



Indigenous player inclusion in the Australian Football League

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Indigenous player inclusion in the Australian Football League (AFL)

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to audit the efforts made around the support of Indigenous players within the Australian Football League (AFL).

Design/Methodology/Approach: Content analysis of the publically available information on websites of organizations associated with the AFL was undertaken to identify the extent of programs and policies around Indigenous representation, inclusion, and development.

Findings: The AFL, as an organization, has a high percentage of Indigenous players (employees) in comparison to the wider Australian workforce representation. Largely, Indigenous representation within the AFL is merit based, prioritized on an individual's ability to play football at an elite level. The website audit identified a number of inconsistencies in the public personas portrayed by the AFL and organizations aligned to it such as the AFL Players Association (AFLPA) and clubs. The findings raise a number of questions for future research.

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation is that the website audit represents a very small insight into the current situation and does not provide a depth of analysis into the circumstances around Indigenous inclusion within the AFL. The audit also is very focused on one sporting organization which may or may not be representative of the sport industry.

Originality/value: The research introduces a number of questions for future discovery.

Keywords: Indigenous, Website Audit, Australian Football League, Inclusion, Diversity

Research paper

Introduction

The acknowledgment that diversity in a workplace can drive creativity and potentially competitiveness is a growing area of research (Davis, Frolova and Callahan, 2016), highlighting how diversity management can address inequality or discrimination at work (Knights and Omanovic, 2016). Human resource management (HRM) has long held the idea that diversity within the workplace will drive greater overall organizational performance if managed effectively (Qin, Muenjohn and Chhetri, 2014). Human resource (HR) managers are recognizing the importance of diversity for their own workplaces, and as such businesses now promote through diversity and inclusion policies, the need for diverse workplaces. While some businesses are beginning to specify exact numbers associated with Indigenous ratios in the workplace (Australia Post – Hopkins 2016), others are developing ways in which to attract a greater number of Indigenous applicants (Brereton and Parmenter, 2008).

Sport is one industry that has a high level of minority representation, particularly within its playing ranks. Bimper and Harrison (2011) identified that African American athletes participating in the major football and basketball competitions in the US represent nearly 47-77% of all participating athletes. While people from different ethnic, cultural and religious minorities are highly represented in the playing ranks, there are significant inconsistencies and under representation of all minorities as coaches and in leadership positions within sport (Bradbury, 2013). Within the Australian sporting landscape there has been a strong Indigenous representation across many sports, and in particular within the Australian Football League (AFL). Investigating this strong player representation alongside more contemporary notions of inclusion, will hopefully provide a first step in developing a picture of Indigenous representation within elite sporting organizations.

The AFL has a high percentage of Indigenous players (employees), identifying as an example of an organization that employs and offers participation opportunities to football players based purely on their abilities and merits. Player representation within the AFL has held around the 9-13% mark consistently for a number of years (AFL, 2015). This contrasts with the percentage of Indigenous population in Australia being approximately 3% (ABS, 2013). Indigenous players are employed by their respective football clubs to play football on a full-time basis and for all intents and purposes are categorized as employees.

The aim of this paper is to begin to examine the area of Indigenous inclusion in the AFL and attempt to determine how many Indigenous players were employed within the AFL beyond their scope as a player, what opportunities or roles are provided, and what policies or procedures were being implemented. In a business where inclusion is merit based, there are lessons to be learnt for wider business. In aiming to build this understanding it is first necessary to audit the current representation of Indigenous efforts throughout the AFL, AFL Players Association (AFLPA) and Clubs. The paper does this through examining the publically available information on AFL, AFLPA and Club webpages associated with Indigenous representation, diversity, inclusion, and development. In doing this, the paper was able to identify that while well represented within the playing ranks, a number of inconsistencies in the public personas portrayed by the AFL and clubs were evident with respect to leadership opportunities, raising a number of questions for future research.

