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Organizational Structures and Working Practices in Elite European Professional Football Clubs: Understanding the Relationship between Youth and Professional Domains

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ABSTRACT Professional football clubs are service enterprises engaged in the business of performance, entertainment and financial profit. Developing young players may reap both sporting and financial rewards to clubs, players and football agents. This paper explores the organizational structure and working practices of professional football clubs concerning young player development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with heads of youth development within elite clubs ($n = 26$) across five European countries. The study reveals the presence of organizational homogenization within formal youth structures across Europe. Developing players for first team, player's personal development and financial profit were predominant aims of all youth programmes. Operational differences included roles, responsibility, youth to professional transitions and the dominant presence of a club orientation towards player development ($n = 22$). Lack of proximity and formal communication between youth and professional environments, regardless of structure, led to staff dissatisfaction and appeared to hinder the coherent progression of young players into the professional environment.

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Introduction

Football is an important and well-recognized “element of popular culture” (Parker, 1995, p. 107) that represents a game embraced by millions of people. The public interest and the associated commercialism surrounding the game, has led to professional football clubs operating as service enterprises engaged in the business of performance, entertainment and financial profit (Bourke, 2003; Vaeyens, Coutts, & Philippaerts, 2005). The increased focus on an entertainment and business perspective by European football clubs was influenced by numerous opportunities to earn revenue from media, sponsorship and marketing contracts (Maguire & Pearton, 2000), and the new competition structure and large financial prizes recently made available in Europe (e.g., UEFA Champions League) (Ernst & Young, 2007). For example, the rights to broadcast English Premier League Football matches have increased substantially in the last few years. The seasonal rights revenues, shared equally amongst all the professional clubs, have risen from £49 million in 1996–1997 (Symanski & Kuypers, 1999) to £568 million in 2007–2008 (The Political Economy of Football, 2008).

As business enterprises (Bourke, 2003; Vaeyens et al., 2005), sport organizations (e.g., professional football clubs) must be very competitive on both a sport and a financial level in order to be effective and successful within the growing sports industry (Slack & Parent, 2006). The combined work of all relevant stakeholders of the organization appears to play a key role in achieving the aims and subsequent success of the organization (De Knop, Van Hoecke, & De Bosscher, 2004; Slack & Parent, 2006; Zink, 2005). In this sense, the organization seems to benefit from the enhanced performance of their stakeholders through better and more effective management practices (e.g., organizational structure, quality systems, job/role satisfaction, commitment) (De Knop et al., 2004).

With respect to the football industry, Gammelsæter and Jakobsen (2008) argued that the vast commercialization of the game, and the intensity of such a results- and performance-orientated environment (i.e., a need to win and survive at all costs), will undoubtedly have an impact on a club’s organizational position (e.g., autonomy, goals definition, targets, performance measurements) and subsequent operating culture and philosophy of practice. The opportunity for financial profit has also been seen to influence the recruitment of players to the first team. More and more, clubs appear to favour bringing high profile players into the club in order to obtain immediate results and increase merchandise sales. This proliferation of incoming players was boosted by European Union (EU) legislation allowing the freedom of player movement within the EU, and the Bosman judgement in 1995 that allowed players to move freely to another club at the end of their current contract (Giulianotti, 1999). Such a situation has not only increased salary levels, but the subsequent availability of European-wide talent has reshaped European football through the proliferation of migrant patterns (Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Stead, 2001; Vaeyens et al., 2005). The perceived need to invest in more “finished” or complete players (i.e., a talented young player

who may have been more exposed to high-level meaningful competitive football) (Richardson, Littlewood, & Gilbourne, 2005) suggests a lack of readiness and/or even willingness to prepare the indigenous youth academy players for elite football.

The apparent lack of emerging young talent in the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Federations and the perceived reluctance to invest in youth development programmes by some clubs (Richardson et al., 2005), has become an increasing concern for football's governing bodies. For example, UEFA proposed that by the 2008–2009 season each club participating in UEFA competitions should include in their squad four players from their own academy and four others from clubs of the same national association (UEFA, 2005a). It is anticipated that these new measures, and the increased value of young players, will encourage professional clubs to begin investing more in youth academies, talent identification and development (Reilly, Williams, & Richardson, 2003; Vaeyens et al., 2005; Williams & Reilly, 2000). However, although some talented young players (i.e., playing in youth programmes and national youth squads) are often labelled as future stars, frequently, when they progress to the professional environment, they do not perform or achieve at the level expected of them. With more professional clubs working as business enterprises, it would appear necessary to reduce the risk of investing in youth training (i.e., financial and time-intensive investments) (Gonçalves, 2003). In this regard, it seems that there is a strategic concern over the development of youth players to progress successfully into the professional environment. This paper aims to explore the structure, philosophy and working practices of professional European football clubs, and the subsequent impact on player development.

Literature Review

The Structure and Organization of Football Clubs

It is neither easy nor clear how a club's (or any business enterprise's) structure and organization should be defined. Gammelsæter (2006) reported that there is a lack of empirical research on professional sport organizations and, specifically, on professional football clubs. In this regard, Gammelsæter subsequently explored the application of Mintzberg's (1979) "The structuring of organizations" model within professional football clubs, because

not so much because I am convinced that Mintzberg provides the answers but rather because his book has made his mark on my and later generations of organization researchers. Mintzberg's five configurations still feature as the most complete typology in standard textbooks on organization structure (Gammelsæter, 2006, p. 2).

