Master's degree thesis

IDR950 Sport Management

Slowing the merry-go-round of managerial dismissal: A Sporting Director Perspective

Joshua Fellerman

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Preface

This thesis is equivalent to 30 ECTS for the completion of a Master of Science in Sport Management at the Molde University College. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisor Hallgeir Gammelsaeter. Additionally, this project was only feasible thanks to the work of Per Mathias Høgmo and Christian Borgersrud. A final thanks is also warranted for Professor Dan Parnell of the Association of Sporting Directors.

Without the participants there is no research project. I would like to thank all the participants who gave their time, knowledge, and honesty in the research for this study.

Summary

Introduction and context: The purpose of this study was an exploration of Sporting Director solutions for the increasing pace of managerial turnover within professional football.

Literature review: Previous research regarding the relationships and governance structures between management in a professional football club's hierarchy, from owner and sporting director to manager and stakeholder was presented to better understand the processes of managerial termination and how a sporting director can positively impact their club.

Theoretical framework: This study examined the birth of the sporting director position and their decision-making processes from the lens of institutional theory and institutional logics theory.

Method: This study used a qualitative research approach and an exploratory research design given the newness of the sporting director position, and the complexity of the issue discussed. Interviews with eight sporting directors from top-flight Scandinavian clubs were conducted using a semi-structured interview approach.

Findings, Analysis, and Conclusion: The findings of the study are related to legitimacy (Meyer and Rowen, 1977), isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and institutional logics theory (Friedland and Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). The proliferation of the position is the result of growing professionalization and commercialization of the sport. Factors prompting managerial termination are not statistically likely to bring forth footballing success, but the merry-go-round is only increasing in speed in professional football. The findings of this study discuss the options for sporting directors to overcome industry pressures to enact changes that mitigate this cycle and subsequently better the on-pitch performance of their club.

Contribution of the thesis: This study has provided greater understanding of the mechanisms that enable sporting directors to mitigate managerial turnover in professional football clubs.

Key words: Sporting Director, professional football clubs, governance structures, managerial turnover, institutional logics, isomorphism

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Abstract: Football has evolved from a community-based activity into a global ecosystem with implications outreaching those of mere sport. The professionalization of the modern game over the decades has led to dynamic restructuring. Wherein once footballing issues primarily resided within managerial control, growing complexity and stakeholder involvement has led to greater instability and the emergence of the Sporting Director. This often-ambiguous position, evidenced by the wide variety of alias' (technical director, head of sporting) is a growing field in European football that has either been fully adopted (Bundesliga) or adopted with reticence (Premier League). While responsibilities vary among club and country, Institutional and Institutional Logics Theory help provide a theoretical understanding of the position's emergence and role in European football. This study explores the position's framework and its involvement in the now common cycle of managerial 'sacking.' Sporting Director operations are examined within top-flight Scandinavian football in the hope of reducing managerial dismissal and ensuring a football club's long- term sporting and financial success.

1.0 Introduction:

Modern football is a multi-billion-dollar industry with stakeholders (e.g., investors, global media, sponsorships) far outreaching autotelic activity (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008). The sport's popularity spread due to technological innovation, gambling, leisure periods, and nationalistic sentiments pervasive in the 19th and 20th century (Collins, 2013). Regulatory bodies soon followed at both a domestic and international level. This growing professionalization and commercialization elevated football's reach and profitability, while further accentuating the sport's complexity. Two significant events in the 1980's and 90's altered the sport, both of which are discussed in Chapter Two. One consequence of football's transformation was the introduction of the Sporting Director. The position's relevance results from football's endemic stability problem as long- term goals collide with profit and on-pitch success (Parnell et al., 2018). The entry of commercial stakeholders "caused an increased market orientation, leading to a shift in the inter-institutional system, with the result that to an increasing extent clubs have to think of themselves as producers of an attractive product" (Nissen & Wagner, 2020, 9).

Many of football's biggest professional football clubs (pfcs) operate with a Sporting Director model (Barcelona, Liverpool, Bayern Munich, etc.). While the governance structures diverge depending on club and boardroom structures, the role itself is deemed essential, representing a given club's culture and long-term stability (Parnell et al, 2018). From a broad perspective, the Sporting Director is responsible for operational and business aspects of the club (Bridgewater 2010). However, the emergence of the position has risen in tandem with high levels of managerial turnover in elite football (Ibid), often complicating the position in the eyes of stakeholders. Despite widespread responsibilities, the position's portrayal has become erroneously linked to this 'hire and fire' environment. For consistency, this study uses the term Sporting Director (SD), albeit recognizing that titles and responsibilities are contextual (Parnell et al 2018).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

"This structural change is not only operating at the elite level; there is a growing ideology amongst senior management and owners of clubs to adopt a model of the Sporting Director"
(Parnell et al, 2019, 10)

Football intersperses itself in various social spheres (e.g., mass media, politics, corporate business), and as such many stakeholders figure in the development and management of football clubs (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008). The introduction of the SD position represents a significant change to football organizations; however, this emerging role has only been sparsely explored by academia (Parnell et al., 2019; Morrow and Howieson 2014). This study originates from the notion that cyclical managerial dismissal is ill-conceived. The departure point is not an absolute condemnation of manager dismissal (and in cases very much needed) but from largescale academic examination the practice is ineffective and detrimental for on-pitch performance (See Chapter 2.2). Aided by institutional theories, existing literature, and semi-structured interviews, this study supposes to navigate one of the sport's major issues. The following question is put forth:

- *Can a sporting director mitigate the cycle of managerial turnover to best achieve long-term sporting and financial success?*

Additional questions explored include: How do club/ownership structures affect SD agency? How can a sporting director maximize their influence? What characteristics facilitate greater impact? This research aims to further understand the position's agency regarding managerial turnover and specifically, how institutional theories provide a theoretical framework.

1.2 Overview of the study

This study follows the cardinal research paper structure, comprising eight chapters of comprehensive, relevant topics. Chapter 1 is introductory, providing a brief background of the research and the Research Question (RQ) under discussion. Chapter 2 provides a backdrop to better conceptualize the topic. This chapter begins with a brief synopsis, along with European football's key events and structures and narrows to Scandinavian culture and footballing professionalization. Chapter 3 tackles previous research relevant to the study. Chapter 4 illustrates the theoretical frameworks using Neo-Institutional Theory and Institutional Logics theory, enabling greater understanding of the explored topic. Chapter 5 provides a methodological overview applied in this study, including the chronological order of the research procedure and intent behind the given design. Chapter 6 presents the empirical data in a detailed and structured manner. Chapter 7 analyzes the data, linking such findings to relevant theory and existing literature. Findings falling outside the theory are discussed as well. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes with a discussion, recommendations, limitations, and future research.

2.0   Context:

This chapter aims to conceptualize the SD within modern football. Football is the most popular sport worldwide, and governed globally by Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and its 200+ member nations (Jewell, 2009). European Football is governed by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), while each country has its own Football Association (FA) that comprises the greater regulatory body. Thereby, European football varies in regulation (Gammelsæter and Senaux, 2011) and various factors (e.g., media coverage, club revenue, salaries, etc.) influence decision-making concerning managerial tenure (Nissen, 2014).

2.1 European Football History

Professional football today is an amalgamation of sporting logics and market principles emphasizing winning and profit (Parganas et al., 2017). Football's economic burgeoning is the result of professionalization and commercialization, buoyed by the advent of cable and satellite television (Collins, 2013). "[C]lubs realised their economic potential and demanded a part of the revenues generated by the liberalisation and deregulation of the broadcasting sector" (Paramio-Salcines and Llopis-Goig, 2018, 34). Football's inception; however, began in 19th century England under amateur principles. By the 1880's cracks of professionalism emerged and the English FA legalized professionalism in 1885, and league competition followed three years later (Collins, 2013). FIFA abandoned any façade of amateurism with the 1930 World Cup because the Olympics "excluded nations that had adopted professionalism" (Ibid, 84). But the adoption of professionalism was not systematic, and nations transitioned at various junctures (Gammelsæter, Storm, and Söderman, 2011).

Despite the transition from amateurism to professionalism, pfc structure remained relatively stable until Tottenham Hotspur's 1983 violation of FA Rule 34 and the 1995 Bosman Ruling. The former allowed football clubs to move onto the stock market as public limited companies (plcs)-not to be confused with pfcs. The English FA had previously forbidden owners from making sole use of their club as a profit- making enterprise [five percent maximum of shares held] and prohibited salaries to directors (Usher, 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the disregard of Rule 34 came during Thatcherism and laisse-faire principles professing the free market. Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen (2008, p. 21-22) reflect that as a

result "the plc is seen as the form through which commercial stakeholders can most effectively influence the management of their investments…There is little doubt that capital has been exchanged for influence, and that this has extended to sporting decisions. Investors have increased their power in the boardrooms of the clubs, or more precisely, decisions have been moved to the boardrooms of the plcs."

The Bosman ruling represents a secondary landmark decision, wherein the European Union (EU) high court affirmed footballers as laborers with free rights of movement (Gammelsaeter and Senaux, 2011). Before the decision, a football club still 'owned' an out-of-contract footballer, typically requiring a transfer fee before permitting the transfer. The case facilitated widespread international player movement and consequently, smaller nations' (e.g., Holland, Norway) were unable to keep their talent who could freely transfer at the end of their contracts (Lonsdale 2004).

2.1.1 European footballing structure

European football operates in an open league of relegation and promotion. While the game itself changed little, its governance (e.g., governing bodies, tournaments, policies) shifted dramatically (Gammelsaeter and Senaux, 2011). The 1992 arrival of English football's breakaway Premier League and the European Champions League (Peeters and Szymanski, 2014) "run in parallel to the increasing and irreversible commodification and commercialization of the whole of European football and of the top five European leagues in particular" (Paramio-Salcines and Llopis-Goig, 2018, p. 35). Finishing in top positions and subsequent qualification for European competition becomes paramount to unlocking financial windfalls. "[C]ross-subsidization within and between national leagues maintains and enhances the major teams' dominance and competitiveness in the European Champions League" (Herskedal, 2017, 14).

Consequently, problems regarding competitive balance ensued (Chadwick 2013), and small market teams had trouble competing financially. Thus, the present football environment has "two main and concurrent yet often conflicting goals… profits and financial strength can be considered as derived objectives and necessary conditions for sporting success. On the other hand, sporting success can be viewed as a prerogative for profit maximization" (Parganas et al., 2017, 197). Literature reaffirms that the drive for on-pitch success has led to

overinvestment, spending sprees, and fiscal complications in many clubs (Morrow, 2014a). UEFA substantiated this claim as 63 % of European football clubs reported losses in 2011 alone (UEFA, 2013).

The post-Bosman landscape has concentrated European footballing success from both an economic and performance standpoint in the so-called Big 5 leagues (England, Spain, Italy, France, Germany). These are also known as professional football's 'core economies,' which have the highest television ratings, global fan bases and revenues (Elliott and Gusterud, 2018). The prevalence of the SD in these countries, and particularly among their most successful clubs (e.g., Spain, Barcelona, Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid); Italy (Juventus); France (PSG); Germany (Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund); England (Manchester City and Liverpool), gives insight into the adoption of this position. Institutional theories (see Chapter 4) conceptualize the role and practices as seeking the success of the above clubs at best and, at worst, appease external stakeholders while legitimizing internal practices and operations.

2.1.2 Club Hierarchy

The title of 'manager' is primarily used in the UK while 'head coach' is the preferred term in continental Europe (Herskedal, 2017). Manager is used in this study for ease, but with an understanding of these contextual differences. Despite the transformation of clubs into plc's, growing revenues, and the inception of the EPL and Champions League, the manager's role remained inoculated to external changes (Kelly 2008a). They enjoyed high levels of autonomy and power regarding their role and footballing matters, including staff appointment (Ibid). Part of this resulted from an insular segment of the industry that deemed played experience as sufficient evidence to manage. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the manager position resisted professionalization processes that characterized other areas within football (Ibid).

The sporting director represents one such area of professionalization in European football. Its inception highlights the now common 'Dutch' structure throughout the continent (Murphy, 2002) in which a manager is responsible for first team affairs rather than for complete footballing oversight. This approach intends to bring stability regardless of the manager in charge (Ibid). Still, frequent miscommunication hampers organizational effectiveness (Relvas et al., 2010). One explanation lies in the size of pfcs today. For

example, Liverpool's 1981 squad (English and European champions) consisted of 19 first team players and three staff (Herskedal, 2017). In 2021, the number of first team players and staff is 26 and 27, respectively (LFC, 2021). "This increase in staff and the diversification of responsibilities is a significant departure from the strategies of the past that used to rely on a single individual to provide support in all of these areas" (Drust et al, 2018 151).