Workplace Diversity and Inclusion

The recognition within the HRM literature that diversity enhances outcomes is well developed. Diversity is recognized as the composition of groups or workforces (Roberson, 2006), categorized into gender, race, religion, country of birth, sexual orientation and disability by way of examples (Shore et al., 2009). Through organizational efforts recognizing and valuing diversity, Ewoh (2013, p. 112) argues organizations “will see more successful team and individual work outcomes”. Where structured diversity management exists, Mavin and Girling (2000) argue that employees will give their best, be more innovative, and provide better customer service. They suggest that overall, the indirect benefits of diversity for both employees and organizations lie in a better public image; “improved staff relations, job satisfaction and staff morale, increased productivity, and improved competitive edge” (Mavin and Girling, 2000, p. 422). Organizations are likely to gain financially from a strengthened competitive advantage through more productive and innovative team-based work structures when diversity in all its forms is valued; particularly when employees feel included and recognized for their unique talents, knowledge and abilities (Ewoh, 2013).

Diversity as a management practice has evolved, so too has its associated contemporary notions of ‘inclusiveness’ (Ewoh, 2013; Guillaume et al., 2013). An inclusive organization is grounded in cultural norms and values and demonstrates efforts to create respectful inclusive environments that nurture the potential employee differences held to achieve high levels of performance (Qin et al., 2014). However, Podsiadlowski (2014) argues that inclusion research has reached conclusions which indicate considerable disparity, supported by Shore et al. (2009, p. 1263) who stated this disparity is “without consensus on the nature of this construct or its theoretical underpinnings”. Definitions of inclusion have referred to “acceptance”, or “being

treated as an insider: (Pelled, Ledford and Mohram 1999, p. 1014), “the removal of obstacles to participation” (Roberson, 2006, p. 217), a sense of “belonging and inclusive behaviors” within an organisation (Lirio et al, 2008, p. 151), and an “effort to involve all employees in the mission and operation of the organization” (Avery et al., 2008, p. 6).

Inclusion extends beyond simply recognizing differences, and can present as an organizational commodity (Exchange Value – Bowman and Ambrosini, 2000), empowering individuals towards making a valid contribution and feeling part of the process within the organization (Bilimoria, Joy, and Liang, 2008; Roberson, 2006). In this sense, inclusiveness can be demonstrated through non-discriminatory recruitment and selection processes, higher levels of problem solving, decision-making, creativity and innovation, and more flexible work scheduling (Herrera et al., 2013). Otten and Jansen (2015, p. 74), define inclusion as “the degree to which an individual perceives that the group provides him or her with a sense of belonging and authenticity”. These authors press the need for organizational policies and practices that allow employees to develop a social identity coherent with a sense of organizational belonging, and a personal identity that can flourish, rather than be stifled, within organizational work environments.

Given the significant representation of Indigenous players within the AFL, AFLPA and clubs, aiming for inclusion for the benefit of all players should be a strategic choice with both direct and indirect outcomes. Inclusivity should support the development of socially connected individuals who are involved and active contributors to their sport and club, where the individuals can feel safe to voice their concerns (Roberson, 2006).

This will only happen where individuals feel they are supported, and in situations where they do not feel supported they will likely remain silent (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003). From a social exchange perspective (Blau 1964), individuals engender feelings of obligation, trust and gratitude to the organization because of the service provided to them (Agarwala 2003). If diversity and inclusion mechanisms are activated then there is a greater likelihood that those directly impacted will feel a sense of support and be better placed to exert more on behalf of the organization.

Inclusiveness becomes critical as a social support mechanism for culturally diverse and more specifically Indigenous players. Nicholson, Hoye and Gallant (2011) found that social support is critical for Indigenous footballers in Australia. They argue that Indigenous teammates provide the most support, but the Clubs have a long way to go in understanding the cultural support necessary for these Indigenous players. In fact, the social connectedness; to others and to country, was a significant attribute found by Rossi and Rynne (2014) in sporting groups that involved Indigenous participants.

