

# WOMEN IN HIGH PERFORMANCE COACHING

Understanding the environment  
around women & their experiences in  
developmental programs

SenseMaker Insights

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# WOMEN IN THE SPORT ENVIRONMENT

## Introduction

The Women in High Performance Coaching (WiHPC) project aims to examine the coaching system at an individual, interpersonal, organisational, and sociocultural level to understand the incentives, motivations and barriers encountered by women coaching in the Australian sport system.

This report focuses on a survey of positive and negative experiences from women in high performance coaching, aiming to gather contemporary normative data from the Australian high performance sport system on the systemic and cultural forces that impact women coaches in their environments. This information will be used to support the development of future initiatives for the WiHPC.

## Cohort

106 women, across 33 sports coaching at city, regional, state, national and international representative levels participated in the survey. The minimum level coaching experience was set at a representative level.

## Survey Design

The survey was hosted through a SenseMaker platform, designed in conjunction with Cognitive Edge. Survey questions were developed through the following steps:

- **5 one-on-one interviews.** These were used to dive deeply into the array of factors facing women when coaching in high performance environments;
- **3 workshops.** Outcomes from these interviews shaped 3 workshops, which were used to contextualise these factors relative to a larger coaching community.

## Insights

This survey identified six overarching insights across all qualitative and quantitative questions, for both positive and negative experiences.

1. **Behavioural issues are present at individual level and system levels.** Behavioural issues acted out against women coaches were noted consistently, including biases, poor conduct, aggressive behaviours, bullying and harassment.
2. **To create champion women coaches, we need to see women coaches.** Having women visually within sport roles is important for the development of future coaches in the sporting system. Despite this, difficulties prohibit women from staying in the sport industry, leading to a lack of women in the system.
3. **Making change will be complex, context dependent and individual.** Participants varied in terms of the type of change that they wanted to see in the future. Some participants identified change being necessary at the individual stakeholder level, particularly in the context of biases against women, with other participants more focused on making change at the system and organisation levels.
4. **Experience shapes perception, as well as need.** Consideration must be given to women coaches with less experience to create supportive environments as they begin their coaching journeys, with earlier coaches more likely to value concepts like mentoring, guidance and support as start their coaching careers.
5. **Women seek challenge, opportunity & autonomy.** As women coaches become more experienced, they require the same opportunities as men to be recognised and succeed. Women need exposure to everything in an effort to grow and develop (i.e. leading national programs, coaching members of the opposite gender, etc.).
6. **Coaching is personal and a part of identity.** As coaches become more experienced, intrinsic motivators become an important part of the role, including focuses on personal connection to athletes and a personal sense of self achievement.

# WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

## Introduction

This report focuses on a survey evaluating the role and function of women's only development programs for women coaches and managers, to better understand the nuance and difference that these programs provide in supporting the development of women in sport. The findings will be contextualised relative to responses from men, and also women who participated in mixed gender programs. This information will be used to support the development of future initiatives for the WiHPC and women coaches.

## Cohort

156 participants, across 44 sports participated in the survey. Participants were majority high-performance coaches, but also included managers and performance support staff.

## Survey Design

The survey was hosted through a SenseMaker platform, designed in conjunction with Cognitive Edge. Survey questions were developed through direct consultation with stakeholders from the AIS High Performance Coaching group.

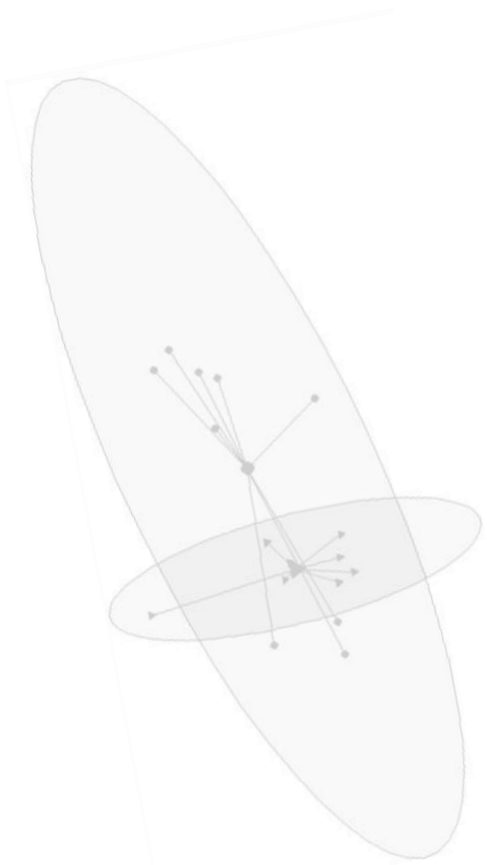
## Insights

1. **Connection was integral, independent of gender or learning environment.** Connection was the most dominant theme, with the context for why varying at the level of the individual.
2. **There are subtle differences between gendered and ungendered learning environments for women.** Women in programs with men viewed impact in terms of pragmatic outcomes, like using connection for personal growth and finding tools to elicit change. Connection was viewed differently, as a mechanism of inspiration for women in gendered programs.
3. **Importance of connection, safety and support is real as a part of the female experience.** Whether determined through the outcomes of narratives through traditional qualitative methods, or identified as key themes through natural language processing, connection for safety and support was a unique characteristic of women's experiences.

4. **Other factors beyond gender have role in explaining differences in perception.** Participants held different levels of system experience, and also participated in different time windows (i.e. COVID19), with these factors influencing the nuance of perceived program impact.
5. **Continuity is key... and expansion is better.** Future programs would benefit greatly from running for a longer period of time to stimulate continued development. Additionally, providing accessibility to connect with other peers outside of programs would be of value.
6. **Opportunities is a major issue for everyone.** Despite the benefit of programs on individual development, one consistent issue was the difficulty in implementing learned knowledge into practice, given the lack of opportunities (particularly for progression) in the system.
7. **There are different types of responders, due to latent factors (we can't see).** Different exploratory machine learning methods identified different "response groups," independent of gender, experience and timing of programs. This indicates that other hidden factors may be influencing program needs, and these should be further explored for program refinement.
8. **There were very strong trends at the cohort level.** Despite there being different response groups, there were very stable trends across all participants indicating some areas of fast opportunity for system changes across all genders.
9. **Diversity of perspective creates learning.** The diversity of experience was an integral part of the learning process for participants, with the face-to-face connection serving as a powerful mechanism for personal growth.

## Considerations for Developing Future Programs

1. **There is a need for learning environment options for gender.** The function of gendered programs for women carries a unique and necessary function that should be preserved.
2. **There is a need to understand "who" would benefit from being in a given learning environment.** It is clear that some women will benefit more from gendered environments, while other women will benefit more from programs with men as fellow participants. Building a process to link women with the right program for their individual needs should be a focus of future programs.
3. **New programs should explore continuity and expansion.** Regardless of gender, some key considerations for future programs are related to provision of more time for development, and also building towards the development of a larger expanded community of practice.



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