Mintzberg (1979) identified five key parts of an organization (although not necessarily aligned with sport organizations): operating core, strategic apex, middle line, techno-structure and support staff. Moreover, he

believed that work within these parts was based around one (or more) of the following five mechanisms: mutual adjustment, direct supervision, standardization of work processes, standardization of outputs and standardization of skills. Accordingly, it appears that the stability and effectiveness of organizations is based on notions of order, coherence and consistency (Mintzberg, 1979). Such mechanisms appear to align with similar managerial practices, such as Total Quality Management (TQM). The tenets of TQM aim to increase the organization's quality and success through the participation, satisfaction and commitment of all stakeholders (De Knop et al., 2004). Similarly, the Baldrige National Quality Program's (2009) performance excellence framework, embodies seven categories of good management practice, including: leadership; strategic planning; customer and market focus; measurement, analysis and knowledge management; human resources focus; process management; and business results. These advocates of effective management practice appear to reinforce the idea that organizations will ultimately benefit from the enhanced performance of their employees. To ensure optimal quality for the organizational stakeholders, the supporting managerial processes need to be continually (re)defined with respect to the changing challenges of their respective industry environment (Zink, 2005).

Within organizations, decision-making structures (e.g., executive board, chief executives) are regarded as decisive in the definition of behaviours, interests, goals, priorities, relationships and communication processes (Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1995a). Moreover, executive personnel need to encourage and guarantee stakeholders' full commitment in order to establish and maintain the effectiveness of the organization. Indeed, the shared values and goals of the organization must be clear and accepted by all stakeholders (Slack & Parent, 2006; Wilson, 2001; Zink, 2005). In order to guarantee that all stakeholders know the values and goals of the organization (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005; Woodman & Hardy, 2001), and what is expected of them in terms of contributions towards the aims of the organization (Woodman & Hardy, 2001), the decision-making structure must develop a sound, robust and clear communication system. Woodman and Hardy reiterated such a policy as they maintained that the main workplace stressors include: communication failures, ambiguity regarding the aim of the organization, lack of awareness of people's roles, lack of role structure, and the difficulty in fulfilling two (or duplicate) roles. Moreover, role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload and lack of knowledge and responsibility seem to play an important role in the development of staff satisfaction and performance (Jamal, 1985; Kemery, Mossholder, & Bedeian, 1987; Rabinowitz & Stumpf, 1987; Seegers & van Elderen, 1996). According to Woodman and Hardy (2001, p. 228), the efficiency of an organization is directly associated with clear communication and role clarification: "You can't sort of be united and everyone striving for one goal when everyone seems to be sort of split into different directions so that no one knows what's happening". It seems that a higher level of decision making and more written procedures were positively linked with a better and clearer

communication process (Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002) and, consequently, an increase in the organization's effectiveness (Kimberly & Rottman, 1987).

Governing Bodies' Influence over Clubs

Kikulis, Slack and Hinings (1995b), reported that the high visibility and value of sport world-wide has encouraged governing bodies to pressure sport organizations into assuming a more professional approach to the delivery and design of the sport product (e.g., National Sport Organizations in Canada). In this sense, football (and its structures) has changed considerably during the last few decades. The growing popularity of the game and the new emphasis on economic capital has led clubs to redefine their structures and strategies (O'Brien & Slack, 2003). Specifically, more clubs have turned from a non-profit association to a limited company (e.g., England—1990s; Italy—1960s; Spain—1990s). Some clubs can now be found in stock-market listings, with their club owners being (predominantly) concerned with financial return. The privatization and subsequent re-positioning of the organization's perspective has led to increased concerns from governing bodies, where "... gradually, sporting and ethical values are being eroded under increasing commercial/financial pressures" (UEFA, 2005c, p. 18). Such a business model and perspective demands a more considered appreciation of the (potential) similarities between sport and business organizations (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002).

Through the years, football clubs have frequently been subject to external influences from national and international organizations, and ruling bodies. From a broad European perspective, the influence essentially comes from UEFA. As a result of the incremental player and market movements, following EU legislation and the Bosman ruling, UEFA introduced a club-licensing scheme for the 2004–2005 season, imposing minimum requirements for a club's infrastructure, designated personnel, administration, legal and financial procedures in order for clubs to be able to participate in their competitions (UEFA, 2005b). UEFA believe that such freedom of movement is leading to a lack of local identity with teams (i.e., teams without eligible national players) and the loss of potentially talented youngsters who do not get to play in and/or for their community (UEFA, 2006). In 2005, UEFA released a document called "Vision Europe—the direction and development of European football over the next decade", stating the need to encourage unity and equity amongst all club members of UEFA. Specifically, the document deals with corporate/organizational strategic aspects and not with questions of implementation and/or operationalization (UEFA, 2005c). The concerns posited by UEFA and the subsequent need for clubs to develop and write down strategies appears to align with the effective management practices (i.e., clear, coherent and well-defined strategies, common and transparent interests and aims) outlined earlier (e.g., Kikulis et al., 1995a; Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002; Woodman & Hardy, 2001).