As such, many organizations recognize the need to manage diversity within the workplace as an important business imperative (Roberson, 2006). “Properly implemented policies that promote workplace diversity can result in an improved bottom line; increased competitive advantage; superior business performance; higher levels of employee satisfaction and loyalty; a strengthened relationship with multicultural communities, and attracting the best and the brightest candidates” (Davis et al. 2016 p. 81). While much of the initial focus on managing diversity has tended to be on recruitment, education, training and mentoring in order to retain heterogeneity in the workforce, there has been an increased emphasis on broader programs supporting

inclusion through removing barriers that block employees from using their full range of skills and competencies (Roberson, 2006). Professional sport represents one area where athletes have been encouraged to develop their full potential within the workplace.

To ensure diversity management initiatives are part of an organizations culture, Davis et al. (2016, p. 81) states that equal employment opportunities (EEO) need to be embedded into the organizations business practices, suggesting that “organizations need to provide EEO throughout the employee work life-cycle to both prospective and existing employees”. This suggests that the employee work life-cycle of the professional athlete must be viewed not only from the time period that they participate as a professional athlete, but following into the next phase of their career. If that might involve an athlete seeking to be involved in leadership roles within (or even outside of) the sport, then the business practices need to support this, thus making diversity management practices an integral part of the organisation (Davis et al. 2016). Maxwell (2004) identified that following the introduction of policies to establish greater workforce diversity, the subsequent, and broader challenge becomes effectively managing that diversity, to the extent that failing to consciously manage workplace diversity could in fact be counterproductive (Hur, 2013; Sabharwal, 2014).

Managing diversity can significantly impact on the public persona of the company and its reputation (Cook and Glass, 2014; Mavin and Girling, 2000). The corporate persona of an organization can be referred to as “a rhetorical notion in which a corporation communicates ‘who’ it is” (Nelson et al., 2014, p. 180). Business and organizational research has delved into how the organization is composed of many individuals yet

appears to speak with a collective voice or corporate personality (Gioia et al., 2010; King et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2014). It is argued that the reputation forthcoming from an organization will impact on a person's attitudes towards the organization and their subsequent loyalty (Bauer et al., 2008).

In the case of the AFL, diversity and inclusion based initiatives have the potential to contribute to the public persona of the organization. For the AFL and associated clubs, how they publically address diversity generally, and more specifically for Indigenous inclusion, affords the opportunity to increase the public's awareness of such initiatives. While some Australian organizations are active in building an inclusive culture (Brereton and Parmenter, 2008; Daly, Gebremedhin and Sayem 2013), currently, the Indigenous population in Australia is 3%, but the current workforce is only composed of 1.7% Indigenous aboriginals (ABS, 2013; Hopkins, 2016). This indicates that there is still a long way to go to achieve diversity in organizations.

The Australian Football League (AFL)

The AFL officially formed in 1990, derived from the existing Victorian Football League (VFL). The VFL was established in 1896 to represent professional football clubs in the State of Victoria. It comprised 12 teams based in the State of Victoria but was struggling for relevance into the 1980s, and it was determined that there was a need for nationalisation of the competition, alongside economic restructuring. Through a series of club relocations and expansion teams in the period from 1982, there are currently 18 teams represented in a truly national competition, spanning five states, and overseen by a central administrative body.

The expansion of the AFL has secured a wider market for its product, which in turn has enabled the league to command greater revenue from broadcasting rights, corporate sponsorship and marketing activities. The result has seen total revenue climb from \$AUD20.6 million in 1986 - the year before the entry of teams from Perth and Brisbane - to exceed \$AUD494 million in 2015 (AFL, 2015). Total spectator attendance rose from 5.4 million people in 1994 to over 6.5 million in 2015, and broadcast interest in the league has grown with the Grand Final attracting an average audience in mainland capital cities of more than 3.5 million viewers nationally (AFL, 2015).

AFL and Indigenous Development

Indigenous participation in the AFL was often associated with racial abuse and on-field sledging. However, in 1993, the United Nations Year of Indigenous People, the AFL actively recognized and initiated redress towards reconciliation for Indigenous players (Gorman et al., 2015; Judd and Butcher, 2016; Philpott, 2016). The introduction of Racial and Religious Vilification prohibitions, at the time Rule 30 (now Rule 35), endorsed sanctions to address on-field racial abuse (Gorman et al., 2015; Judd and Butcher, 2016). The introduction of a racial vilification code, alongside incorporation of Indigenous-themed events and celebrations points towards an organization attempting to position itself as a sports body visibly committed to the politics of reconciliation (Philpott, 2016).