Pfcs are complex businesses (Morrow and Howieson, 2014) embedded among numerous stakeholders (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008) that claim to know the formula for footballing success (Nissen, 2014). Club management therefore becomes a difficult practice (Gammelsaeter, 2010). As footballing results often take priority over financial performance (Dimitropoulos 2011), clubs are managed under the pretense of on-pitch success (Kuper and Szymanski, 2011). This helps explain the nature of managerial dismissal, whose job security lies in immediate success and frequently ends due to sporting failures (Barros, Frick, & Passos, 2009).

2.2 Footballing Paradox & Managerial Dismissals

An inherent problem underlies professional football and cyclical managerial employment- only one team can win each league each year. Therefore, despite improvements or proper decision-making, the majority will fail from a win maximization perspective (Gammelsaeter, 2013). A maximum number of points are allotted annually per league season, regardless of playing or managerial quality (Ibid). "The point here is that the points system in sport does not reveal improvement or deterioration in leadership… leaders in sport are more constrained than in other industries in terms of translating their leadership abilities into valid performance measures" (Ibid, p. 293). Despite this logic, dismissals are now routine events throughout football (Bridgewater, 2010; Kelly, 2017, Nissen, 2015; 2016). UEFA's 2013 report found the average span of 18 months for a manager in a top European league. Increasing managerial turnover further accentuates instability (Gammelsaeter 2013), yet dismissal figures in European football continue to increase (Bridgewater, 2010; Gammelsaeter, 2013). Coaching dismissal "has become widely accepted as 'the right solution' in times of sporting failure when a team fails to fulfill expectations" (Nissen, 2016, 137). Dismissal is frequent in number and the practice so verbally normalized by club directors and the media that the coaches themselves are cognizant of the process (Nissen and Wagner, 2020).

Existing quantitative research highlights the effects of a dismissal on club performance. In English football 'sacking' does not improve sporting performance (Audas, Dobson, & Goddard, 1997,1999; Bridgewater, 2006, 2010) and sometimes worsens results (Audas, Dobson, & Goddard, 2002). An additional English study (Hughes et al., 2009) found that a team receives a short-term bump post-termination yet achieves no sustained performance throughout the season. De Paola and Scoppa (2011) find no improvement in performance in Italy following a termination; the same for Germany (Heuer et al, 2011) and Holland (Koning, 2003). There was slight uptick in points for Spanish home games, but the study only covered two seasons (de Dios Tena & Forrest, 2007). Such collective dismissal research validates this study's RQ.

2.3 Sporting Director Evolution

Given the intense scrutiny that results from first team underperformance (Bridgewater 2006), researchers have advocated greater expertise in football director positions (Kelly and Harris, 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly, sporting directors met hostile managers (especially in the UK), who perceived infringement on their power. Today, the general acceptance of the position is partially attributable to the arrival of foreign owners (Parnell et al, 2018) whose ownership is not one of 'traditional' local fandom. Growing acceptance is evident with new sporting director accreditation programs (Ibid), whether for footballing curriculum (Manchester Metropolitan University), industry standardization (The FA Level 5 Technical Directors course), or members associations (The Association of Sporting Directors).

Although increasing levels of managerial 'sacking' transpired with the emergence of the sporting director in club hierarchy, few in the position have authority to fire a manager (Nissen, 2014). Merely equating the rise of the SD as club caregiver during managerial dismissal is myopic. Structural conditions of European football (e.g., open league with relegation/promotion) "encourage short-term orientation rather than long-term strategic planning" (Nissen & Wagner, 2020, 9). Football requires long-term strategies regarding youth development, talent identification, transfer policies, etc. (Morrow 2014), and the SD oversees this football business (Nissen, 2014) while implementing long-term strategies promoting far-sighted organizational goals.

The position retains numerous titles depending on club and country, thereby "subtleties in the use of the title, the role, and the communication of the role can create misunderstanding with external stakeholders such as fans and the media (or even other clubs seeking to undertake a transfer)" (Parnell et al., 2018, 161). Indistinct job titles can subsequently cause role confusion and organizational inefficiency (Drust et al., 2018.) Previous research highlighted this problem:

- *"It's ok to have the sporting director title, but when everyone thinks you have the full role and you don't, it can cause trouble. If the press and fans, or even just the lads in the academy think you have an influence on recruitment [i.e., transfer in and out of players], when you don't, then basically your head's on the line…"* (Parnell et al, 2018, 160)

2.4 Scandinavian Culture

Although this study supposes a resolution throughout football, participants represent clubs in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Therefore, a summary of these countries is provided. Scandinavia comprises the northwest, European region of Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. With an approximate population of 20 million, the languages resemble three dialects and are relatively interchangeable (Gammelsæter, Storm& Söderman, 2011). Scandinavian sport evolved out of non-profit voluntary clubs which operated at elite, youth and grassroot levels (Ibid). Their collective sporting culture traditionally reflects egalitarian political leanings, often professed within sport as 'sport for all.' The distinctiveness of this culture has been documented in sporting literature (Anderson & Carlsson 2009) as a mix among amateurism, volunteerism, and commercialism. As a result, pfcs often struggle with 'sport for all' principles, win maximization, and commercialization (Skille, 2011). Despite conflicts between elite (professional) and amateur (voluntary) football, the consensus is that talent development and professional success are inter-related (Gammelsæter, Storm& Söderman, 2011).

2.4.1 Professionalization

Scandinavian countries transitioned from amateur to professional football separately; Sweden in 1967, Denmark in 1978, and Norway in 1991 (Ibid). Sporting professionalization is "the process by which sports organizations, systems, and occupations of sport, transforms

from a volunteer driven to an increasingly business-like phenomenon" (Dowling, Edwards, and Washington 2014, 527). Factors leading to professionalization include "control of work, the formation of professional associations and[…]state level developments" (Nissen & Wagner 2020, 5).

2.5 Scandinavian Football Structure

These respective countries' league structure and ownership models are relevant given that the participants work in these three countries.

2.5.1 Norwegian Football

Norwegian pfc's abide by laws prohibiting sole private ownership (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008). As a result, clubs operate with a co-operating plc that handles financial aspects while the club deals with sporting responsibilities (Ibid). Most top-flight pfcs adopted the dual model structure of governance, wherein the legal separation provides member owned clubs and investor(s), facilitating a sporting and financial dual board structure (Ibid). One effect of plc involvement is that often clubs have limited control of their players due to the blurred power brokerages. Legally, "investors have no right to influence the selling of players; however, when the club decides to sell a player the surplus of the transaction can be shared between the club and the investors according to their settlement" (Gammelsæter, Storm, & Söderman, 2011, 87). For legal reasons, the association employs the footballers. In case of plc insolvency, clubs thereby retain their biggest assets (Ibid).

2.5.2 Danish Football

Danish professionalization followed the most market-oriented route of the three. "Commercial actors were attracted to materialise professional football by means of widespread transformation of the clubs' elite departments into shareholder companies." (Gammelsæter, Storm, & Söderman, 2011, 79) This commercialized model entails few restrictions for external shareholders and floating. Formal contractual relations to a pfc are valid if the pfc operates a youth department. The Danish federation has little leverage over the company, albeit from license withdrawal (Ibid).

2.5.3 Swedish Football

Swedish football adopted a model closely associated to the Norwegian model of cooperating shareholder companies, which were permitted in 1999 if the club retained majority vote in the company (Ibid).

Figure I: Dual Model Structure of Norwegian Football (Adapted from Jacobsen et al., 2021)
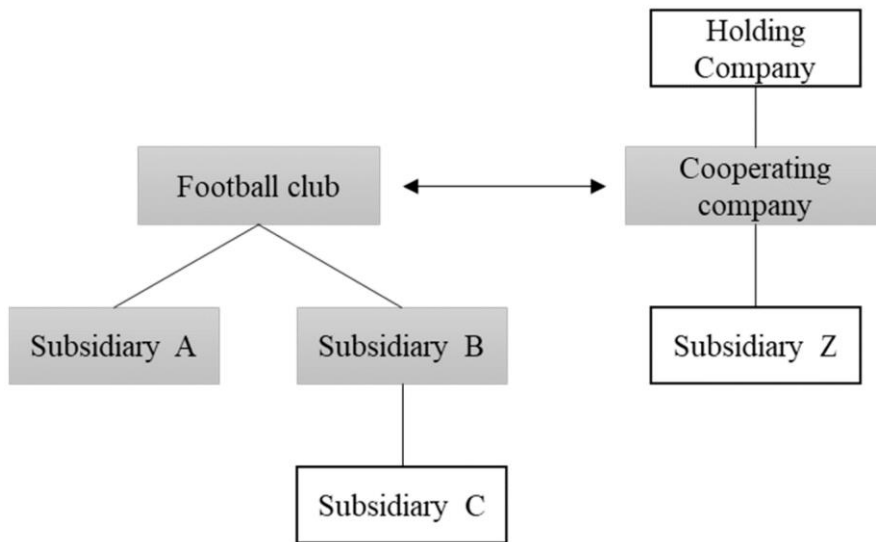
3.0   Literature Review:

The purpose of the literature review is to provide a critical examination of previous research and draws upon said findings to contextualize the data gathered in this study. Existing work is divided into two streams. The first is an exploration of the position regarding responsibilities, organizational hierarchy, and networking (Parnell et al, 2018; 2019). The latter concerns the relationships between a pfc's manager, sporting director, and ownership (Nissen 2015; Harris and Kelly, 2010), including breakdowns in trust that facilitate managerial dismissal (Nissen, 2014; 2016).

3.1 The Sporting Director Background

"[T]he sporting director is yet to receive a clear consensus on the purpose and scope of the role, even the title itself has been used interchangeably with technical director, director of football, and head of football operations, all used to describe a broadly similar remit at different football clubs" (Parnell et al., 2018, 157).

The relatively fledgling position has resulted in role ambiguity, but the position arises from a growing instability within football (Bridgewater, 2010). Evidence includes a substantial turnover of managers and associate staff coupled with frequent policy and cultural changes (Ibid). Instability brings challenges for owners who wish to protect their investment (Parnell et al., 2019). In tandem, the sport's increasing attention on commodities (athletes) placed higher demands on a club's management (Kaiser, 2004). This in turn propelled focus toward talent identification and transfer policy (Lürssen, 2017), with the SD as head of the footballing business (Nissen, 2014). As the position is responsible for short, medium, and long-term planning, a legitimate examination is paramount as the SD often operates in a custodial nature while a club is undergoing turmoil and change (Parnell et al, 2018). The complexity of the SD framework begins with the manager who remains pertinent for on field success (De Paola and Scoppa, 2011). Although managerial oversight is often included in sporting director responsibilities, the position includes a myriad of others including the first team, academy, recruitment, transfer policy, sport science, media and medical departments (Parnell et al, 2018).

3.2 Structure of the Position

Many businesses operate with a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) responsible for strategic decisions (Maitlis, 2004). The CEO oversees the board and directs an organization to fulfill goals and satisfy stakeholders (Petrovic, 2008) "In very politicised organisations, i.e., where the 'presidential' side dominates, the risk of under-weighing and eschewing the focus on analysis, planning and long-term perspectives is increased" (Draebye, 2018, 184). Consequently, the SD acts as "intermediate between the strategic apex of a football club (i.e., the Board) and sporting departments" (Parnell et al., 2019,6). While a CEO and a SD share similar characteristics, the latter position has "football specific expertise; knowledge and experience of the intricacies of the business of professional football […] from both a technical and tactical perspective…" (Ibid, 3).

Strategy is implemented at the hierarchical apex of pfcs (Parnell et al, 2018). While the SD holds senior level responsibilities and often sits above the manager in club hierarchy, most fail to hold a board position. Among twenty-six elite European clubs, the SD functions as conduit between executive board, youth, and professional teams (Relvas et al., 2010). This power aligns the position to that of middle management (Mintzberg, 1979), a claim also made for the pfc manager (Nissen and Wagner, 2020). Middle managers are both controllers and the controlled, resisters and the resisted, thus encapsulating a 'dialectical' as both object and subject (Harding et al, 2014). "Job stability would be crucial for successful performance of a sporting director; however, if they are not in the strategic decision-making positions they may hit barriers balancing the "day-to-day" against the long-term strategy of the organization" (Parnell et al, 2019,167). Sporting directors may face increased skepticism surrounding recruitment and firing oversight as a result (Parnell et al., 2018). The position also becomes susceptible to external pressure (media, fans, etc.), which plays significantly in the decisions of senior pfc leaders (Nissen, 2015). As multiple stakeholders often co-own a club (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008), many see themselves deserving of a vote on managerial appointments (Nissen, 2016).