The organizational influence over clubs has not been exclusively reserved for the international governing organizations. At a local level, clubs have also been subjected to the influence of their national governing bodies. In England, The Football Association (FA) Technical Department (1997)

introduced the *Football education for young players: "A charter for quality"*. In essence, the charter's purpose was to provide a more structured approach to player development. Whilst not explicitly documented, the charter was also a response to the increased inward migration of European players (i.e., as a consequence of EU legislation mentioned earlier), and to create more and better young indigenous (home-grown) players. The FA were, in effect, encouraging (or challenging) the clubs to be responsible for developing these players. The *charter for quality* listed specific environmental and operational criteria that were considered essential for appropriate player development (e.g., facilities, staff, medical provision, practice, legislation). Specifically, the FA was attempting to guarantee quality standards and equitable provision and opportunity amongst clubs. In France, the French Football Federation (FFF), together with the Ligue du Football Professionnel (LPF), implemented a similar "quality" model through the adoption of the "Charte du Football Professionnel" (2007). The *Charte* is a document that is updated and released every season to regulate the Academies of French professional football clubs. As in England, the FFF defines requirements for the academies, including facilities, staff, players and efficacy criteria. Each club is then classified and/or grouped into different levels of quality and subsequently receives relative financial support from the FFF. More recently, the Belgium FA, Finnish FA and both the German FA (DBF) and Professional Football League (DFL), recognized the lack of "home-grown" players moving from the academy environment to the professional teams, and the subsequent effect on the future success of professional football clubs. With respect to such concerns, each of these respective football governing bodies have explored and implemented a new programme called Foot Professional Academy Support System (PASS) (Van Hoecke, Schoukens, & De Sutter, 2006; Van Hoecke, Schoukens, Lochmann, & Laudenklos, 2008). The principles of Foot PASS mirror some of the concepts of TQM (e.g., through encouraging coherent and clear (long-term) strategic planning, developing and better preparing the different stakeholders in order to enhance the organization's effectiveness). Specifically, Foot PASS looks to support the implementation of a quality management system within football clubs. In these cases Foot PASS is typically aimed at the youth academies situated within the professional football clubs. The engagement of such a programme by the respective governing bodies suggests a willingness, and need, to emphasize and embrace the importance of a high quality youth academy in the development of home-grown talent, and the subsequent relevance for the club's success in a very competitive environment (Van Hoecke, Schoukens, & De Knop, 2007). Van Hoecke et al. (2006) considered seven dimensions: strategic planning, organizational structure, talent development, supporting activities, internal marketing, external relations and facilities. Typically the results provide advice and guidance for supporting activities (e.g., debates, sessions with club leaders, courses for heads of youth development (HYD), and the publication of a quality manual) to be developed by the respective FA alongside professional advice for the respective HYD (or equivalent). Accordingly,

the authors highlighted that Foot PASS offers clubs (specifically youth departments) a better understanding of the quality of their practices.

The involvement and influence of both national and international governing organizations may lead to the emergence of similar professional structural designs across borders (O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Van Hoecke et al., 2007), cultures, goals, programmes and/or missions. It appears that within and between countries, the clubs' formal structures and aims may become homogenized. This similarity between clubs is particularly noticeable in the mission statements that have emerged from various football academies (or youth development programmes). Generally, clubs identify the need to create an appropriate environment to develop elite players for their first team, or to generate income through the sale of players (Laurin, Nicolas, & Lacassagne, 2008; Richardson, Littlewood, & Gilbourne, 2004). However, whilst similar strategies, structures and organizational hierarchies (influenced by footballing governing bodies) may have emerged, it is important to note that certain local (philosophical and operational) characteristics of practice may prevail (Tempel & Walgenbach, 2007). Considering that each local institution (or club, in this instance) is likely to have its own specific cultural environment (Parker, 2001), and that player development demands an inclusive, appropriate and supportive environment (Richardson et al., 2005), a cross-cultural and comparative exploration of practice may enable a better understanding of the societal system (Holt, 2002), individual practices and cultural terms that exist within a distinct club's subculture (Chick, 2000; Jenkins, 2001; Quarterman & Li, 2003; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999).

This research aims to outline the different organizational structures, working practices and philosophy concerning elite youth player development within professional football clubs across Europe. Moreover, it seems pertinent to explore the later player development years, the nature and harmony of the relationship between the youth and professional departments, and the possible effect of such an interaction on the player's promotion to the professional environment and subsequent inclusion in the first (or starting) eleven.

Professional football is characterized by a heightened level of performance expectation alongside a reduced tolerance for failure (Reilly, Williams, & Richardson, 2008). Additionally, external factors appear to play an important role in enabling a more coherent pathway for the development of the youth player into a professional team. Specifically, an opportunity to play 'meaningful' matches, the absence of injuries, the nature of guidance and training, personal, social and cultural factors ought to be considered (Reilly, Williams, Nevill, & Franks, 2000; Richardson et al., 2005). It seems pertinent to explore the determinants of a suitable environment and their working mechanisms, which may facilitate the process of development to ensure a more successful throughput of players to a higher level. This paper attempts to present similar and distinct elements of structure, philosophy and practice that exist within 26 elite clubs across five European countries. Accordingly, Chick (2000) advocates that cross-cultural comparative studies in sport have immense potential for the understanding of such phenomena in human culture.