While the AFL is certainly attempting to develop its persona within the Indigenous space, it has certainly not been without its detractors in its pursuit of this. Hallinan and Judd (2009) highlighted how the AFL sees its role as being beyond simply a code of football, and that it has attempted to be an agent of social change. While the AFL may be positioning itself in the reconciliation space, Hallinan and Judd (2009) indicate that;

“the controlling alliance in the AFL is able to construct positive images of Indigenous footballers without confronting the structural inequalities of the sport. That is, Indigenous participation is now celebrated by the alliance but is contained and limited to playing roles. The evidence presented elsewhere strongly suggests that this participation, with minor exceptions, excludes access to leadership and decision-making positions (p. 1227)”.

Although there has been some criticism of the lack of Indigenous leadership within the AFL, in 2015, an ‘Indigenous Advisory Council’ with a remit to provide advice to the AFL Commission and Executive on the development of the AFLs Indigenous strategy and policies was established (AFL, 2015). A group of Indigenous leaders, Indigenous advisors, AFL players and staff and AFL Commissioners formed the inaugural 11 members of this Council.

The AFL and the Clubs also provide a range of key Indigenous programs. The AFL refers to its Indigenous employment strategy where it has partnered with Indigenous communities to improve employment, education, health and participation opportunities for Indigenous people and communities. In addition to traineeships and junior positions, the strategy demonstrates the potential for Indigenous leadership in all areas of business including coaching and senior management (AFL & the Indigenous Community, 2016). AFL Clubs partner with Indigenous communities and, in conjunction with local schools and community organizations, engage young people in school and sporting activities.

This begs the question however, of whether the focus on community programs is enough? What other opportunities for diversity, inclusiveness and Indigenous support are provided to players? How do the AFL, AFLPA and Clubs represent Indigenous people on their websites? From the marketing literature, the public places significant importance on the public persona (corporate image) of a company as represented by

their website, especially around corporate social responsibility (Hong & Rim, 2010). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to bring awareness to the current initiatives that the AFL, AFLPA and Clubs are involved with to promote diversity and inclusiveness. The paper conducted an audit the websites of the AFL, AFLPA and Clubs to identify the public persona that they each promote associated with Indigenous inclusion, through examining available public content (for example, annual reports, policies, community programs, Board structures).

Method

Content analysis has a long history of use in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology and business (Elo and Kyngas, 2008; Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The use of qualitative descriptive approaches such as descriptive phenomenology, content analysis, and thematic analysis is suitable for researchers who wish to employ a relatively low level of interpretation (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). Many researchers believe that both descriptive and interpretative approaches entail interpretation, even if the interpretive component is downplayed or masked in discussions of its broader narrative and exploration (Sandelowski, 2010). In diversity based research, content analysis is a common approach in exploratory research of this type (Motel 2016; Shaw 2007).

The audit represents a form of content analysis which can present a flexible method for analyzing textual data. The data collection and analytical method employed can range from “impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses through to systematic, strict textual analyses” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1277). While a strict content analysis technique was not employed for this research, the intent was to examine the publicly

available information that exists within the AFL, identifying the programs and support provided for Indigenous people. In excess of 275 web sites were identified and information uploaded into an excel spreadsheet for review. These websites were then addressed in terms of an audit of the type of information presented. Information pertaining to whether the organization displayed an annual report, mission/vision statement, specific policy documentation (such as diversity statements), involvement in community programs, support structures for players, a constitution, as well as other related documentation were identified. While the actual content was not then presented for coding or analysis, an audit (score) was undertaken of which of the AFL organizations had any or all of the items in place and available on their website. To ensure reliability of the audit analysis, two independent researchers considered each website, and verified the available and applicable information pertaining to the study. This approach ensured a cross validation of the information collated.