3.3 Sporting Director Responsibilities

Sporting director's incorporate human resource management (Parnell et al, 2019) due to their responsibilities for the first team manager, recruitment heads, performance leaders, and

department personnel (Ibid). Such complexity relies upon a networking system of intermediaries and confidants that make such a task viable (Ibid). Responsibilities include appropriate staffing within given organizational positions and being proactive in recruiting, selecting, and developing such individuals (Torrington et al., 2008). With on-field success the result of team composition, identifying and recruitment are two facets that enable a competitive advantage and minimize expenditures on the wrong players (Kelly, 2017). Football's hyper-commodification increased focus on recruitment rather than player development (Relvas et al, 2010) and SDs are "renowned for their recruitment practice taking players in and out of the club" (Parnell et al, 2019, 6). However, given the scope of SD responsibilities, success is not "isolated to recruitment or talent identification" (Parnell et al, 2019, 10). Pfc power structures dictate that sporting directors build positive relationships throughout club hierarchy from top to bottom (Ibid).

3.3.1 Networking

The position has been examined from an economic sociological approach, (Parnell et al, 2019) contending that networks and social structures offset rational choice. "[M]any SDs do not understand the networked nature of this role and how embeddedness in social relations impacts their economic behavior and ability to make rational decisions" (Ibid, 7). Embeddedness theory includes principles of closure and trust, weak ties, and structural holes. Closure and trust represent strong bonds among individuals of like backgrounds and characteristics (Coleman, 1973) while weak ties is a counter argument (Granovetter, 1973) in which strategic advantage is found outside this like clustering (homophily). "It is not necessarily the 'strong ties' within professional networks (i.e., the closest, must trusted connection) but the 'weak ties' (i.e., more removed connections) that lead to success in job searches and recruitment" (Parnell et al., 2019, 9).

Outside the top five European leagues, clubs "seek alternative ways to identify and recruit foreign talent […] clubs situated in peripheral economies rely on the flows of information" (Elliott and Gusterud, 2018,70). Scouts and related staff represent financial costs, and often clubs look at players based upon word of mouth (Ibid). This cycle often causes confusion due to intermediary bias [agents, coaches] and introduces the concept of structural holes (Burt, 1992). These holes exist in multiple network environments, as one party remains unaware of the other's knowledge or lack thereof. Structural holes within football are

prevalent, and a SD filling such gaps finds competitive advantage (Ibid). From this economic sociology and networking perspective, sporting directors "live and work within a network of networks" (Parnell et al, 2019, 10) and benefit by exploiting such knowledge and leveraging their power.

3.3.2 Leadership

Given the networked role of sporting directors, the vast array of pfc constituents impact daily work. "[A]ctions are the social interactions that occur between the Sporting Director, the board, the manager, the playing staff, the coaching staff and the support staff, agents, the fans, the media, and other external organisations etc." (Ibid, 11). Moreover, SDs require cognizance of their diverse audience for effective communication. Fletcher and Arnold's empirical research (2011) identifies vision, operations, people, and culture as important considerations for someone in the role. Leadership rises to the forefront, and a myriad of characteristics benefit a sporting director, including: football gravitas, mediation abilities, and low ego. (Parnell et al., 2018). "Leadership is defined as a process of individual influence on a group of individuals aimed at the achievement of individual and or common goals of the group or the organization" (Benscotter and Rothwell, 2012).

The sporting director has been likened to that of an orchestrator (Parnell et al., 2019). A pfc orchestrator binds a club's internal and external football network of players, staff, and stakeholders (Wallace, 2004), facilitating long-term leadership in which culture, stability and control ensure strategic aims (Parnell et al, 2019). Leadership skills facilitate "adaptive and constructive change (a strategy to compete and win) (longer-term objectives), as well as day-to-day management to provide order, consistency, and stability…" (Drust et al, 2018, 152). Furthermore, pfc complexity requires high levels of emotional intelligence, wherein an individual controls their behavior to maintain and build effective relationships (Goleman, 1998). Four capabilities encompass emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skill (Goleman, 2000). This study uses leadership as a lens for the empirical data, albeit assuming that such qualities are culturally contextual (Hofstede, 1998b).

3.4 Relation to the Manager

The relationship between the manager and the SD is crucial for a football club (Nissen, 2014), but much of the public dialogue surrounds managerial dismissal (Nissen and Wagner 2020). Although coverage frequently paints their relationship from the employer/employee perspective, the SD is an ally and club success is mutually dependent (Nissen 2014). Clear communication and defined roles become prerequisites for high pfc performance (Parnell et al., 2019), with both positions emphasizing communication as vital (Nissen, 2016). Interdependence arises as the sporting director is involved in the squad's composition (i.e., buying and selling players) and often has input in the hiring/firing of the manager. But the manager oversees game tactics, line-ups, first team responsibilities, and remains on the sideline during the game (Ibid). Winning is usually determined by playing squad (Nissen, 2016) but for financial reasons, a SD may sell players that the coach deems necessary for results and job survival (Ibid). Therefore, both parties hold the key to the other's success. Their relationship mirrors that of trustor and trustee because the former's role deals with issues often unrelated to football (Nissen, 2014).

3.4.1 Trust

Trust is "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al., 1995, 712). Three characteristics underlie trustworthiness: ability, benevolence, and integrity (Ibid). Benevolence 'is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive' (Ibid,718). Integrity 'involves the trustor's perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable' (Ibid,719). The higher the trust, the greater the chance of a prolonged managerial tenure, a viewpoint addressed by Norwich FC's SD Stuart Webber:

> *"Daniel (Farke) has been brave enough to play homegrown players and make them better and as a club we have given him support in doing that because it's one of our criteria for success. Our criteria wasn't just win, win, win. If that was the case, Daniel wouldn't still be here after last season (when Norwich finished 14th)"* (Southwell, 2019)

Without trust, the manager favors immediate success through experienced and loaned players (Nissen, 2014). Trust bridges the tug-of-war between immediate success and future development, a war that often ends with a dismissal when a team finds itself under the shadow of relegation. 'Going down,' often results in organizational downsizing as revenues and payouts from lower leagues are fractional compared to those at the top-flight level (Ibid). The 'trust trichotomy' of ability, benevolence, and integrity conceptualizes the increasing rate of managerial turnover in European football" (Nissen, 2016).

3.4.2 Relation to Owner

"As a Sporting Director, you need owners who allow you to do your work." -Stuart Webber, Norwich Sporting Director (Southwell, 2019)

Webber's sentiment touches on the vulnerability of the sporting director position. The CEO or chairman is the strategic apex (Parnell et al, 2018) but often lacks footballing expertise. However, their prerogatives are the deciding factor for club direction (i.e., academy, transfers, first team, European competition, etc.), which helps explain present day acceptance of the Sporting Director in England. One Premier League Vice Chairmen of Football stated: "Ownership is transferring from local millionaire fans to billionaire businessmen who do not want one man with little or no business experience handling millions of pounds in funds" (Ibid, p. 165). Ownership interference is likelier to occur during poor sporting results as stakeholder input intensifies (Nissen, 2016). Pressures "give rise to intra-organisational distrust and internal disputes because different members of the club…are likely to disagree on the best way out of the crisis" (Nissen, 2014, 223). Therefore, obstacles become easier to overcome if the SD sits on the board (Parnell et al., 2018). One English sporting director stated:

> *"[K]ey decisions related to strategy are decided in the board room. If you don't sit round a table with the CEO and Director for Finance, how can you possibly ensure your strategy is presented correctly, to influence decisions [...]You can't really lead properly as a SD without being on the board" (Ibid, 162).*

The trustor/trustee relationship thereby should be expanded from manager and sporting director (Nissen, 2016) to sporting director and club apex using qualities of ability, benevolence, and integrity. These three measure a "group of skills, competencies, and

characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain" (Mayer et al.,1995,717).

3.5 Environmental Pressures

"[T]he formation of public opinion on professional football is massive, and club directors should put an effort into communicating about the future directions of their clubs and accommodate public criticism rather than trying to oppose or ignore their stakeholders" (Nissen, 2015, 101).

Professionalization within the zero-sum nature of football as sport is unlike the market [share price] in which multiple organizations can be successful (Nissen and Wagner, 2020). Although pfc expectations can be mitigated, this does not undo the irony of managerial turnover as the statistical likelihood points to sporting failure. While sacking fails to improve on-pitch results, termination functions to preserve legitimacy and stability for club hieracrchy (Ibid). "[I]f one understands a coach dismissal as a means of improving the results, the action appears rather irrational. Alternatively, one could understand a coach dismissal as an action that provides the club with some sort of narrative it can use to describe itself in order to appear effective and legitimate. The symbolic character lies in the fact that the clubs value adapting to valid myths of rationality higher than efficiency in itself" (Nissen, 2015, 98). Poor results prompt breakdowns between club and external stakeholders and solutions become increasingly opaque. Club management eases pressures by "being able to provide stakeholders with trustworthy answers on what the next step is, and to act accordingly" (Nissen, 2016,143). Nissen (2014) broached this concept with sporting directors in Danish football:

- *"When we have decided to dismiss a coach, these are the only situations in which I cannot say for sure who made the decision […] If we pretend that the betting companies did not address it, that the newspapers did not address it, that the sponsors kept their mouths shut, and the board did not ask questions… Then I am not sure that I would have dismissed any coaches"* (p. 223)

Further complicating matters, dissatsified players voice frustrations publicly, putting the spotlight directly on the manager (Nissen, 2016). A 'loss of the dressing room' almost always concludes with a manager's dismissal. Poor performances cause internal conflict among

players, and normally amounts to grounds for dismissal (Ibid). Although this appears as a chicken or the egg dilemma, the response is feasible (in comparison to firing an entire team). "First, it can be a tool to satisfy stakeholders like fans, sponsors, and the media, thereby enabling a club to rebuild its damaged reputation and secure future financial support. Second, besides pleasing stakeholders that offer financial support, dismissing a coach can further give the reinforcing director credit among peers, i.e., acceptance from other club directors and field members" (Nissen, 2015, 98). If clubs fail to win "…it is difficult for a director to refrain from what everyone associated with the club anticipates will be the director's next move: to dismiss the coach" (Ibid).

3.6 Sensemaking and Dismissal

Dismissal appears as a response to systemic pressures. As this study aims to mitigate dismissal pressures, sensemaking serves as a micro-perspective tool. Uncertainty and ambiguity trigger sensemaking; "Explicit efforts… tend to occur when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world" (Weick et al., 2005,409). Analyzing the processes necessitates understanding organizational decision-making at an individual level regarding dilemmas that defy the making of sense (Ibid). Sensemaking is closely related to institutional perspectives of conformity and rationality that reinforce the same behaviors (Greenwood et al, 2008). Sensemaking begins with connections between cues and frames. Cues [events] challenge a frame in which an organization sees itself (Weick, 1995). Seven properties of sensemaking are listed:

1. Extracted Cues- "simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Ibid, 50) Context affects the formation of the extracted cue and its interpretation.
2. Enactive of Sensible Environments- People produce aspects of their environments. Sensemaking is linked to actions; actions create changes that organizations and individuals relate to, creating opportunities and constraints (Choo, 2005).
3. Sensemaking is social, conduct [even if alone] is contingent upon conduct of others (Ibid)
4. Grounded in Identity-Sensemaking serves as positive self-reflection, often triggered by inability to do so (Weick, 1995). Environment as mirror for looking into oneself.
5. Retrospective- Assigning meaning to process or action is already post-action (Ibid).
6. Ongoing- Sensemaking never ceases, never starts nor stops (Ibid).

7. Plausibility- Individuals behave pragmatically, rather than accurately, when constructing events (Ibid).

These seven features help conceptualize SD behavior. First, sensemaking reinforces 'sackings' despite running contrarian to the likelihood of sporting improvement. Conforming to expected signals leaves the club with its same customer base (e.g., fans, sponsors). "[A] dismissal gives a director the opportunity to signal a willingness to act and, by doing so, to silence stakeholders who might have criticised him and the club during the season" (Nissen, 2014, 226). Below is another sporting director excerpt from Nissen (2014):

> "*If we had not replaced the coach and had continued to perform below what is expected of us and ended up being relegated, then some of the sponsors would have asked: 'Why the hell did you not do something?' Now we have done something, there is acceptance of what we have done, there is support... If we end up being relegated after all, I think we will be met with this reaction: 'Well, it was tough luck: you did what you could; you changed, and you tried to save it'*" (Ibid, p.226)

Dismissal neutralises stakeholder criticism, and this particular SD acts "upon a feared future state" (Ibid). The SD acted in accordance of expectation and attempted some effort at maneuver. If worst comes to pass and the club is relegated, the sporting director demonstrated leadership in selecting the correct and only option. "By acting in accordance with this script of rationality, directors hope that they have prepared the ground for future collaboration and financial support" (Ibid, 226). Termination is not a 'performance-oriented perspective' but rather a social process that incorporates sensemaking and performing one's role in the 'proper' manner (Ibid).