Methodology

Twenty-six HYD, Academy Managers (AM) (or equivalent) from elite professional football clubs (i.e., currently playing in the top league of their respective country at the time of interview) across five European countries—England ($n=6$), Portugal ($n=5$), Spain ($n=9$), France ($n=2$) and Sweden ($n=4$)—were interviewed. Interviews (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001) were undertaken by the first author over a period of fifteen months, between February 2006 and May 2007. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide that utilized various phases and topic areas to guide the discussion (Table 1). The interview guide was deductively developed alongside previous literature, conceptual themes and with respect to informal contact with a selection of youth development staff within professional football.

Twenty of the elite clubs were involved in European competitions in the 2005–2006 and/or 2006–2007 seasons. The other six clubs all had previous

Table 1. Summation of the interview schedule

Phase 1—Introduction
Importance and explanations about this interview (expected time, aims, interview structure and reinforce confidentiality).
Phase 2—Youth development club ideals and philosophies
Aims: Break the ice—Subject's sportive background; To explore the HYD role and personal perspectives about the ideal youth coach and player. Club aims, decision-making process, and philosophies regarding youth development (Quartermann & Li, 2003; Richardson et al., 2004; Stratton et al., 2004).
Phase 3—Club's organizational structure
Aim: To explore the organizational structure of the club: facilities, departments, financial issues, staff organization (Quartermann & Li, 2003; Stratton et al., 2004; Williams & Reilly, 2000).
Phase 4—Working practices
Aim: To explore the working mechanisms within the club and the youth club structure: nature of staff relationships, staff development, communication, players' support and recruitment (Holt, 2002; Quartermann & Li, 2003; Reilly et al., 2003; Stratton et al., 2004; Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002; Woodman & Hardy, 2001).
Phase 5—Within-career transition from Youth to Professional environment
Aim: To explore the player's promotion and within-career transition from Youth to Professional environment. Player's characteristics, main barriers and preparation for a successful transition (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Richardson et al., 2004; Stambulova, 2000; van Rossum, 2001; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavalley, 2004; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004).
Phase 6—Psychosocial support and development
Aim: To explore perceptions of psychosocial aspects of the youth development programme, and locate the staff responsible for that process. Clarify the role and practices of the appropriate practitioners responsible for the development of psychosocial competencies (e.g. sport psychologist and/or the head of education and welfare) (Gould, Dieffenbach & Moffett, 2002; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002; Richardson et al., 2004; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004).
Phase 7—End of interview
Clarification and appreciation for their time and knowledge.

European competition experience. Strategic, operational policy and practice documentation for all clubs were collected from a range of secondary sources (e.g., directly from personnel staff and/or through the club's internet site). The football environment is typically and historically a closed environment; one that is normally sceptical about "outsiders" (Parker, 2000). Such scepticism and uncertainty is further heightened when more than one club (in some cases rival clubs) participate in the same research. In this regard, and in order to initially gain access to such environments, it was imperative to offer, and guarantee, confidentiality to each club with regards to data collection, recording and the subsequent presentation of this work.

Face-to-face interviews were transcribed verbatim and (predominantly) deductively analysed using content analysis procedures (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993; Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989). Due to the vast amount of data collected, the data were grouped according to predetermined deductive themes (i.e., evidenced in the interview schedule) and other (more inductive) themes that emerged during the interviews. Emerging themes were subject to within-methods triangulation (McFee, 1992). Data reflecting the relevant themes are presented alongside pertinent verbatim quotes of the respective participants. A tagging system was employed within the data analysis process with relevant themes/headings and associated contextual quotes being representative of the various clubs and countries (i.e., P—Portugal; EN—England; E—Spain; S—Sweden; M referring to the HYD and/or AM, followed by a number that represented the different clubs within the same country. For example P, M1 identified the HYD (or AM) of Portuguese club 1).

Results and Discussion

The following results capture the relevant (but not exhaustive) issues that emerged from the interviews and secondary data collected.

Clubs' Organizational Structures

In the following section the clubs' organizational structures are represented in two phases. First, the general club structure is outlined followed by a subsequent delineation of the youth development structure.

General club structure. It was evident that the clubs operated within one of two distinct general organizational structures. Structure A ($n=18$) identified a "sports director" that appeared to operate as a link between the executive board and what appeared to be two distinct football departments (i.e., youth and professional). Some HYD's ($n=14$) mentioned that the first team is the "engine of the club" and everything else appeared to move around it. In such cases the HYD reported that it was the sports director who was closer to, and more concerned with, the professional department, typically leaving the control of the youth department to the HYD. Most

HYD's ($n=10$) appeared to understand and accept this position. Structure B ($n=8$) also identified an executive board but it appeared to be more directly responsible for both the youth and professional environments. Usually two vice-presidents from the executive board were responsible for the football departments (i.e., one for the youth and another for the professional department). Neither of these distinct organizational structures could be associated with any particular country or culture (Figure 1). Interestingly, the first team manager was identified as the direct line manager to the youth department (i.e., HYD or AM) in only two clubs (one English and one French). In one of the clubs with Structure B, a business manager controlled the professional and youth departments. The business manager tended to control his department as a small enterprise looking not only for sportive performance but also for financial profit.

It appeared that regardless of structural schematics, the HYD was the main person responsible for everything that happened in the youth department; managing a range of personnel and reporting directly to the board or a sports director:

I am responsible for all the youth football administration, and for that I control one big team of professionals from diverse areas. In the end I have to report to the executive board what we have done in the youth department (P, M1).