The audit focused on the AFL, AFLPA and the 18 AFL Clubs. The scope of the audit was to determine what policies or procedures, opportunities or roles were provided or being implemented for Indigenous people within the AFL community. The programs in place for Indigenous people were also identified as part of this process. Information collected was from that which was readily identifiable and available on the organizations website and agreed through cross validation between researchers. For example, while there was mention of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) on the Port Adelaide Football Club website, it was not readily accessible, so was therefore not included in any assessment. The audit occurred over a single week, at the end of June 2016, and is representative only of the information available during that specific time. Reference to Indigenous activity was collated into an excel spreadsheet, enabling

development of tables stating how many people and what types of programs were available. While this research did not do any more than identify what exists within the AFL with respect to Indigenous activities, the analysis of the types of policies and assumptions currently being made through an audit of what currently exists is an important starting point.

Results and Discussion

The results identify that all clubs and the AFL have a strong community emphasis (see Table 1). It has been established in a historical context that the AFL and clubs are at the forefront for reconciliation for Indigenous participation (Gorman et al., 2015; Judd and Butcher, 2016). All organizations are active with programs across the community. These programs take the form of Charities and Foundations, or specifically targeted multicultural, Indigenous or diversity specific (youth, women etc.) targeted programs. Each organization has people directly employed to engage with the community, for example managers for community programs and/or community engagement. Some of the clubs and the AFL are involved in specific Indigenous programs. The approach to community programs suggests a strong desire to be involved and active across their specific and broader communities. While many of the community and diversity programs were somewhat confined to a more localized focus, the Indigenous programs extended into a broader community focus, sometimes within another State/Territory altogether. This suggests a strong attention towards a corporate social responsibility agenda within the AFL. Building the brand of the organization through these community programs starts to build the public persona around dedication to areas and

people that are often considered disadvantaged (Cook and Class, 2014; Mavin and Girling, 2000).

Further, the results report that eight clubs have developed a RAP, alongside similar plans developed by the AFL and the AFLPA. These RAP documents are designed around improving participation in all aspects of the game (playing, coaching and umpiring); building partnerships in recognizing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian constitution; creating employment opportunities to increase Indigenous employment, and; acknowledging and celebrating Indigenous culture. Six of the clubs have an Indigenous club partnership program where they are involved in specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While some club websites did not clearly disclose any Indigenous program activity, all clubs had community involvement, with most engaging in diversity programs of one type or another.

The impact of the AFL's Indigenous approach is one where the AFL seeks to actively encourage a relationship with Aboriginal Australia, and where targeted community engagement programs to develop Indigenous talent are initiated. The AFL, AFLPA and clubs have dedicated positions in place to foster relationships and support Aboriginal players and their families (Judd and Butcher, 2016). Also, the AFL and its constituent clubs invest heavily in athlete and player support, with support delivered by player agents, coaches, player welfare and development managers, teammates, dieticians, trainers, doctors and a raft of other service providers (Nicholson et al., 2011). These support mechanisms contribute to improved on-field team and individual performance, while also contributing to the personal development and wellbeing of players "during

their playing careers, during the transition to retirement and during their post-playing lives” (Nicholson et al., 2011, p. 132).

----- INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE -----

While the AFL and teams have Indigenous community programs and RAP documents in place, Indigenous representation on Boards and in leadership roles is clearly limited. Table 2 identifies the numbers of Indigenous representatives on the AFL and Club Boards, and in positions of authority such as coaching. Currently, besides the Indigenous Players Board (as part of the AFLPA), which has eight Indigenous members, and the AFL Indigenous Board, represented by eight Indigenous people from 11 members, all other Boards of Directors do not have an Indigenous person represented. While the AFL and AFLPA do identify with these Indigenous Boards within their respective organizations, these 2 Indigenous Boards are in fact sub-committees reporting to the main Board. The AFL has recently committed to recruiting an Indigenous commissioner with a commencement date of 2018 (Twomey, 2016). However, there is still a relative gap in the current representation at Board level in the organizations, and particularly on the AFLPA Board, which is not even represented by a nominee from the Indigenous Players Board. In the non-profit sector, research has indicated that leaders are not satisfied with the low levels of racial / ethnic diversity displayed within their Boards (Bernstein and Bilimoria, 2013), however little is being done to overcome the apparent imbalance in the AFL and associated clubs.