3.7 Sporting Director Shortcomings

With sensemaking grounded in identity construction (Weick, 1995), sporting director backgrounds are relevant in discerning their decision-making. As the majority of SDs come from previous footballing experience (e.g., ex-players, managers, scouts) the role is arguably over reliant on like individuals (Parnell et al., 2019). While unsurprising given their knowledge and connection within the sport, professional football has a tradition of upgrading the physical and downgrading intellectual capacities, thus tending to create one-

dimensional identities among players (Gammelsæter & Solenes, 2013). As players transitioned into management positions, their collection of like experiences presents exploitable gaps. Potential homophily illustrates a vacuum of 'weak ties' that bring forth novel ideas and opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). Examples within football point to 'weak ties' (distanced connections) that bear fruit for recruitment (Parnell et al, 2019).

3.8 Research Gap

At present, despite its statistical unlikelihood of improving on-pitch results, managerial dismissal is the principal response maintaining organizational legitimacy and stability. The irony resides within the fact that all stakeholders crave success, but this seemingly illogical action is the response to poor performance and further lessens the chance of success. Bridging this gap can enable a sporting and financial advantage. Research addressed the results of managerial sacking from the quantitative perspective of points (Audas, Dobson, and Goddard, 1997, 1999, 2002; Bridgewater, 2006, 2010; Hughes et al., 2010; De Paola and Scoppa, 2011; Heuer et al, 2011; Koning, 2003; de Dios Tena & Forrest, 2007). This provided the basis for greater examination of the processes surrounding managerial dismissal (Nissen, 2014; 2015; Nissen & Wagner, 2020). An examination of trust and power (Nissen, 2016) attempts to reduce termination on account of greater trust between sporting director and manager. However, this premise still accepts dismissal as an institutionalized response, rather than questioning the process altogether. This study aims to build upon existing research from a qualitative sandpoint while exploring solutions from the sporting director perspective. Additionally, the position has not been examined on how the SD/owner relationship influences managerial dismissal. Integrating institutional theories conceptualizes the established processes within a theoretical framework.

4.0 Theory:

This chapter outlines theoretical frameworks that conceptualize the sporting director position. Two interrelated theories are presented: Neo-Institutional Theory (NIT) and Institutional Logics Theory (ILT). Both illuminate organizational change based on external factors; however, the former perspective more deterministic and structural while the latter dialectical and dynamic (Nissen and Wagner, 2020). These theories will highlight the underlying practices of the position as one that maintains external legitimacy, increases access to networks and resources, and simultaneously achieves the highest position in relation to the market (league standings).

4.1 Neo-institutionalism

Neo-institutionalist theory (NIT) has its roots in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) in which rationalist spirit was self-sustaining and proliferating, thereby entrapping humanity in 'an iron cage' (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Institutionalization is "the processes by which social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action" (Meyer and Rowan, 1977, 341). NIT emphasizes organizational environments (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and decision- making processes that follow taken-for-granted solutions of behavior in specific situations (Greenwood et al., 2008). Frieland and Alford (1991) state that NIT "must work at three levels of inquiry – individuals competing and negotiating, organisations in conflict and coordination, and institutions in contradiction and interdependency…" (pp. 240–241). "[A]ll three levels of analysis is necessary to adequately understand society" (p. 242).

Organizations are argued to be 'rationalized' structures, shaped by institutional rules, using roles and activities as means ends relationships for targeted goals (Meyer and Rowen 1977). Models of rationality are also seen as culturally dependent (Ibid). According to Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis (2016, p. 495) NIT "proposes that organizations have the structure that they do largely for cultural reasons." When an advantage of one organization is witnessed (real or perceived), then their procedures and structures are legitimized. "Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and procedures" (Meyer and Rowen, 1977, 340). External conditions influence organizational practices, and legitimacy drives structural change. The

actual efficacy is ancillary as failure to adopt these changes makes an organization outdated and archaic (Ibid). The proliferation of the sporting director and the acceleration of dismissal highligh the manner wherein positions, guidelines, and routines become authoritative principles influencing social behavior (Scott, 1983). NIT has been applied to a variety of sports (e.g., English rugby, O'Brien and Slack, 2003), Swedish hockey (Fahlen 2006), doping within FIFA and athletics (Wagner, 2011) and football (Gammelsaeter and Jacobson, 2008; Gammelsaeter and Senaux, 2011).

Institutional rules guiding organizational practice are what Meyer and Rowen (1977) labeled as 'rationalized myths.' Although the efficacy of these rules is vague, "they are widely shared, or have been promulgated by individuals or groups that have been granted the right to determine such matters" (Scott, 1983, 14). Job titles, roles, procedures, and policies are all 'rationalized' and institutionalized to garner social legitimacy (Ibid). Manager dismissal is one example of a 'rationalized' policy (Nissen 2014):

- *"The coach is always exposed in the world of football […] he can handle it because he has been coach for almost 20 years; he has been dismissed several times, but he is never out of a job. So there is a tendency that their [the coaches'] durability and service life are longer and they stay in the system. So it [dismissing] is a part of the game" (Ibid, 225)*

Meyer & Rowan (1977, p. 342) find that "[p]revailing theories assume that the coordination and control of activity are the critical dimensions on which formal organizations have succeeded in the modern world." One organization's success will initiate an adoption of practices by like organizations, although conditions of success are contextually specific (Ibid). "Designs and practices become regarded, for whatever reasons, as highly esteemed, that displays high cultural capital." (Clegg et al., 495). Not all 'myths' are strictly followed, as a total submission is inefficient and impractical (Caldas and Vasconcelos, 2002). Practices still differ among organizations even after adopting titles and structures, a coping mechanism that "buffer[s] their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled, building gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 341). Internal decoupling allows for external legitimacy, the foundation upon which organizations acquire resources and mobilize public support (Ibid).

4.2 Institutional Isomorphism

Organizations respond to externalities that are influenced by like organizations responding to their environment. The result is a lessening of organizational diversity, leading DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 148) to ask, "why there is such startling homogeneity of organizations forms and practices?" The two theorists labeled this process as isomorphism (Ibid). Three relevant mechanisms initiate such change: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Isomorphism represents a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (Ibid, 149). These processes liken organizations to each other regardless of improved efficiency (Ibid).

Coercive isomorphism occurs when "an organization is compelled to institutionalize a particular policy," (Clegg et al., 496) which often arises from a governing body. Formal and informal external pressures shape policies and structures of organizations given cultural expectations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). In footballing terms, the Bosman ruling is a perfect example, as the EU ruling superseded UEFA, altering the legal obligations of football clubs. Mimetic isomorphism is a secondary mechanism when "organization designs and practices that are seen to be successful are copied because they are associated with success" (Clegg et al., 497). Mimicry of successful organizational practices is a prime example (Ibid). The SD model operates at football's most successful clubs (e.g., Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Liverpool), and makes mimicry a compelling argument for the position's proliferation. A sporting director in name alone may be ill-formatted for a given pfc and damage existing relationships and operational goals (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Dismissal applies in the mimetic sense (not for on-pitch success) but rather as following existing practices that bring little scrutiny. The "fact that they are normatively sanctioned increases the likelihood of their adoption" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 148). Unintentional mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) is an offshoot occurring through employee turnover or recommendations from third parties (i.e., consultancies, agents). Frequent staff turnover in elite football (Parnell et al, 2019) may aid such a process.

Normative isomorphic pressure occurs as "organizations' members are normatively disposed, perhaps through a period of professional training and socialization, to favour certain sorts of designs and practices" (Clegg et al., 496). DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 152) defined professionalization as "the collective struggle of members of an occupation to

define the conditions and methods of their work, and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy." Normative pressures are transmitted through professionalized education programs such as official licensing from governing bodies, accreditation courses, and member organizations such as the ASD. Paramio-Salcines and Llopis-Goig (2019, p. 34) view normative pressures as gradually developing "over the last decades with direct and indirect influence on European football structures and policies…" From a footballing context, pfc success is situationally irreplicable (i.e., environmental, cultural, financial, political); policies may be counterproductive if adopted by others. Football is an "organizational field that increasingly is being institutionalized, and that mechanisms of homogenization are operating in the field, if not yet to the extent that soccer clubs are coerced into using a particular form of organization structure" (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008, 21). Footballing success through isomorphic practice remains paradoxical given its zero-sum nature (Gammelsaeter, 2013).

Further complicating pfc management is ambiguity regarding elite sport. Organizational changes have no direct link to on-pitch success; "[a]necdotal prescriptions prevail, often derived from subjective experience…little is empirically known about the actual *mechanisms* of change" (Cruickshank and Collins 2012, 213). Risk-taking is perceived as hazardous, and isomorphism encouraged as in ineffectual safety net (Grey, 2017). Dismissal involves an interplay between pfc and its environs, while "meaning is created because the environment functions as a mirror into which directors project themselves and their clubs […] since everyone associated with the club expects a dismissal to be the director's next move, conforming to this expectation produces cues that are used for making sense of the situation" (Nissen, 2014, 223). The institutionalized nature of dismissal may leave club superiors under the assumption that no viable alternatives exist and provides insurance for future employment (Ibid). This dutifully accepted, taken-for-granted action within football illustrates the cognitive workings of institutions (Scott, 1983).

4.3 Institutional Logics Theory (ILT)

"[A]n institutional logics perspective has the unequivocal advantage of asking questions about the assumptions governing bodies and stakeholders pursue" (Gammelsaeter, 2018, 52)

ILT theory provides a meta-theoretical framework for examining relationships among individuals, organizations, and institutions (Thornton et al., 2012). Multiple logics are present, while individuals and organizations alter and blend elements into strategic advantage (Ibid). Institutional logics grant agency, enabling greater organizational and institutional heterogeneity than NIT (Greenwood et al., 2011). ILT critiques the emphasis of homogeneity and isomorphism within organizational fields. Actors are exposed and dependent upon conflicting logics, thereby more suitable to deal with agency issues (Ibid). ILT arose as "society can be perceived as an inter-institutional system with multiple institutions operating on individual, organizational and societal levels" (Nissen & Wagner, 2020, 5). It assists in understanding the complexity of modern sport (Ibid) as organizations belong to multiple fields and exploit various logics (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006).

4.3.1 Institutional Logic

Thornton and Ocasio (1999, p. 804) define an institutional logic as "the socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality." Friedland and Alford's (1991) initial institutional orders viewed the state, market, democracy, family, and Christianity as crux institutions in the 'Western World.' A general understanding of business "is rooted in the theoretical economic frame […] rational choice, utility maximization, supply and demand…and crucially independence" (Parnell et al, 2019, 8). Here this assumption is rejected in terms of an institutional organizational framework, where independence and rational choice is offset by external legitimacy and stability.

Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) updated Friedland and Alford's orders (1991), incorporating ideal logics: family, community, religion, state, market, profession, and corporation. Although the inherent logics of sport (autotelic activity) differ from those listed above, their coalescence is the result of business oriented pfcs that often operate as multi-national corporations (Relvas et al, 2010). Football is a "unique cultural institution that operates in a commercial environment" (Smith & Stewart, 2010, 2).

4.3.2 Logics

Building blocks highlighting practices and symbols comprise logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Theoretically, these blocks demonstrate the way individuals and organizations understand themselves in the landscape (Ibid). Logics exist as guidelines for behavior, but dominant macro-logics are not always followed at a micro-level (Ibid). Multiple logics operate at a dynamic level rather than a deterministic one, allowing potential disruption of existing relations with new logics. A football club today functions as a 'blended' hybrid (Skelcher and Smith, 2015), a "synergistic incorporation of elements of existing logics into new and contextually specific logic" (Ibid 440). Oil oligarchs buying professional clubs differ in motive (i.e., investment, soft power) than previous, local 'millionaires.'. This study argues that the sporting director seeks to incorporates multiple logics into a synergistic functioning. Four relevant logics are listed below:

a) Community

Seen as local communities i.e., culture, behavior, media presence, impact organizational behavior. Root metaphor of this logic is shared commonalities, beliefs, and bonds that result in trust as crucial factor for legitimacy (Nissen and Wagner, 2020). A pfc represents a boundary wherein community's express beliefs and objectives (Ibid). Hiring managers or SDs who formerly played for the club is one example. Alliances among actors (e.g., media, sponsors, fans) potentially outmaneuver internal chain of command and influence decision-making (Ibid).

b) Market

Market's root metaphor is transaction. Legitimacy is garnered through profit, increased efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction (Ibid). In footballing terms, efficiency does not guarantee profit, and the market metaphor is viewed through league standing (Ibid). Through payouts and European competition, the uneven redistribution of footballing profits toward the more successful clubs widens the gap between rich clubs, poor clubs, and footballing nations (Gammelsaeter, 2019). Better performers earn more, cementing their position at the top of a given league (Ibid). The drive for winning among stakeholders facilitates managerial turnover (Nissen and Wagner, 2020).

c) Profession

Relational frameworks are the root metaphor. Legitimacy is achieved through expertise or perceived expertise. Professional associations providers of authority (Ibid). For example, coaching badges offered by FAs and UEFA/FIFA. Such standardization removes potential conflict and assists in later employment. Nissen and Wagner (2020, p. 11) articulate that the "coaching profession is the product (service) a coach can offer, and sport directors can skip once the product is no longer demanded."

d) Corporation

Hierarchy operates as root metaphor (Nissen and Wagner, 2020). Legitimacy is achieved through market position in relation to competitors. In footballing sense, this means on field success and efficiency [team improvement]. Given a hierarchical logic, authority lies at top of pyramid (Ibid). Owner's profit orientation and win-at-all-cost mentality are two characteristics that often propel a SD to 'sack' the manager (Ibid). As football clubs become increasingly complex, hierarchy and division of labor maintains organizational control (Parnell et al, 2018).