All clubs presented similar first team and reserve team (or B team) structures; however, in some cases they were located in different departments. For example, in Spain, France and Sweden the reserve teams (Team B and in some cases Team C) were under the supervision of the HYD and were subsequently located within, and managed by, the youth department. The professional department was solely concerned with the first team whilst the youth department embraced all the teams from the reserves down to the youngest playing level. The only exception to this (i.e., within Structure B)

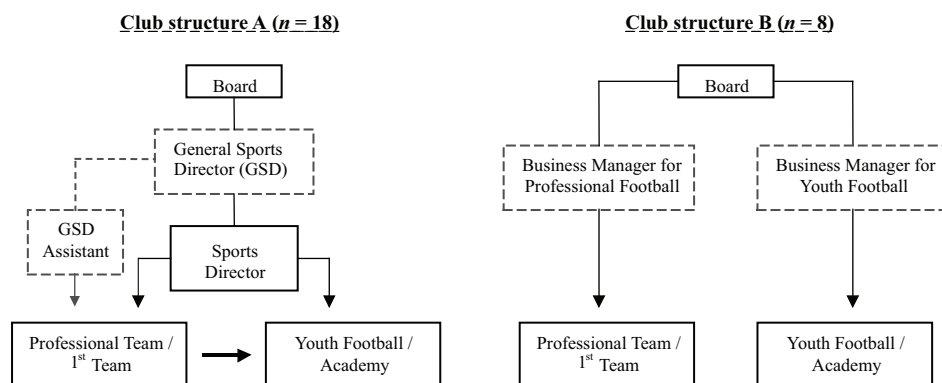


Figure 1. Representation of the two types of club structure evidenced within the 26 clubs across five European countries.

was found in one Spanish club where Team B was located in the professional environment. The reason for this apparent anomaly was that the Team B played in the Spanish Second Division (*Liga Adelante*); a professional league that stipulates that all players must have a professional contract. It was noted that this club also possessed a Team C that was integrated in, and managed by, the youth department. In Portugal, few Team Bs existed, but where they did, they were considered to be part of the youth department. In England the reserve teams (i.e., equivalent to Team B) were all integrated within, and managed by, the professional environment.

After describing the structures that have emerged within this research, it seems pertinent to offer some managerial and/or organizational theoretical context. Considering Mintzberg's (1979) conceptual description of the organization, it is possible to identify and relate the five key parts of the organization with the organizational and development structures emerging within the clubs: strategic apex—chief executive and chairman; middle line—sports director and the coaches; operating core—the players; techno-structure and support staff—all the elements that work within the club and help the daily practice. From a formal perspective, in Structure A, the decision-making power seems to be in the strategic apex of the club. Subsequently, two distinct departments, (i.e., professional and youth) appear to operate at the same hierarchical level (i.e., the first team is not responsible for the youth department). The sports director acts as the intermediate (i.e., a guarantor of communication) between the strategic apex and the other departments. On a daily basis, it appeared that the professional department assumed the priority role, with both the strategic apex and sports director co-habiting within the professional environment. Typically, the youth department, and specifically the HYD, was responsible to the board of directors (i.e., not the first team). In Structure B things appear a little different, with the strategic apex defined by two of its members occupying responsibility roles within each of the football departments (i.e., professional and youth). Within this structure, the first team reports to one member of the board, while the HYD reports to another member of the same board. This structure seems to be associated with a formal distance between the two distinct football departments. Nevertheless, on a daily basis, the working mechanisms, patterns and practice seemed to be dictated more by the different type and character of personnel working within the clubs, than any specific country's and/or club's structural influence. For example, in this research, independently of structure type (and/or location), it seemed that a "distance" existed between the first team and youth environment. This distance could be described as either physical (i.e., two distinct training facilities), cultural (i.e., distinct operational practices) or both. Specifically, three situations were evidenced.

1. When sharing the same training facilities, it appeared that youth and professional departments were located in different physical buildings ($n = 18$). The predominant rationale for this was the perceived requirement to

- “protect” the first team players and to stimulate/motivate the youth players to “fight” to enter into a professional environment.
2. In one club the youth department and the first team shared the same training facilities; however, whilst still appearing to be managed by the youth department, the Team B (or reserve team) resided within the professional environment ($n=1$).
 3. In the third example, first team and youth used different training facilities ($n=7$). This situation, and the consequent (physical) distance between youth and first team, seemed to contribute to the presence of distinct game and operational cultures and some subsequent dissatisfaction amongst the youth staff members as to their association, relationship and in some cases perceived lack of belonging to the first team.

Youth development structure. After offering a general perspective about the clubs’ structure, it appears pertinent to focus on the predominant purpose of this paper and explore the specificity of the youth department structure, the youth development process and the subsequent transition from youth team to first team environments.

As mentioned previously, the measures implemented by some national and international organizations, such as UEFA and/or the National Football Associations, appear to have led to the existence of similar organizational structures or homogeneity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) amongst professional football clubs across Europe. However, within the global organizational structure, distinct sub-organizational or department structures were evident (Figures 2 and 3; see also Gammelsæter, 2006). The majority of the clubs ($n=22$) appeared to favour the identification of different departments (e.g., technical, medical, operations, socio-psychological, educational) similar to that outlined by Stratton et al. (2004). This structure appeared to adopt a more “traditional” hierarchical organizational structure. Each one of these departments had a head of department or designated responsible individual, who answered directly to the HYD. Final decisions were always reserved for the respective HYD: “I have all the responsibility, and I am the one who has to show my face to the board, so I will always have the last word” (E, M5).

