training





## The Lenses of the Eco-system: managing the sports sector

Mind the Gap – employability informed teaching [EIT]

The lenses associated with sport management: management of participation, spectator & elite performers

Education + Training