4.3.3 ILT Conclusions

Nissen and Wagner (2020) determine that market and corporate logic are football compatible as winning equals higher league standing. Power dynamics between owner, SD, and manager are volatile; during sporting failure power ratios shift and arguments made for manager termination (Ibid). Dismissal provides "immediate legitimacy in a context infused by the short-term focus on market position and increased efficiency (Ibid, 10). Logics act as behavior guidelines given the dialectical perspective of multiple logics. Pfcs are complex, pluralist organizations where management is subjected to stakeholders that are "horizontally pluralist, vertically extended, interdependent, contradictory, reciprocally entangled, and brought together through a meta-identity arrived at through different institutional constructions" (Gammelsæter, 2010, p. 586).

5.0   Methodology:

In the following chapter, questions regarding research design, data collection, and analysis are discussed. Furthermore, details regarding interviewees, the interview guide, and ethical considerations are addressed.

5.1 Research design

Once the field of research and research question are established, the following step is a suitable research design. (Veal and Darcy, 2014). A research design supposes an outline dictating how a researcher answers the given research question (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Such design includes sources from which data are collected, coupled with manner of collection and analysis. The decision lies in the design choice - whether exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, or casual research design (or a collaboration). In addition, the research process requires either a quantitative or qualitative approach. As this study attempts to address a particular issue, the qualitatve approach [interviews] and exploratory design was deemed most appropriate.

5.1.1   Exploratory research design

Exploratory research seeks "to discover, describe or map patterns of behavior in areas or activities which have not previously been studied in the field or for which information needs to be updated on a regular basis" (Veal and Darcy, 2014, 6). Given the RQ, *"Can a sporting director mitigate the cycle of managerial turnover to best achieve long-term sporting and financial success?"* exploratory research was the preferred option. Principle reasons include the lack of research on sporting directors in general (Parnell et al, 2019), let alone solutions to habitual managerial dismissal. Exploratory design is valuable for loosely structured interviews with open questions (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019). "An exploratory study is particularly useful if you wish to clarify your understanding of an issue, problem or phenomenon, such as if you are unsure of its precise nature" (Ibid p.187)[1]. As participants inhabit differing environments, findings were treated individually. One sporting director's opinion is as valid as findings from the other seven (Veal and Darcy, 2014).

5.2 Qualitative research

Unlike a quantitative approach concerning numerical data, the qualitative nature concerns itself with spoken or textual language, along with images, videos, and audio clips (Ibid). With the the insular nature of the footballing world (Nissen, 2014), the study aims to gather extensive information from a small number of industry insiders. Given the relatively small size of the professional football industry, these interviews will be smaller in number but gather 'rich' or 'thick' information, commonplace of the qualitative approach (Veal and Darcy, 2014). As this approach rests upon SD involvement, it remains best suited for persons describing their experiences, motivations, and perspectives (Ibid). Thereby, the qualitative approach aligns with the purpose of this study.

5.2.1 In-Depth interviews

Frequently used qualitative research within sports includes in-depth interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis (Ibid). In-depth, open-structured interviews are often longer in length, greater in detail, and less structured than questionnaire-based interviews. Despite a framework for all interviewees, questions and analysis diverged based upon responses (Ibid). In-depth interviews are conducted with open-ended questions in a face-to-face (in person or through video chat) setting. Interviews are not structurally restrictive, and participants are encouraged to speak candidly. As this RQ is presumed particularly touchy, in which interviewee's beliefs may contradict pfc decisions, interviews opened with 'easier' dialogue (Kvale, 1997) regarding the participant's background. Interviews are naturally asymmetrical given that the interviewer asks the questions and opening questions should be relatively easy to answer and without potential embarrassment (King, 2004). A simple opening builds trust and eases participants into complexities regarding pressures and solutions for managerial turnover. Probing and follow-up questions were dependent on what each SD emphasized as particularly important. The researcher must be cognizant that the interaction, coupled with the framing of questions, impacts the data collection (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019).

5.2.2 Participants

Although various qualitative sampling methods exist, the few top-flight SDs within Scandinavian football makes this a unique group. Norway's Eliteserien and Sweden's Allsvenskan consist of 16 teams, and Denmark's Superliga has 12. While interviewing all the SDs in these leagues would make for excellent data, the author would have consumed far too much time and resources. The composition of interviews included top-flight SD's of Norwegian clubs [5], Danish [2] and Swedish [1]. Approaching top-flight pfc sporting directors was the logical step as such clubs are subjected to the highest demands regarding winning and profit (and can qualify for European competition). All sporting directors were assured anonymity. Five interviews were conducted through Microsoft teams video chat as Covid-19 and geographical distance made for easier communication. Two interviews were over the phone, and one was conducted in person. For sake of privacy, names were assigned in the order in which they interviewed (e.g., SD- 1,2,3). Empirical data includes the same numerical reference.

Name	League	Date	Approach
SD 1	Eliteserien	22/3/21	Phone
SD 2	Eliteserien	24/3/21	In-person
SD 3	Eliteserien	26/3/21	Microsoft Teams
SD 4	Eliteserien	26/3/21	Microsoft Teams
SD 5	Eliteserien	13/4/21	Microsoft Teams
SD 6	Allsvenskan	21/4/21	Phone
SD 7	Superliga	28/4/21	Microsoft Teams
SD 8	Superliga	12/5/21	Microsoft Teams

Figure II: Participants

5.2.3 Interview guide

With in-depth and semi-structured interviews as preferred method, an interview guide served as a general outline (Veal and Darcy, 2014). Semi-structured interview guides contain themes and critical questions (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019), while allowing the author to keep track of the discussion without inhibiting the SDs from freely and critically responding. The guide was divided into six parts, which were themselves subdivided into

relevant categories. Potential questions were listed in case the conversation made such questions applicable. Interviews were in English (author's native language) and sometimes needed rephrasing during for the participants' sake. English-based interviews allowed transcription and coding in a native language, an important criterion when dealing with subtleties and symbolism. Existing theory supported given themes, which needed to be used consistently throughout all interviews for proper deductive collection of data (Ibid). The author responded to the participants with 'interview responses' that encourage further explanation on behalf of the interviewer (Veal and Darcy, 2014).

5.2.4 The interview process

The football realm is often perceived as a "notoriously closed social world" (Kelly, 2008, p. 401). Therefore, gaining access was accomplished by a gatekeeper high within Norwegian Football. A brief message contained a short presentation about the researcher and project, attached with a formal information letter with in-depth information and legal considerations. Freedom to decline participation is an important and SDs could withdraw at any time for any reason. The interview guide was not shared beforehand in order to avoid pre-conceived answers. Although this spontaneity has benefits, answers may not have been as detailed if the questions had been delivered beforehand. But that method carries the additional risk that the SDs can prepare satisfying answers in advance (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011). Given that participants carry differing responsibilities and levels of authority, interviews necessitated individual tailoring. However, participants received the same preliminary questions in order to remove potential bias on behalf of research error. The interview stucture was flexible and included many open-ended questions, facilitating greater depth (Alvesson, 2003), interaction, and thought-process exploration (Kvale, 1997) in regard to the research question.

As a result of Covid- 19, most interviews were conducted via online video calls. Phone interviews were avoided (with two exceptions) because qualitative research benefits greatly from body language interpretation (Tjora, 2017). Face-to-face also enables greater trust and dialogue. The author and participant initially exchanged text messages where participants confirmed their willingness to interview. The participants were given carte blanche regarding date and time of the interview to best suit their schedule. All interviews were recorded through video and phone. An iPad recorded the in-person interview. Participants

were guided loosely by preliminary questions; however, the respondents controlled the interview and only guided when the author decided conversation drifted too far off topic. Interviews lasted between 30 and 70 minutes [50 min on average]. Data was subsequently uploaded to an external and secured back-up drive for safety reasons. Files will be deleted by August 31st, 2021, in accordance with the NSD policy.

5.3 Data analysis

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then examined individually. Transcription was done manually and by software. Given that the participants are not native English speakers, the software had difficulties and a manual read-through was done to secure authenticity. The analysis commenced through a two-part process. As outlined in the theoretical chapter, NIT and its underpinnings of legitimacy and organizational homogenization, coupled with the four institutional orders (market, profession, corporation, and community) guided the readings from a "pre-defined analytical lens" (Nissen and Wagner, 9). Following this step, examining the data involved a thematic analysis, representing the fundamental method for qualitative data (Sanders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2019). Through coding the text, categorizations and overarching themes emerged. Veal and Darcy (2014, p.431-433) conclude that "[a] theme which emerges from just one subject is as valid as one which arises from ten subjects [...] If only one person or organization in the study is shown to behave in a certain way as a result of certain forces, this is a valid finding for qualitative research."

Thematic analysis is ideal for researchers with little experience in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Such analysis highlights similarities and differences. The framework below was adopted.

Phase	Examples of Procedure for Each Step
1. Familiarization	Transcribing data: reading and re-reading; noting down initial codes
2. Generating Initial Codes	Coding interesting features in the data in a systematic fashion across the data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for Themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each theme
4. Involved Reviewing Themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data-set; generate a thematic map
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics for each theme; generation of clear names for each theme
6. Producing the Report	Final Opportunity for Analysis selecting appropriate extracts; discussion of analysis; relate back to the research question or literature; produce report

Figure III: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006, 87)

Thematic analysis was applied (Ibid) in the following manner:

1. Transcripts were transcribed and re-read. The same applies to the audio files. Initial thoughts and discussions were noted.

2. Interviews received equal attention throughout coding. Themes were not taken from a few, vivid descriptions, but rather a comprehensive analysis (Ibid). Significant statements were transcribed again. Emerging themes should "capture something important about the data in relation to the research question" (Ibid 82).

3. Data was analyzed, interpreted, and articulated into meanings. Using inductive direction, identified themes were linked to the empirical data. "Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame" (Ibid, p. 83).

4. Themes were analyzed against each other to identify the core of respective themes. Themes should fit logically within their subsequent relation to the RQ (Ibid).

5. The final stage of analysis involved finalized themes in a structured framework, thereby presenting a "complicated story of the data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis" (Ibid, p. 93).

6. Ideas emerged during the study, causing additional refinements within the analysis. This falls in line with thematic analysis literature (Ibid).

5.4 Validity and Reliability

A project's quality is often a result of the researcher's method and manner of application. Measuring the above is based upon dimensions of validity and reliability (Veal and Darcy,

2014; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). Validity speaks to the accuracy of the used measurement and whether the research measures what it intended to measure (Ibid). Validity is differentiated between internal and external validity. The former discusses the consistency and accuracy of the relationship between data and drawn conclusions. For a high internal validity, the researcher is assured that the cause-effect emerging from the data is not caused by unexamined variables. (Veal and Darcy, 2014; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). External validity discusses generalizations within the project, with findings applicable in other relevant settings (Veal and Darcy, 2014). Reliability is the trustworthiness of the research. If multiple researchers enact a study of same design and find the same results, the first is deemed reliable. Reliability shortcomings are often due to participant and/or research error or bias, (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019).

As football exists within set parameters, a similar study in other countries of differing language and culture would be expected to produce similar results. There are caveats to Scandinavian football and culture, but the sport has overarching rules and regulations governed by EU laws, UEFA, and FIFA. If this study were conducted with other clubs' sporting directors in the near future, results should be similar. But with legal and structural changes over the past decades, a study in ten years may produce different results (Veal and Darcy, 2014). As this project aims to identify solutions to footballing phenomena, findings cannot necessarily be applied elsewhere.

5.5 Ethics

Given the nature of this research, the author recognizes several ethical concerns. Six are mentioned below (Veal and Darcy, 2014 p 107):
- The research should be beneficial to society
- Researchers should be suitably qualified and/or supervised to conduct the research
- Subjects should take part freely
- Subjects should take part only on the basis of informed consent
- No harm should befall the research subjects
- Data should be honestly and rigorously analyzed, interpreted, and reported

Due to the football's insular nature identifying participants based upon name, age, or even testimony imbues the researcher with a critical responsibility to not harm the subjects.

Participants were assigned fictional names while the data itself was measured against the risk of exposing participant identity. Identity must remain anonymous yet the conclusions unchanged (Tjora, 2017). If any concerns are relevant, the participant can be asked for input in the matter, and/or the section altered.