Inclusivity, and feeling part of the organization and the decision-making process (Roberson, 2006) could potentially be harmed by the lack of Indigenous representation.

Philpot (2016, p. 12) argues that the current “anglo – middle class” of the AFL Board reinforces a “colonial attitude” of the game and it does little to enhance equality issues, arguing that the intent is not racist but rather instilled by “unconscious dispositions and values”. Otten and Jansen (2015) indicated that inclusiveness has the capacity to provide for enhanced social identity in line with a sense of organizational belonging and authenticity. Are AFL organizations just talking the talk? Due to the limited nature of the audit conducted for this paper, there is capacity in further research to unpack the parallel between inclusiveness and perceptions of Indigenous representation on the organizations websites.

---- INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE ----

Currently, there are 74 Indigenous players on AFL club lists in 2016, representing approximately 9% of the total number of registered players. These 74 players are represented within a total of 90,000 Indigenous participants (approx., 6% of total players) playing AFL football around the nation (AFL RAP, 2014). There has been discussion whether the rise of Indigenous representation is aligned to the sport becoming more open and inclusive (Evans et al., 2015).

While the Indigenous playing numbers are clearly documented, the actual involvement and employment of Indigenous people within the football fraternity is a little less clear. The AFL believes that after three years of strategic program development, the AFL industry now employs over 70 Indigenous people, with a retention rate above 80% (AFL & the Indigenous Community, 2016). The Indigenous employment numbers are certainly a step forward by the organization, but there has been some recent discussion

centering on the leadership opportunities available to Indigenous people. Wilson (2016) identified that despite a period 30 years ago where the “then VFL boasted a senior Aboriginal coach (Barry Cable), an umpire (Glenn James) and club recruiter (St Kilda's John King)”, there are no Indigenous people in similar positions today. In that time only seven Indigenous coaches have worked in the AFL, and in the current environment where 178 assistant coaches are employed across the competition, only two are Indigenous (Table 2). Some have argued that the AFL and its clubs may need to invoke the ‘Rooney Rule’ to ensure that Indigenous applicants can aspire to leadership roles within the sport (Wilson, 2016). The Rooney Rule was established by the American National Football League (NFL) in 2003, whereby clubs must interview minority candidates for coaching and senior football operation jobs, although it does not dictate quotas or insist upon preference given to those candidates (Wilson, 2016). However, there are questions over whether promoting this approach, more generally, instills a movement towards tokenism, or meeting affirmative action objectives, as opposed to more merit based achievements through an individuals’ own motivations. This problem indicates clearly that it is a fine line to balance.

While the Rooney Rule is a potentially an admirable concept it may not overcome one of the issues identified by former Indigenous AFL coach and player Barry Cable, who “urged Aboriginal players to start believing in themselves and pursue AFL coaching careers” (O’Donoghue, 2015). While 74 Aboriginal players are on AFL lists, including some of the game's biggest names, this talent is yet to translate into coaching. One of the issues raised by Cable was that it was rare for Aboriginal people to want to take on the responsibility of coaching. "A bit has to do with their culture," he said. "They're a bit laidback-ish and lack a fair bit of confidence. I don't think that has helped. They're a bit shy”. Cable said the Indigenous community would likely benefit if one of their

own was an AFL coach. "Some of these guys need to stand up and really come forward". "Of course, they can coach. They can coach as good as anybody else if that's what they want to do and if they show the confidence in themselves to be able to do it. It's a great thing to do. It's good to be in charge. You just need the confidence in yourself to come forward and be a leader." Hallinan and Judd (2009, p. 1228) attempted to discuss some of the reasons for this obvious post-career lack of opportunity for Indigenous players, providing explanations that reflected upon Indigenous ambition with commentary along the lines of; "can they become coaches? They live more day to day" and "I don't know with a lot of the Aboriginal boys that they like to lead ... perhaps it doesn't suit the average Aboriginal temperament to do that".