Swedish clubs operated with age group personnel teams, including a coach, an assistant coach and one director for the team. Frequently the assistant coach assumed the role of fitness coach. Typically, the club possessed one goalkeeper coach for all of the youth teams (i.e., under 8s through to under 19s). It is important to mention that two of the four Swedish clubs mentioned that they were preparing a restructuring plan for the youth department, which included the change of the structure from age group personnel teams to a department organization structure. Interestingly, in one of the Swedish clubs the players trained in mixed-age groups. For example, the under 21s, under 19s and under 18s trained together with three or four coaches present in each training session.

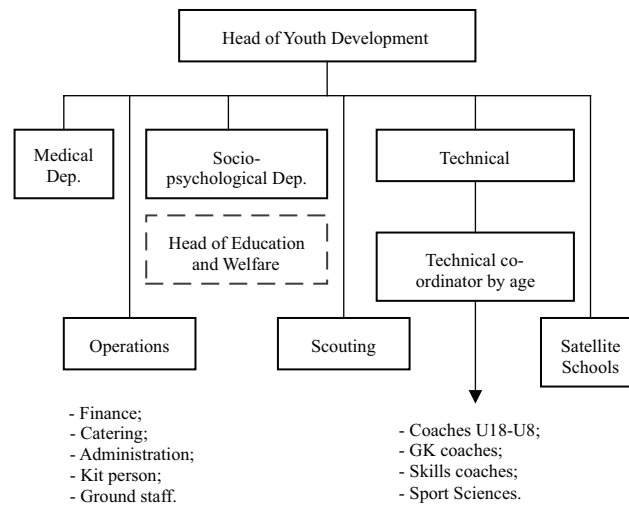


Figure 2. Youth development structure within Portuguese, Spanish, English and French clubs studied.

It was noted that whilst most clubs operated within a similar departmental and/or area of responsibility with similarly named staff, the presence of full-time contractual staff was low (e.g., between two and five full-time youth staff per club). Even in elite clubs, full-time contracted staff appeared to occupy only highly responsible positions, such as the HYD, technical co-ordinator and/or fitness co-ordinator. In the main the coaches were part-time; however, when full-time coaches were employed they were usually associated with the top-age youth teams and also tended to assume other “generic” and strategic responsibilities, for example the role of technical co-ordinator, alongside their role as a coach:

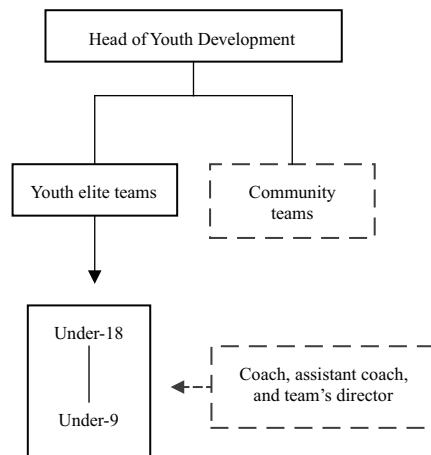


Figure 3. Youth development structure in the Swedish clubs studied.

... the coaches have their work and then they come here, because the club cannot afford to pay a coach to be full-time. The coach of Team B is full time, and I don't think that it's necessary to employ anyone else ... it's not worth it (E, M4).

Such a part-time existence may impact an individual's dedication, commitment and time spent in the club. Similarly, a part-time, short-term contract may also hinder an individual's ability to develop coaching practices and may be associated with heightened levels of role/job insecurity. From the 26 clubs, only four (two French and two Spanish) presented a full-time professional youth structure, where all the youth staff had full-time contracts: "... in the youth football we have created a structure, let's say very professional compared to an amateur level" (E, M6). In Sweden, the Swedish FA provides financial support to the clubs in order for them to have at least one full-time coach between the ages of 16 and 19 years. However, in order to receive such financial support, the clubs must guarantee good training facilities, have players on youth national teams and deliver reports to the Swedish FA concerning their work developed at the club (e.g., development of practices and players). Moreover, these coaches, supported by the Swedish FA, must attend continual professional development programmes every year to maintain their coaching practice.

As noted previously, each club identified similar youth staff positions. However, their specific operational roles and responsibilities appeared to vary slightly within each club. Indeed, each club was a "hostage" to a particular way of working according to the distinct practitioner skill base, philosophy and culture of the club. It seems pertinent to highlight some significant practice variations. The HYD's tended to adopt either a more managerial and strategic role or a more "hands-on" operational and practical approach: "an academy manager can just be coaching all the time, or can be sat at a desk all of the time, and some are in the middle" (EN, M4); "due to the club's particular culture, the academy manager's background, experiences, and expectations, he might structure his job to what actually suits his weaknesses and strengths" (EN, M1). Similarly, coaches adopted different approaches. In some clubs the coaches came to the club only to manage a team, while in others they also assumed other responsibilities, such as coaching groups of players according to their field position: "there's one exclusive day that we work by lines, and there's a coach from one of our teams that assumes the training responsibility" (E, M3), or watching some players and acting also as a scout: "the coach during the weekend must see four, five or six matches, where they do a report that refers to some interesting players" (E, M6).