5.6 Limitations

The author's lack of conversational Scandinavian languages must be considered as none of the SD's are native English speakers. Answers may not have been expressed in the detail or manner had the conversation been in their first language. Ideally, interviews would be conducted in the director's native languages, thereby maximizing their communication most naturally. However, all SDs were proficient in English and as a manner of compensation, the author frequently asked if questions and topics were understood. Multiple SDs candidly responded when they did not understand a specific question, and workarounds were established.

6.0   Findings:

The chapter is divided into three themes that emerged from the analysis: "Power Structures," "Leadership," and "Trust." These themes are further subdivided into sections that delve into greater depth. Numerous themes and content overlap; for example, strong leadership influences trust, subsequently altering power structures and club decisions. Within power structures falls a section regarding external stakeholders. Upon first glance, this category appears distinct; however, the effects of external actors is only relevant if it alters pfc strategy. The chapter follows the interview guide (See Appendix), which supposes to be a natural manner of conversation.

6.1 Power Structures

> *"Every club organizes itself in a different way[...], so you have to adjust how you work and your structure to the reality that you are living in." (SD-5)*

The interviews commenced with safe questions (Kvale, 1997) in which participants elaborated on their background. All had football playing background but some returned to university before reaching top-flight football due to insufficient ability while others transitioned toward club management in their waning playing years. Directors elaborated on their current responsibilites and priorities, which were themselves dependent upon club goals. This ranged from player transfers to the acadamy to the first team. The distinctive nature of each postion reaffirms the contextual nature of the role (Parnell et al., 2018). However, the long-term perspective of the position remained a common thread despite distinct responsibiities.

> *"I have a focus on the whole club, from youngest player up to [top] team to create and build something sustainabile and something solid over the years. If I leave the club....then there should be something consistent to build on." (SD-7)*

> *"My main aim was to try to facilitate the academy, the strategies. To make the best out of the time you have in the sense of which, if it happens, that [the team] could go down. In the meantime, then you already have started the process of rebuilding." (SD- 4)*

Conversation progressed into their respective club hierarchies, and in line with exisitng research (Parnell et al., 2018; Relvas et al., 2010), none of the sporting directors sit on their respective boards. Unlike conclusions drawn from Parnell et al (2018), participants stated that a board position would not necessarily improve their situation. Their collective concern was open dialogue and an invitation to strategize and impact decisions. This difference in finding may be the result of varying ownership structures between the UK and Scandinavia and is explored further in the following chapter.

> *"The boards have meetings together[...] I'm just reporting to the club board. I'm hired by the club, I have my contract in the club." (SD-1)*

> *"In Norway and Sweden you have members owning the clubs, in Denmark you have private ownership. That is very different to work in a club who have members with the final say actually. Thats a very important issue to look into..." (SD-6)*

> *"...You are basically under scrutiny from the members and sometimes the members are not either familiar with running business and making decisions on behalf of the club" (SD- 8)*

The finding may have a cultural explanation as well as Scandinavian countries have a smaller power gap between hierarchical levels than the UK (Hofstede, 1998b). The takeaway is that pfc governance impacts SD agency.When probed further, participants elaborated that Norwegian and Swedish pfc composition accentuated indistinct power modules. As the license to play in these leagues is not transferable to the plc (Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen, 2008), members technically sit above the board. However, the co-operating plc's financial investment enables pfc activities, often leaving the investors with unwritten power (Ibid). Therefore, sporting directors in these two countries are influenced by the two boards, cooperating plc and club members. SD-6 believes that authority for the position is more readily available with a particular structure.

> *"[I]t's easier to get that authorization if you are a privately owned club. Otherwise it's trying to convince and have a very strict strategy, explain the strategy and follow*

the strategy and get the trust from the board. And thats the only way it works"(SD-6)

6.1.1 Hire/Fire Capabilities

As participants outlined their responsibilities and club structures, the author revealed the RQ under discussion; "*Can a sporting director mitigate the cycle of managerial turnover to best achieve long-term sporting and financial success?*" Perhaps discernable from the section above, their respective authority over the manager is contextually dependent. When broaching managerial turnover in relation to their position, participants addressed a common misconception. For external stakeholders, the inception of the SD in light of increasing managerial dismissal appears as a valid correlation. Yet, none of the eight participants had the sole authority to make a managerial change. This was confirmed by the ASD CEO, Dan Parnell, who reiterated to the author that the sporting director rarely, if ever, has the lone authority.

> *"When it comes to bigger investments like players or infrastructure [...] they have a very strong opinion. They want to have a strong opinion. Of course, the owner himself wants to have a strong opinion[...] We have to spend his money like he tells us" (SD-1)*

> *"At club [x], its defined in the club strategy that the board hires and sacks the first team coaches [...] I didn't agree with the decision [sacking] and the way it was done." (SD- 8)*

The sporting directors established that although their position and efficacy is impacted by managerial turnover, they are unable to control the process. Their lack of authority was not fully unexpected given their explanation of club hierarchy and literature aligning the SD to that of middle management (Mintzberg, 1979). Therefore, the RQ is placed within a framework of 'mitigating' this merry-go-round.

> *"...[Y]ou have a lot of clubs where the head coach is the big influence in how you work, and the challenge there is, you risk fluctuation, people come in…and six months later that guy is out…and then you have a big challenge" (SD-5)*

"When you sign a new coach, the day after you need to look for another one" (SD2)

"It's easier if you have one of these [managers] for longer, especially when you have the structure that we have...but football is living on the results" (SD- 3)

The above testimony touches upon the institutionalized nature of sacking and is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

6.1.2   Internal Culture & Interference

Participants' tenuous grasp over managerial hiring and firing pointed toward a complex and arduous RQ. Conversation naturally turned toward pfc decision-making. Had participants made or agreed to decisions that they personally disagreed with from a footballing standpoint? The answer was uniformly, "yes". Pfcs are political organizations with a vast array of stakheolders and despite a uniform desire for success, the manner in reaching goals is disputed (Nissen, 2014). SD-1 corroborated such a claim:

"The football culture is full of alpha males. And they want to show themselves and they want to show power and be on the front pages, but also have the final word always...[D]ecisions are made not solely on the facts and understanding and the knowledge that they have from the university [...] it's a lot of politics." (SD-1)

Participants frequently addressed the background and experience of senior pfc leaders, many of whom come from outside football. SD-4 and SD-8 broached this directly as a problem that potentially negates their efficiency as a SD. This study measures football efficiency to on-pitch success, parameters used by (Nissen and Wagner, 2020).

"You can sit in a board meeting and [they have] different kinds of competence, business competence, financial competence and so on. But normally it's not very high, high sports competence, because they hired you to take care of that. But in a way with football everybody has an opinion [...] Should we sell this [player], why this and so on?" (SD-4)

> *"It's a common problem that the board(s) and sometimes the directors make decisions with a lack of understanding of football. They probably bring their culture from corporate life or something like this, change leaders, and it's looked upon as a common problem from the football competence side…"* (SD-8)

Dismissal functions as a normalized market practices (where success and profit are coaligned more seamlessly than in football). Despite football's zero sum nature, pfcs opperate as a business along lines of fiscal viability. Therefore, SD-8 admitted to the impracticality of running a pfc on sporting intuition and mathematical models alone.

> *The fact is that the first team of the football club is the main product of the fc, it's the only product u can sell, and if its not attractive you would have to understand that the board needs to look at that and if its necessary to do some changes"* (SD- 8)

Participants ackknowledged the dilemma of their position; success is critical despite their long-term leanings. The manager has greater day-to-day impact given their control of line-ups and tactics (Nissen, 2014), which can extenuate issues with a SD if results are poor.

> *"The thing is in football, you can run the club very [well], you can have a good setup, strategy, good players, good economics, but then you lose a match in the 90th min…If you win four, five, six matches in a row, nobody cares how the club is run"* (SD-6)

> *"I know that for a sports director, you have a coaching staff you've got to rely on. You have players you have to rely on. You're not playing, you're not picking the team…it's a lot of things you can't control directly, but obviously you can control it indirectly"* (SD 4)

A secondary issue is that responsibiliites attributed to SDs on behalf of the club's apex are often incorrect. Greater transparency is necessary after appointment as lingering ambiguity invites sporting interference from the club's apex. This too has been reported in SD concerns outside a purely Scandinavian context (Parnell et al, 2019). Internal breakdowns hamper strategic aims and goals, specifically when a SD receives blame for areas outside their responsibilities.

"When the transfer window is closed, for example, I always get questions. 'The transfer window is closed, now is good for you. You can relax?' They think that a SD is just buying and selling players…they don't know what the position is. The least part is buying and selling players." (SD-6)

6.1.3   External Culture and Interference

Although football is a global game (Jewell, 2009), it remains deeply rooted in communities and susceptible to pressures from external stakeholders e.g., fans, media, sponsors (Nissen, 2015). Thus, stakeholder pressure exerts power in a pfc if said pressure influences internal decisions.

"The fans put pressure to the board members. You can hear now and then that they got input from people who are acting out of emotion and not the pure footballing perspective. But as a leader you need to be aware that this is part of the business, football is an emotional game where people only remember the last thing you did...
" (SD-7)

"It's all about who did the sports director buy or who did he sell. And even then, they don't understand that it's a lot of people involved in that process, not a one man show. But we're getting measured in the media about who we are selling, who we are buying and in some way which coach we're hiring and firing." (SD-4)

6.2 Leadership

With the interview having established important criteria regarding SD authority, conversation veered toward viable mechanisms that maximize sporting director influence. Leadership surfaced as a critical component of effective management, due to growing organizational complexity in pfcs. Three parameters emerged as underlying measures of effective leadership.

6.2.1 Delegating Responsibility

Delegating responsibility is the first parameter gathered from the data. SD-8 described his responsibilities (for the first team alone) while SD-3 discusses club objectives.

"You can't work in an old-fashioned way, you have to delegate responsibility […] I have now one team organizer, two project managers…. I have two physiotherapists, one doctor, one physical coach, two analysts. I have two assistant coaches, one goal keeping coach, one head coach…. plus all the players, and the contracts…" (SD-8)

"You have a lot of people working also in the club that you can use. I think that you have to use the competence that you have … you're not only, you know, only one guy" (SD-3)

6.2.2 Building Coalitions

Participants stressed that building a consensus brought about optimal results (rather than individual mandate). SD- 8 discussed his desire for a coalition in relation to a potential sacking.

"I would ask for the board's permission to involve the coach, that there is unrest around his position. I would discuss that with the coach and would see if there was any response to that so we could make some changes […] see if it was possible to rescue the situation"

Pfc collaboration also applied to clubs with financial restraints. SD-2 emphasized that a coalition is beneficial due to personal shortcomings.

"For us as a mid-size club in country [x], it's important that we get the quality out of the people we have in the staff, we cannot have 20 people in the staff like club [y], so we need to get more out of each individual…" (SD-7)

"If you cannot do it yourself, you need to surround yourself with people who are aware and can cope with the changes…I'm conservative, I need people around me that aren't conservative" (SD-2)

6.2.3 Due Diligence

SD-8 addressed the RQ under the guise of due diligence in which sacking a manager shortly after hire exposes internal club breakdowns as opposed to a porr manager. However, this rarely occurs, and instead the manager deemed incorrect and the cycle continues (Nissen, 2014; 2016).

> *"Most of the big decisions, for example hiring or sacking a coach, likewise with the players are long-term decisions. You take on a long-term responsibility [...] Sacking a manager after 18 months is a bad job in hiring that manager. It's a really bad job if you have to sack him after six months or 18 months"* (SD-8)

SD-7 outlined his club's detailed approach when looking for a new manager:

> *"First thing, we wanted a guy who knew Scandinavian football[...]we ended up going thru 40, 50 coaches[...]we needed to meet the three, four candidates we had, and this was the most difficult part, to get a sense of the personality, to know who you are talking to, dig a bit deeper in the small details that you can do face to face."* (SD-7)

6.2.4 Leadership and Neutralizing Emotion

Despite the business of sport SDs addressed the emotional nature of football. Multiple interviewees stated that one goal of their leadership was neutralizing internal club emotion. This credence aligns the SD with that of senior managers who supposedly disregard emotion for the sake of the business (Brundin, 2012). Examining distinctions between rationality and emotion requires a paper unto itself; however, the relevancy from the data is the belief that emotions negatively influence pfc strategy. Further complicating notions of rationality are the communal boundaries in which a pfc operates, wherein involved parties share differing beliefs, objectives, and manners of fulfilling club goals (Nissen and Wagner, 2020).

> *The feeling around the club effected the decision-making to a certain extent [...] we had a CEO, [person x] was a little bit emotional around the media coverage and the*

supporter's reaction to things… if you are emotional with football and make decisions based on emotions, I think it is dangerous." (SD- 8)

"Board members are not into the daily routine, they only see the result. This is emotional for them[…]If you are not winning, then a lot of decisions are made on a poor foundation. My responsibility is to try and take away all these emotional things at a football club" (SD-7)

6.2.5 Social Media and Emotions

External stakeholders influence pfc strategy for sporting directors as found similarly by Nissen (2015). However, participants in this study considered social media to be an additional, influential tool impacting club management. Social media acts as an outlet for stakeholder opinions in any industry; however, the commentary can be far more virulent within football.