Some on-field player positions can also be characterized as leadership positions. Hallinan et al. (2005) in their research analyzing the positioning on-field of Indigenous players found that typically Indigenous players are not positioned in leadership type (spine) positions on ground. Based on this research, Philpot (2016, p.10) argues that it is clear that "coaches and selectors regard Indigenous players as ill-suited to taking responsibility for winning matches". Often the problem is connected to the way in which Indigenous athletes are referred to through persistence of radicalized thinking and "the abiding racialized stereotypes typify Indigenous participants as limited to 'natural', 'brilliant', 'magical' playing roles but rule out potential for leadership and/or management roles" (Hallinan and Judd, 2009, p. 1229).

The lack of responsibility on-field calls to question the value placed on the leadership skills of Indigenous players, and potentially why they are unrepresented in the strategic positions in the club (Hallinan and Judd, 2009; Hallinan et al., 2005; Philpot, 2016). This view has yet to be fully explored, but it does raise the importance of the influence

and impact of cultural dimensions in driving individual motivations. Hallinan and Judd (2009, p. 1232) posit that the lack of Indigenous representation is “indicative of old racial and cultural prejudices persisting in new and less obvious forms”. This is not exclusively the domain of the AFL as Bradbury (2013, p. 300) reported that there was an “open secret of minority under-representation in leadership in (UK) football”. As Nicolson et al. (2011) argued, there is a long way to go in understanding the cultural support necessary for Indigenous players in the AFL post their playing careers.

Furthermore, research by Adair and Stronach (2010) on Indigenous Australian boxers, identified that athletic identity was significant in driving a preoccupation with sport to the detriment of post-sport careers. Specifically, those athletes with very high athletic identity sometimes resulted in missed opportunities, and psychological and physical limitations within other contexts. Helme (2010) identified that amongst Indigenous high school students that one in four aspired to playing professional sport, indicating that the athletic identity is ingrained from a young age. The barriers to Indigenous career progression, as identified by Helme (2010) are: educational disadvantage; lower career aspirations; less knowledge about careers and; social and cultural barriers. The AFL is positioned to recognize and address the barriers to develop diversity management strategies that are tailored to the cultural requirements of Indigenous players.

An ingrained approach to effective diversity management and active inclusion is driven by leaders who encourage and commit to this approach and can improve many aspects of the workplace culture (Cole and Salimath, 2013). Bagilhole (2006) advised that in order for equality policies to be successful, a whole of organization approach, involving all members is required. Without this full commitment, policies can quickly become

tokenistic or piecemeal, and those individuals or groups who are disaffected will often distance themselves from them. An organization which acknowledges and values diversity, and then executes and evaluates it, is one which can ensure that diversity becomes systematically part of the organization's corporate culture (Friday and Friday, 2003).

Shore et al. (2009, p. 1271) identified that "tokens (i.e., people with characteristics that are held by 15% or fewer group members)", can experience difficulties such as suffering from performance pressures and discomfort from being visible within the group. This feeling of being unique from others can activate stereotypes or feelings of exclusion that can result in the experience of feeling different from others (Pelled et al., 1999; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson, 2002). Could in fact any inclusion of Indigenous footballers into leadership positions within the AFL structure be seen by those players as a form of tokenism and in fact result in being counterproductive rather than supportive of these athletes?

The approach taken here likely raises far more questions than it provides answers. One of the most significant questions identified relates to whether Indigenous AFL players even want to continue to be involved with the sport once their playing career has ended? While there would seem to be a strong likelihood that at least some players would wish to remain involved in the AFL ranks, the next questions then relate to if and how this is then made available to the players to pursue? Are players given the opportunities to be involved, and does this involvement extend into leadership positions? At present, there is opportunity for programs supporting player involvement during their career, but there seems to be a limited opportunity (or willingness) being provided for Indigenous players to move into coaching or administrative leadership positions within

the AFL industry. Embedded racism could be the potential blockage to further developed positions beyond playing (Hallinan and Judd, 2009; Philpot, 2016).

While the above scenario introduces key questions, and while the AFL industry has made significant inroads into establishing programs, policies and procedures, including documents supporting Indigenous outcomes, investigation around the effectiveness and appropriateness of these activities presents a logical next stage for research.