According to Skinner (2005), individual behaviour may affect the group phenomenon and organizational environment, although behaviour can become organizationally socialized (Potrac et al., 2002) and subsequently influenced by the culture and practice of others within the same environment. This might explain why, within similar formal structures, different practical and/or operational approaches existed in different clubs. Whilst distinct individual working practices amongst different club environments

may be evident, even expected, it is pertinent and good management practice, for each environment to be aware of its own purpose and for the management (e.g., HYD) to guide, manage and/or control the direction of the youth environment to ensure effective practice and, ultimately, generate role satisfaction within and between all the staff members within the structure. Moreover, it is necessary to clearly define the organizational structure, responsibility and authority (Rogers, Li, & Ellis, 1994) to avoid role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload and lack of knowledge and responsibility (Jamal, 1985; Seegers & van Elderen, 1996). Surprisingly, the majority of clubs ($n=19$) did not appear, or at least were unable to articulate, a clear (or at least explicit) and/or well-defined list of roles and responsibilities for all of their staff. However, almost all HYD's recognized the importance of such strategic and operational procedures, and the need to create guidelines as soon as possible.

In summary, an apparent similarity in the formal (general) club structures and youth development departments existed amongst all clubs. These similarities existed independently of country and/or culture. Despite this similarity in their formal structures, the working practices seemed to vary from club to club, mainly due to the different practitioners' responsibilities, skill base and the specific culture associated with each particular environment.

The Purpose of a Youth Development Programme

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of emerging young talent in UEFA Federations and an apparent reluctance to invest in youth development programmes, which has caused measures from national and international organizations to be introduced. Given UEFA's requirement that, for the 2008–2009 season and beyond, each club should include in their squad four players from their own academy and four others from clubs of the same national association (UEFA, 2005a), it was relevant to explore the clubs' aims for youth football.

All clubs ($n=26$) made it abundantly clear that the predominant aim of the youth development programme was to develop players for the first team. In line with the sentiments of Bourke (2003), Laurin et al. (2008), Richardson et al. (2004), and Williams and Richardson (2006), all clubs recognized other benefits of the development process, such as the player's personal development, and the potential for financial reward:

... two fundamental points ... develop players to feed our professional team ... have a positive impact at the personal and social development of the youngsters. We could have here a third one, but it is not possible in our market, to make worth (profit) with the sales to others clubs in a national market (P, M1).

Stratton and colleagues (2004, p. 201) stated that “academies aspire to develop players for the first team or (at least) generate income through the sale of ‘marketable assets’ ..., and also develop the ‘whole’ individual”.

Only the Swedish clubs offered a sense that their purpose was to develop players for the Swedish national side:

The big aim is to have 50% of the professional squad coming from the academy, the second is to help Swedish football to develop because we can't live by ourselves here in our club, we have to be involved in a good Swedish soccer environment. We also have to contribute to the Swedish soccer development. The third goal is that the players that are here in the academy, will remember our academy as the best time in their life (S, M1).

It seems that all the clubs intend to develop and promote players from their youth environment to the first team. Surprisingly, four HYD's stated that they did not even know about the new changes from UEFA: "We don't know anything about the changes from UEFA" (E, M3). The majority of the clubs ($n=22$) said that they would not make any changes to their practice, as they perceived that they were doing a good job already and that they already had the number of players required by UEFA in their first team:

No changes ... We believe that we are going in the right way ... From youth we have five [players in the first team], because the exigency in the first division is high ... slowly we intend that the youth football player go up, first because we want to help the first team and then to give a meaning to the youth (E, M4).

Six HYD's also welcomed UEFA's intervention typically stating it as a motivational measure: "I see it has a perfect idea, because it's going to give motivation to the players... they know that they will have to fight, it is going to depend on them" (E, M3). Four other HYD's stated that UEFA's intervention would also reinforce and secure their position within the club and in the eyes of the executive board: "I think it's the best thing that could have happened, because it reinforces our work with the directors and the people that run the clubs that it's got some value" (EN, M3).

The results evidence a general consensus as to the aim of the clubs' youth development programmes: to develop players for the first team, contribute to the player's personal development and obtain financial profit through the sale of players. The Swedish clubs were the only ones to present a more national orientation towards the development of their players (i.e., the desire to help develop Swedish football and the Swedish national side).

Organizational Working Mechanism and Communication

After outlining the existing permutations for an elite club's organizational structure, alongside the location and aims of the respective youth development programmes, it seems pertinent to explore the established communication and player development processes and/or pathways operating between the two environments. As noted previously, the results identified physical and cultural distance between the youth and first team environments. Similarly, three distinct operating practices appeared to exist within these environments.

1. One where the older youth team players (i.e., under 18s) trained in the same facilities as the first team ($n = 16$). However, this did not necessarily mean that the youth teams trained alongside and/or even at the same time as the first team: “If we train in the same place as the first team it would be possible for the first team coach to look to the youth training and observe some players, but training in different places [shakes head in disapproval]” (P, M1).
2. The contact between the youth and professional environment was coordinated through the sports director with no apparent “direct” contact between the HYD and the first team manager ($n = 12$): “If the sports director thinks that a player is ready to go further, the first team coach doesn’t need to have all the decisions” (E, M1).
3. In some clubs it seemed that there was no regular or formal contact between the first team and the youth environment ($n = 10$). A lack of regular and/or formal contact was even more evident in the seven clubs where the first team and youth environments existed in different geographical/physical locations.