As a result, two participants removed themselves from social media as a coping mechanism.

"The special thing with football is it's so emotional. When people want to chop your head off, it's the supporters […] If a Norwegian state oil company gives a quarterly result which is worse than the last one, it will never kick off an internet campaign toward the project manager." (SD-8)

I made a choice that I'm not on the social media. It's important what were thinking internally....I try to focus on the things we [control], I can influence... " (SD-7)

Clubs still need to interact with supporters for numerous reasons, and sporting directors reiterated that communication go through formal channels (e.g. club social media, television interviews, etc.). The dialogue dilemma is further evidence of pfcs attempting to balance the sticky middle ground between corporate and community logics. In the corporate world, divulgence is detrimental and reveals internal operations, strategies, and secrets while for the latter logic, a pfc represents the community in which it resides (Nissen & Wagner, 2020).

"Too many SDs and head coaches are just saying 'no comment'. It's the most stupid thing you can say… we have to give something more, we have to give the people

insight in the club... What we are doing, how we are working, why we are doing it?"(SD-7)

6.3 Trust

Trust surfaced as pertinent for overcoming the research question. Assuming managerial hire and fire is not relinquished solely to the SD, the position must accrue trust to further performance-driven agendas. Trust was outlined in Chapter Three, but key elements are detailed once again given its importance in the empirical data. Trustworthiness is embedded in three characteristics: ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al, 1995). These traits function as "group(s) of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain' (Ibid,717). These categories provided a lens for examining the empirical data

A) **Ability***:*

"I made the analysis for many years, you know, so I had a good, good overview. And that was my advantage to try to turn this [...] heavy ship in the right direction." (SD-4)

B) **Benevolence***:*

"I believe in transparent processes. I think it's possible, I think it's lacking in professional sports because the decisions are sometimes harsh, brutal, and sometimes they are too rushed…" (SD-8)

C) **Integrity***:*

"I like it to be a bigger decision than myself but If I say we need to move now, then the board will follow me. But I also want to work with more people committed to the decisions we make" (SD-7)

While none of the participants have sole authority to sack a manager, SD- 7 emphasized that he has established a level of authority accepted by the club's apex. This assertion can be viewed from the chicken or egg analogy. Perhaps the authority is granted due to a desire for collaboration (instilling upper management's trust), and grants him the ability to make the decision alone. As explored by Nissen and Wagner (2020), the professional logic garners

legitimacy from relational frameworks. Trust to and fro were integral for relational frameworks.

> *"As long as they [the board] trust the people running the club, then they are not asking stupid questions" (SD-7)*

> *"I think the preparation before you hire and the professionalism at the club, as I said before it's probably what gave me the strong belief that I wanted to take this job. Because they were so thorough with everything […] that builds up a kind of trust" (SD-8)*

> *"To have a good relationship, a personal relationship with a CEO is substantial" (SD-1)*

6.3.1 Trustor to Trustee

Due diligence applied not only in managerial selection, but for that or sporting director as well. Existing literature attests to issues concerning ambiguous recruitment processes before a sporting director candidate's appointment (Parnell et al, 2018), a claim substantiated by SD-8.

> *"When [club x] contacted me, I was in talks with [club y] at the same time. I was number one candidate for them in [country y], so I informed [club x] about my situation when they rang… I had five interviews with the CEO on teams […] roughly 2 hours each so I think we had about 15 hours of talks, discussions before we came to conclusion […] The other process I was in with [club y] wasn't as thorough because they basically picked me out and looked at my CV and had two talks on the phone and were happy with that."*

Poor recruitment processes lessened trust toward club y for SD-8, who continued describing trust built from club x's in-depth hiring process.

> *[F]or me it created trust in the club because they were so thorough with their process…. We [had] five team interviews, I spoke to the chairman, they picked up references, they downloaded things from the Internet, the press conferences I've*

done, podcasts and everything [...] So basically, we found the chemistry and both of us found out that we could work together [...] I had more confidence in this one because I felt that I knew a lot more about what I was taking on..." (SD-8)

6.3.2 Trust and Goal Implementation

Trust operates as an investment (Wadel, 1999) that relies upon communication. Achieving pfc aims depends on thorough internal and external communication, along with proper organizational structures (i.e., proper funding, chain of command) and individual accountability (Draebye, 2019). "[C]ommunication is often inseparable from the effective implementation of strategies. It is, therefore, imperative for top management to ensure good communication with managers, employees, and other stakeholders" (Ibid, 183). This applies from sporting director to ownership and vice versa, even though the former sits below the latter in club hierarcy .

> *"If I didn't get the feeling that this [owner] was a person that wanted to discuss with me and be level with me, even if he was above me on the organizational map, I would have to feel that the two of us could fight together..."* (SD-1)

> *"I need to try to communicate on the level that they [the board] can understand [...] But if you're getting [tired] and at some moment you're saying 'I'm the boss of the sports activities, so you just need to trust me,' then I think you're in the negative..."* (SD- 4)

Slowing dismissal requires a bridge between strategy formulation and implementation which impacted SD-1 during a string of poor results.

> *"I remember that board meeting when the board was discussing it, if [the club] should aim to do it within three years or five years. And we ended up on the five-year plan because the people with the sporting experience in the board today, they were emphasizing the patience that is needed when you want to build a new culture and build new quality in the younger players [...] We had that period [of poor results]. We had a meeting with the owner, myself and the CEO... we decided to stay with a strategic plan and also the board renewed the head coach contract because they felt*

that we were on the track to get these players, young players promoted, as we had planned." (SD-1)

Sporting directors iterated the notion that strategy needs to be established from the onset of their in conjunction with the club's apex.

"I would gather the head of the board and have them telling me [what are] my constraints and possibilities [that] affect the decisions. And let them tell me a little bit about how it has been working the last couple of years when the decision has been made…" (SD- 1)

"I think the important thing is to [deal] with this when I came to the club. This was very important for me that the leader group was sitting down… I had an idea of where I wanted to end up with our goals and targets, but they were part of it … you get a commitment from the board. We can have a lot of plans inside the club but if the board does not support them then [out of luck]. We need to put it on the board's table, and we need to get a decision." (SD-7)

With the volatile nature of on pitch results, participants emphasized measures outside immediate results that better represent club progress from a long-term picture (i.e., transfer fees, academy growth, profit, stadium construction, scouting, aims, etc.).

"We found like five, six key points to measure which we think [are] what's important for the style and the way we want to develop. As long as we can see overtime we are developing, then we think we are going in the right direction, and this is the message I have to send to the board." (SD-7)

6.3.3 Internal Stability

The foundation of trust relies on continuity within top level positions (e.g., board/chair, ownership, manager, SD). Power vacuums entail serious consequences as turnover requires new trust building, and functioning relationships necessitate mutual trust (Wadel, 1999). Participants emphasized club continuity, and two argued a general lack thereof in Scandinavian football.

"If you look at Scandinavian clubs, you see a lot of changes in the chairman position, in the boards, thats a big,big problem. Here in [club x], we have had the same board for seven or eight years, thats a key factor[...]When you change the board they come in and after seeing four or five matches they think they know about football. If the board gets changed over and over again, you need to start over again, and explain the strategy and how it works, and it's too many times they come in and say 'this is easy.'" (SD-6)

"Because you have more or less two boards, you are changing people every year[...] some of them are just there to get more information so they know more than their neighbors when they are cutting the grass." (SD-7)

6.3.4 Trust & Homophily

Despite the professionalization that enveloped elite football over recent decades (Paramio-Salcines and Llopis-Goig, 2018), the SD position requires no formal training. Such informality, coupled with hiring practices that favor former players and managers (Parnell et al., 2019), invites potential problem. Footballing experience increases knowledge of the game and team dynamics, but like backgrounds represent a potential Achilles heel undermining SD authority.

"… I think that it's kind of strange that for all the different roles in the coaching staff, you need to have a badge and you can't coach a first level team. If you don't have the pro-license, you have a problem… as a SD, you can come just from the streets." (SD-4)

"Sometimes when you talk to the board, it's like 'yeah, he is an old football player...he is very good at football, but he doesn't understand this economic or business' and that's a feeling you can get." (SD-6)

6.3.5 Accreditation

As a result of participants like backgrounds, there was a general sentiment that an accreditation program would preempt any learning curve, elevate their standing, and garner

more trust from the club's apex. Football still has winners and losers even if everyone in management holds PhDs, an issue discussed further in Chapter Seven. However, it is relevant that participants held a positive perception of an accreditation program and candidly spoke of personal shortcomings.

"I see in Europe you are going to have a market for SDs…You need to recruit a SD [due to] his competencies, not because of this heart for the club." (SD 6)

"… [I]t's not always the case that people with big experience from football know how a business is being run, with the risks and the finance and the consequences..." (SD- 8)

"I should have known more about economy and budgets. And I don't know if you're going to get that from the footballing experiences. I don't think so." (SD-1)

"A lot of things I didn't have a clue about, about the football market in terms of transfers, agents, negotiations […] how it works, the structures in Europe, Asia, USA…" (SD-7)

7.0   Analysis

The empirical data of the previous chapter is now discussed from the perspective of existing literature and theoretical frameworks examined in chapter three and four. Such analysis is done to conceptulaize the SD experience in relation to the RQ.

7.1 In relation to Power Structures

The lack of SD authority in the hiring or dismissal process appears ironic if the position exists under the guise of footballing expertise. A cardiologist's recommendaton for heart surgery being overruled by a petroleum specialist does not seem an undue comparison. When transposing this dynamic to the medical profession, this appears illegitimate. Referring once again to Gammelsaeter and Jacobsen (2008, p. 22), "[t]here is little doubt that capital has been exchanged for influence, and that this has extended to sporting decisions. Investors have increased their power in the boardrooms of the clubs... " Perhaps none of the SDs interviewed desire to sit on the board as they may attain no greater influence on decision-making. This may explain the differences in findings for SDs that sit on the board of UK pfcs (Parnell et al., 2018).

Throughout European football, heterogenous pfc structure impacts club strategy, revenue and competitive balance (Terrien et al., 2017). Despite domestic regulation mandating member- owned clubs in Norway and Sweden, European qualification (and its cash windfall) requires competition with teams across the continent. A 2016 report listed Eliteserien teams (Norway) as having an average of 2.5% of total assets compared to a top-flight English clubs (UEFA, 2016). Such a discrepency puts teams from these two countries at opposites of a level playing field. There was some discussion that private ownership and/or floating pfcs on the open market is the pathway toward financial viability and footballing success.

Wilson, Plumley and Ramchandani (2013) highlight that UK clubs floated on the stock market show improved financial health. However, Leach and Szymanski (2015, p.25) uncover no evidence of modified behavior or performance of clubs after their listing, commenting that English pfcs are "more oriented toward profit objectives than [...] normally assumed". Whether or not profit- oriented pfcs choose to float on the market, objectives

differ among teams within a given league (Terrien et al.,2017). This heterogeneity within leagues has policy implications (Ibid), including the ease at which SDs can receive authority to make key footballing decisions. Assuming sole authority is not relinquished to the SD, the position's exposure to a motley of logics and governance structures will impact the rate of turnover. One quote is particularly telling:

"It's easier if you have one of these [managers] for longer, especially when you have the structure that we have...but football is living on the results." (SD-3)

This sentiment is along the lines of Nissen and Wagner's (2020) examination of pfc exposure and various logics. Turnover operates as a modus operandi for unsuccessful pfcs. Performance-based firing holds water for most market practices, but football only guarantees one winner. Despite the paradox, the first team is the main product and substandard results draw ownership's ire. This is one example of a 'blended' hybrid (Skelcher and Smith, 2015) prevalent throughout professional football. SD-3's testimony above is adage that the manager is judged on football results, even to the detriment of the sporting director. This suggests that the SDs accept and perpetuate [to some degree] their own operating confines within existing institutionalized practices. Although sensemaking (Weick, 1995) was never specifically mentioned by name, the process highlights the mirror in which pfc actions are viewed in relation to their environment. Furthermore, the dismissal process illustrates the uniqueness of sport as a cultural institution operating within a commercial environment (Smith and Smith, 2010).

7.2 In relation to Leadership

Emotional intelligence and behavior (Goleman, 2000) emanated as prerequisites for a successful sporting director given their conduit nature. Daily interactions "create, reinforce and reproduce organisations culture (i.e., the day-to-day practice, behavioural norms and behavioural boundaries – 'what people do (or do not do), how they do it and why they do it…'" (Parnell et al. 2019, p. 11). Modifying club behavior necessitates cognizance of social interactions (Ibid), high levels of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000) and sensemaking awareness (Weick, 1995).