Conclusion

The research provided the groundwork for an exploratory exercise in a relatively undeveloped area, making some movement towards understanding diversity and inclusiveness in the AFL. The intention was to understand Indigenous representation, and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusiveness from the public perspective. However, in doing this many unanswered questions were identified.

The AFL and associated clubs are making some significant progress in the area of corporate social responsibility, which goes some way towards the promotion of their public persona. However, “genuine recognition and equality remains elusive” (Philpot, 2016, p.13). In the area of diversity and Indigenous inclusion, the results revealed that there is limited information provided for the public viewing around these areas. There are clear investments and initiatives, but the consistency of representation is lacking across the AFL, AFLPA and the Clubs. The lack of Indigenous representation in roles other than ‘playing’ indicates the potential gap in the inclusiveness agenda. The AFL regularly celebrates the indigenous participation, the cultural programs and awareness, but there is some suggestion that the racial barriers entrenched within society still need to move from integration and assimilation auditing towards reconciliation.

The potential for the AFL and Clubs to be drivers as Indigenous employers beyond the 'individual as player' needs to be more fully explored. Further research would benefit from the exploration of succession planning and career development within the clubs, and the drivers for employment post-playing for Indigenous players.

The limitations in the development of this research are evident in the exploratory approach to data collection. The results provided a 'snap shot' of the websites at a particular point in time, accounting only for the information available at that time. The approach did not consider the appearance of any further information. In addition, only publicly available information was audited, notwithstanding the availability of further information on organization intranets. This was beyond the scope of this paper, which was focused on the public profile of the AFL, AFLPA and Clubs. A further limitation with the content analysis approach, was the focus on descriptive information with limited understanding of the motives behind the inclusion or not of materials. Additionally, the focus did not address any external perceptions or relational experiences which might be present within the broader community.

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Table 1: Website Program Results

Team	Community programs	Indigenous Program	Indigenous Club Partnership Program	Reconciliation Action Plan	Diversity	Foundations / Charities
AFL	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
AFL Players Association	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Adelaide	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Brisbane Lions	Yes					Yes
Carlton	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Collingwood	Yes					Yes
Essendon	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Fremantle	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Geelong	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Gold Coast Suns	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
Greater Western Sydney	Yes					Yes
Hawthorn	Yes		Yes			Yes
Melbourne	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
North Melbourne	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Port Adelaide	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Richmond	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
St Kilda	Yes				Yes	Yes
Sydney Swans	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
West Coast Eagles	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Western Bulldogs	Yes				Yes	Yes

Table 2: Indigenous Representation

Organisation	Board Numbers	Indigenous Rep on Board	Former Player on Board	Staff in Community / Welfare	Indigenous Players *	Coaching Staff	Coaches (ex-players)**	Indigenous Coaching Staff
AFL	9	0	2					
AFL Indigenous Advisory Group	11	8	2					
AFL Players Association (AFLPA)	10	0	9					
AFLPA Indigenous Players Board	8	8	8					
Adelaide	9	0	2	5	22	5	5	
Brisbane Lions	9	0	2		30	10	7	
Carlton	8	0	1	4	14	8	5	
Collingwood	8	0	2	2	14	9	7	
Essendon	9	0	2	3	22	8	7	
Fremantle	8	0	3		30	10	8	1
Geelong	8	0	1		17	7	7	
Gold Coast Suns	7	0		3	13	9	7	1
Greater Western Sydney	10	0		4	6	13	10	
Hawthorn	7	0	2	3	11	10	6	
Melbourne	10	0	2		19	7	6	
North Melbourne	6	0	3	16	23	9	7	
Port Adelaide	10	0	1	10	21	13	10	
Richmond	9	0	2		19	10	8	
St Kilda	8	0	2	7	17	7	4	
Sydney Swans	10	0	1	2	18	8	8	
West Coast Eagles	7	0	2		27	6	6	
Western Bulldogs	9	0	1		14	6	6	

Note: * some players represented more than 1 club and also includes current and past players; ** NB - only coaches who played AFL (Not State competitions such as VFL/SANFL/WAFL)