

Women in high performance coaching

SenseMaker Survey Report and the “Big 6”



Better understanding the challenges faced by women in elite sports coaching in Australia and how to increase the number of women in elite sports coaching in Australia

Overview

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 sport system. This survey forms an integral part of gathering data to better understand these system factors.

Objectives

This current SenseMaker survey project has two key objectives:

- Collect and collate contemporary normative data from the Australian high performance sport system, to better understand the context surrounding women coaching in Australia, and support the development of future initiatives for the WiHPC.
- Explore, summarise and diagnose the systemic and cultural forces that impact on the coaching system utilising a mixed methods survey, including narratives from experiences within sport.

Participant group



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

Survey

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.

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Insights

1

Behavioural issues are present at individual level and system levels

- Subtle biases were noted for challenges women face in sport while coaching including poor conduct, aggressive behaviour, and bullying and harassment.
- There were also a set of behaviours often acted out against women present across a range of role holders in the sport system inclusive of parents, athletes, other coaches and other staff.

2

To create champion women coaches, we need to see women coaches

- Having women visually within roles in sport is important for the development of future coaches in the sporting system.
- There are difficulties for women in terms of balance and flexibility and accessibility to the right resources for coaching. These difficulties are prohibiting 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

- The focus of change varied across participants. One group focused more closely on change being required at the individual level, particularly in the context of biases against women.
- These differences in response are important and may speak to subtle individual differences in the problems faced within certain sport or organisational contexts.

4

Experience shapes perception, as well as need

- Consideration must be given to coaches with less experience to create a supportive environment as they start begin their journey.
- Earlier career coaches were more likely to see empowerment of coaches as important, valuing mentoring from older coaches and recognition from peers as validation of progress. These were notably different from mid career to experienced coaches.

5

Women seek challenge, opportunity & autonomy

- Women require the same opportunities as men to be recognised and succeed. Women need exposure to everything in an effort to grow and develop.
- This was demonstrated in a thirst for autonomy. This could be the challenge of leading a sporting program, coaching members of the opposite gender, and the ability to operate without instruction.

6

Coaching is personal and a part of identity

- As women coaches become more experienced, intrinsic motivators become much more noticeable.
- For more experienced coaches there was a strong focus on a personal sense of self achievement, indicating a need to satisfy internal drivers of motivation. Any future development opportunities should aim to incorporate these drivers.

Narratives of Positive Experiences