Football's emotional core further complicates sensemaking and decision-making. Sport functions as an emotional enterprise (Szymanski, 2010) and most shareholders do not invest in football clubs for financial profit (Ibid)." Nissen and Wagner (2020, p. 10) state that investment in a pfc is done to "indulge in their emotional passion for the game and club…The emotional attachment goes beyond shareholders as it also encompasses stakeholders such as fans, media, and the local community." As a result, community logics fuse with market and corporate logics and are thereby "reflected in situations in which club stakeholders have a decisive influence on the decision to dismiss a coach" (Ibid). SD-8 referred to the football's peculiarity when comparing the outcry over lost matches to those of bad results for a Norwegian Oil Company.

With elite football as a zero-sum endeavor (one winner), rationality should not be measured against proper or improper leadership (Brundin, 2012). Sporting directors frequently reinforced the notion that if a pfc wins, stakeholders do not care about internal workings. SD actions are legitimized when their team wins. Therefore, one cannot connect a failing football club to an emotional management and a successful club to rational management. Doing so fails to consider that pfc management does not directly influence footballing results (Cruickshank and Collins, 2012), regardless of leadership or competence. A hospital director that invests in MRI machines directly influences their aims. For other institutional fields (Friedland & Alford,1991; Thornton et al., 2012), proper leadership (Gangdal & Angeltveit, 2014) has far greater direct impact on outcome. Finally, leadership constructs in this study are understood from a 'Western' perspective and culturally biased (Hofstede, 1998b).

7.3 In relation to Trust

With pfc ownership transitioning to wealthy owners, business conglomerates, and/or cooperating plcs (Parnell et al, 2018), the outlook of pfcs transforms. Sporting directors cited the academic background and business experience of their employers in contrast to their own. Sporting director homophily broaches the concept of unexploited weak ties and an insular footballing environment that leaves suitable candidates on the periphery (Parnell et al, 2019). Regarding accreditation programs, SD-6's belief that the future candidates will need some 'license' is valid. Given the influx of money in football, and trends over the last decades (e.g., coaching badges, foreign ownership), it is a safe assumption that personnel in control of vast sums of pfc monies will be required to have a formal degree.

From the theoretical standpoint, DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) coercive isomorphism (mandatory accreditation) inevitably removes a segment from participation as a potential sporting director. Supposing increased accreditation, the number of adoptions further sanctions more adoptions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and becomes itself a badge of legitimacy (Meyer and Rowen, 1977) rather than efficacy. This inevitably holds true for winning the league. If all sporting directors disregard emotion and hold ten PhDs, one team still wins the league. Other facets of a pfc (transfer policy, academy, infrastructure, staff turnover etc.) should function more efficiently with greater professionalization. A rational argument for a 'badge' is enhanced continuity for club actions, which frequently incur massive waste when one project is dumped due to staff turnover (e.g., ownership, board, sporting director, manager). Payouts to 'sacked' coaching staffs (Hardy, 2019) and expensive players (think Mesut Ozil) falling out of favor with a new manager are but two examples (Burton, 2020).

7.4 Findings Outside Theory

Managerial dismissal functions as a mimetic isomorphic response (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) to poor results. However, this ironically is not of mimicry of successful organizations from a footballing perspective, but rather one of stability within organizational hierarchy. Mimicry of successful pfcs would actualize Manchester United and Alex Ferguson, who won his first league title (1 of 13) after nearly seven years as manager (MUFC, 2021). If he was sacked after the eighteen-month average span that exists presently (UEFA, 2013), United's greatest two decades may have died long before they began.

8.0 Conclusion:

This study explores solutions to managerial turnover from a sporting director perspective. To the author's knowledge, there exist few studies examining remedies for this institutionalized practice. It is surprising given the manager's importance to the success of a pfc (De Paola and Scoppa, 2011) that the industry has developed such a cavalier attitude toward their fluctuation. The reality that participants could not offer a simple answer only points to the complexity of the subject. As a result, the onus fell upon the researcher to sift through the empirical data to find solutions (Tjora, 2017). Existing theories and literature aided the process to better understand the phenomenon of 'sacking' within the context of professional football. Assuming a reality in which pfc power structures remain static, the SD's ability to garner trust from the strategic apex appears most significant to alter the frequency of managerial sacking. A sporting director can mitigate the cycle of managerial turnover, although the transfer of trust and agency is often dependent upon the governance structure of a club.

8.1 Recommendations

A) Organizational control will impact the influence of the sporting director position which has yet to be homogenized industry wide. The rise of accreditation programs signals increasing structure, and arguably forecasts a future where suitable candidates are required to be licensed. Accreditation increases leverage for future candidates, who can be replaced by anyone at present. Structured programs outlining role complexities lead to higher ability at best, and the perception of greater ability at worst. Ability is central for trust building (Mayer et al., 1995). Additionally, external qualifications may bridge internal miscommunication surrounding the sporting director position, which frequently hampers pfc strategies and goals (Parnell et al., 2019). Therefore, the first recommendation is highlighted below.

- Take advantage of available accreditation programs which can preempt the learning curve, increase knowledge and ability, and bring competitive advantage. Accreditation programs provide leverage to help garner trust and legitimacy.

B) Sporting directors and/or candidates can help ensure their future success through ample due diligence during the recruitment process. This entails understanding the sporting and financial sides of a pfc, role responsibilities, and governance structures of a given club. Recruitment processes for top pfc positions are additionally of interest, as these positions may oversee the sporting director. Given that trust factors heavily in established relationships, SD candidates should sift through prior information regarding turnover of key positions, election campaigns, decision-makers, etc. One sporting director referred to the process of board member appointment, concluding that the Spanish process is far more thorough than in Scandinavia. The adage of past actions predicting future actions applies to a pfc when a club has had multiple managers, owners, and/or sporting directors over a previous five-year period. Coupled with due diligence, SDs need to demand more input before accepting a position. One participant stated that he should have been much tougher and not accepted so much interference while another now demands the authority to hire and fire as a precondition for job acceptance. Recommendation two is as follows:

- Conduct ample due diligence of a given pfc, and especially those that sit above the SD in hierarcy. The ability for ownership to trust the sporting director (an employee) is one strength of a proper leader (Gangdal and Angeltveit, 2014) and subsequently, the SD is only able to influence to the degree that ownership is a 'proper leader.'

C) Despite a myriad of SD responsibilities, sporting director effectiveness throughout the club is impacted by the first team. They are the product, and professional football operates as a sporting business. Therefore, SDs should demand greater oversight of the managerial position. Given the manager's importance to on field results (De Paola and Scoppa, 2011), the ability to replace a manager is decisive. The pace of dismissal is quickening in European football (Gammelsaeter, 2013), illustrating the degree to which an irrational decision (from a football perspective) is prevelent industry-wide. The fact that manager termination may include political reasons absolving upper management from responsibility (Nissen & Wagner, 2020) merely displays the degree to which a pfc is exposed to a plethora of logics. Dismissal appears to be an institutionalized policy maximizing job security for those at the apex rather than pursuit of football success. Sacking a manager within 18 months of hire illustrates poor due diligence and ineffective processes. Recommendation three is as follows:

- Present rationale for hiring/firing authority (at best), or for playing a strong role in finding the 'correct' manager (at worst). Accepting a job that limits the power to make managerial (as well as other) decisions inhibits the efficiency of the position and a football clubs' ability to win on and off the pitch.

D) The empirical data pertaining to leadership points to a networking perspective as gaining traction (Parnell et al, 2019), and greater examination of 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) as a manner of competitive advantage. With an ever-increasing organizational complexity, SDs act more as a pfc conduit. Sporting directors with larger networks (by means of accreditation or other experience) are more adept at building networks that enable competitive advantage (Ibid). Leadership is relevant insomuch that the role is assigned particular responsibilities, such as overseeing various departments. For directors in these clubs, delegation skills are vital. When it comes to backing or sacking a manager, leadership is more akin to that of building coalitions.

When a sporting director lacks sole authority, creating consensus with the club's apex becomes critical for enacting or stopping turnover. Candidates must engage personally (before accepting the position) with the club's apex, (e.g., CEO, chair, board members, members, etc.) and address expectations, personality, interpersonal chemistry, and other impactful factors. This should continue during one's tenure to avoid breakdown and frequent misperceptions (Parnell et al, 2019). Benevolence and integrity are characteristics within the trust triad (Mayer et al, 1995), and are often reliant upon interpersonal interactions. Sporting directors need to be cognizant of this when dealing with the pfc apex. Establishing targets, expectations, and demands removes ambiguity that later leads to interference and second guessing. A conceptual understanding of leadership and effective governance is crucial for any SD candidate to build the 'trust trichotomy' (Nissen, 2016) and reduce managerial turnover turnover. Trust between sporting director and club apex is a prerequisite for influencing pfc actions; however, accruing trust is a complex process and even more so when a pfc governance structure allots power to many individuals (member-owned clubs). Therefore, recommendation four is as follows:

- Prioritize personal connections throughout pfc hierarchy before and during tenure (e.g., owner, board, members, manager, etc.) Discuss expectations, targets, responsibilities and roles from the onset in-face-to-face meetings with the club's

apex. Present reasonable demands and rationale behind them. Mutual trust allows those with maximum expertise in respective fields to fulfill particular goals.

8.2 Limitations

This study desired solutions to a commonplace occurance throughout European football, drawing upon empirical data gathered from top Scandinavian clubs. Participants came from a particular European region (known for greater egalitarianism and social welfare), therefore opinions expressed may differ depending on political, social, and economic factors across the continent. In addition, not all club structures in every European country are accounted for in this study. However, all European clubs abide by given UEFA/FIFA guidelines and, therefore, are exposed to similar legislation that provides a baseline from which to view European football. Additionally, only top-flight clubs were selected. The top leagues deal with far larger financial implications and public scrutiny, thereby sporting directors of lower league pfcs may respond differently. Finally, other pfc leaders were not interviewed and therefore interpretations regarding managerial turnover may be seen in another light.

8.3 Further Research

In theory, managerial turnover should decrease if stringent due diligence for managerial hires is put in place. Slowing the merry-go-round in football requires greater academic examination of these selection processes. As the SD occupies a relatively high position on the pfc pyramid, this role is aptly prepared to change ineffective practices in relation to managerial hiring.

9.0 Appendix

9.1 Interview Guide

1) **Introductory questions**

1. What is your title/position at your current club?

2. How did you come into your current role?

3. What are club goals, aims. And your personal aims?

4. What was your previous experience?

- What benefits and/or drawbacks did your previous experience bring to your current position?

2) **Hierarchy**
1. Where is your position in terms of organizational hierarchy?
2. Do you sit on the board? If not, what complications does this present?
3. How does your position sit in relation to the manager?
4. Do you have the power to fire the manager? If not, who holds this power?
5. Have you ever sacked a manager?
6. If so, did you agree with the decision. Explain.
7. Have you made/agreed to decisions that you disagreed with from a footballing standpoint. (i.e., sacking a manager, player transfer, etc.)
8. How does managerial turnover affect your position? Expand. Follow-up questions

3) **Roles and Responsibilities**
1. What is your actual role/responsibilities?
2. Do responsibilities match with expectations before taking the position?
    - How much agency do you have in choosing your responsibilities?
    - Was there any discussion regarding your choosing of managerial hiring/firing during the recruitment process or at beginning of tenure?
    - Did you list any conditions, requirements before taking the position? If not, is there anything you would ask for in hindsight?
3. How do you balance long term footballing vision with a manager's need for short-term success? (i.e.,18-month average)
    - How is relationship with manager? Expand.
4. Does frequent turnover impact your long-term strategies? Coping mechanisms?

4) **Relationships**
1. What is your relationship with the owner? Board members? Club members (when applicable)? Media? Other shareholders, stakeholders?

2. What is most significant relationship(s) in terms of your job functioning and club success? How does their input impact your decision making?
3. What is the background(s) of your significant relationships? Education, experience? Benefits and drawbacks from such?
4. Which pressures are most influential on your position and/or ability to successfully carry out your responsibilities? (Ownership, media, sponsors). Elaborate
5. Do external stakeholders [fans, media] influence your job? Your chairman's (bosses) job and therefore your job? How do you cope? Elaborate
    - How does emotion play into decision making? Coping mechanisms? Social media presence?
6. Are there organizational changes that would allow you to better ignore internal or external pressures that impact your decision making?

5) Actions/Decision making
1. If you believe in a particular policy, individual, etc. in the pfc and superiors do not, how do you go about impacting the pfc strategy and action?
2. What mechanisms do you have to increase your influence and impact decision making? Expand
3. How do you go about implementing such mechanisms? Expand
4. What can the pfc and/or yourself do to make sure the manager is the correct manager? And that a given strategy is the proper one?

6) Final questions
1. How can your position be improved? Internally, externally? What is lacking?
2. What do you know now that you wish you knew before starting position?
3. In five years, time where do you see football moving? And your position moving? And the cycle of managerial turnover?

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