One HYD offered a sense of the reality that he had experienced within the youth development programme:

A perfect situation (for me is) where the first team and the academy they all speak a lot, they all watch players, they all sit down ... The reality for me, is that will probably never happen because of the demands at the first team level, they really just don’t have the time (EN, M1).

Importantly, such different organizational practices seemed to be independent from the general club structure. It appears that it is not the general club structure that dictates working practice; rather, it is the way in which practice is operationalized that affects the relationships and communication networks that evolve and exist between the professional and youth departments. Typically, relationships and practice are culturally specific and traditionally entrenched. For example, even when sharing the same training environment, the communication between the youth and the professional environments was not always regular, informative and/or effective. It was perceived that an apparent lack of communication and/or the apparent inconsistency of the contact (i.e., between the youth and the first team environments), especially in the third scenario, seemed to contribute to the appearance of different game cultures (e.g., attacking versus defensive strategies, a passing style versus a long ball style) within the same club: “the youth area has a strategy, has a model, has a philosophy and the professional football has another model, another strategy and another philosophy” (P, M5), and some consequent dissatisfaction within the staff members: “if there’s no communication and interest, what are we doing here, where are we going?” (E, M4). Such examples of discord and discontent support the need to postulate that a good communication process is important for a successful organization and subsequently enhances staff

satisfaction (Kimberly & Rottman, 1987; Weinberg & McDermott, 2002; Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002).

According to Woodman and Hardy (2001), it is important that all members of the organization are aware and strive towards a common goal, and that it is necessary to encourage precise, clear and direct communication between all levels of management to avoid misunderstandings about the common goal (Rinke, 1997). However, it seems that at least between the first team and the youth department, communication is dependent on the first team coach's perception of the value of the academy or youth department: "With some [first team managers] communication is good and with others there's no communication ... it's going to depend on them (the first team manager)" (E, M3). The results indicated that, in a formal structural sense at least, the first team manager was the direct line manager of the HYD in only two out of the 26 clubs: "I'm in communication with the first team manager. It's a flat, horizontal organization" (EN, M3). In some clubs, it was apparent that even without the existence of a formal structural relationship and/or proximity between the first team manager and the HYD, when they did share the same environment it was possible to witness informal and *ad hoc* discussions between the first team manager and HYD: "The coaching staff of the academy and the first team get changed in the same room every morning, so there's constant feedback and communication about who is doing well, who is progressing" (EN, M4).

The results evidenced three positions of communication between the professional and youth football environments operating within the clubs: (a) training in the same facilities as the first team, (b) all contact through the HYD and/or the sports director, and (c) no regular formal contact. This "perceived" lack of communication and/or inconsistency of contact seemed to contribute to the appearance of different "game cultures", and some consequent dissatisfaction within the staff members. Informal and *ad hoc* organizational practices existed independently of any formal organizational structure. Such loose (and informal) management practices appear to be an endemic part of football culture and are not unique to one particular country or club (see Parker, 2000).

Conclusion

The results indicated that all the clubs presented similar formal structures, creating a sense that management practice and organizations were being homogenized. Such organizational homogenization is similar to notions reported by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). However, despite the concerns over homogenized structures (and subsequently practice), it appears that there was no evidence of specific philosophies, structures and/or working mechanisms towards youth development that were unique to any one particular country. Moreover, even within apparently similar organizational structures, it was possible to identify some differences within the organizational practices (e.g., the role and responsibility of the practitioners, the presence, function and operationalization of the reserves/B teams), the pragmatics of the transition

from youth to the professional environment, communication mechanisms (e.g., first team/youth environment), and the dominant presence of a more club orientation towards the development of young players (i.e., only in Sweden did they offer a more national orientation).

Despite the clubs' formalized organizational structure, an apparent lack of communication exists between the first team and youth environments. Typically, the first team manager seems to operate aside from the youth development process of young players. However, at this stage, it was not possible to determine whether such a position was a consequence of the club's organization and philosophies, or if it was a conscious decision by the first team manager himself. This apparent gap between the first team and the youth environments acts as an additional barrier to the player's progression to the first team: "if the first team coach doesn't have the minimal worry in watching the kids, he will never know what he might have there" (P, M1). All the clubs noted that the main objective of their youth development programme was to develop players for their first team. However, considering the noticeable distance (i.e., physical and/or cultural) and lack of communication between the youth and professional environments, it might be interesting to reflect on the youth programmes, the club's true aims and the subsequent effect that this communication gap may have on the coherent progression of young players into the first team environment. Typically, the clubs' were a hostage to such poor relationships and/or communication between these environments, or, as one Spanish HYD described:

sometimes I don't know what we are doing here. We develop good players but our first team manager doesn't take them, so they go freely to others clubs that then come here to beat us ... with our own former youth players! (E, M4).

Future Directions

The findings of this paper evidence the existence of some structural homogenization concerning the formal organizational structures of elite football clubs. However, the reality of operational and philosophical positioning and subsequent practice varied amongst clubs. In some cases, the lack of formal communication between the first team and youth environments, regardless of structure, appeared to hinder the coherent progression of young players into the first team environment.

Future research should attend to the specific training and supportive conditions experienced by young players as they travel through these environments (see also Helsen, Hodges, Van Winckel, & Starkes, 2000; Volossovitch, 2003). In this regard a more in-depth exploration of the players' day-to-day experiences and subsequent preparation for their most difficult transition from youth to professional football environment is required.

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