



Diverse and inclusive tennis governance: Threading inclusive leadership practices into director selection

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of our article is to demonstrate how inclusive leadership practices can be threaded into the director selection process as a way to achieve more diverse and inclusive tennis governance. In this review article, we have brought together a growing body of knowledge on inclusive leadership practices for sport boards. We use this knowledge to propose suggestions for the director selection processes. We break down the concepts of diversity and inclusion, as well as director selection as they apply to sport governance to offer tangible ways for tennis boards to become more diverse and inclusive.

Key words: Diversity, inclusion, leadership, governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Commentators and the public are increasingly expecting good global citizenship from our sport organisations. Broader societal goals such as respecting human rights and dignity (International Tennis Federation [ITF], 2023), 'playing for peace' (ITF email signature) and environmental wellbeing (United Nations, n.d.) are now part of sport governance. To address these goals, National Tennis Federation boards need to have their eye on governing in a way that embraces diverse and inclusive practices. This means they need to have the capacity to govern beyond a focus on oversight (compliance/risk management) and foresight (performance/strategy) and toward their insight objective (i.e., intra/extra-organisational reflections on matters such as societal contributions) (Ferkins & Kilmister, 2012; Molloy, 2023).

Such societal goals are lofty, especially when, depending on the size of the National Tennis Federation, the core business of developing and delivering tennis (oversight and foresight), likely captures most of the management and governance time and attention. Capacity may restrict the Federation's ability to promote its insight objective that is more orientated toward 'societal contributions', and related imperatives of diversity and inclusion. How then, to make such an 'insight'-ful aspiration a reality?

In this article, we propose two key strategies for unlocking the potential of the insight objective for a National Tennis Federation board as well as contributing to its oversight and foresight focus. Firstly, the pursuit of board composition that promotes diversity (demographic and thought) and inclusive leadership practices. Secondly, board selection procedures that attract and select people with these capacities. Together we call this 'director selection'. These strategies are about



shining a spotlight on who gets to sit on the tennis board. Within these two director selection strategies, we integrate a growing body of research that is helping to expand an understanding of inclusive leadership practices. Thus, in the sections below, we first offer the benefit of the latest research and insight about diversity and inclusion as it applies to sport governance in general, and tennis boards in particular. We explain the nuanced distinction between diversity and inclusion and relate these ideas to inclusive leadership practices by also threading in concepts of emotional and cultural intelligence. We then focus on director selection in tennis governance, teasing out the component parts of direction selection to reveal how inclusive leadership practices can be embedded into this process. Thus, the purpose of our article is to demonstrate how inclusive leadership practices can be threaded into the director selection process as a way to achieve more diverse and inclusive tennis governance.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP IN SPORT GOVERNANCE

Global interest in creating a culture of diversity in sport governance, especially gender diversity has grown within the past decade (Adriannse, 2016; Burton, 2015). However, recent research has recognised that increasing diversity in organisations does not automatically lead to the associated potential benefits (i.e., increased levels of creativity and innovation) being realised (Cook & Glass, 2014; Giscombe & Mattis, 2002; Randel et al., 2018; Roberson, 2006). There needs to be a deeper understanding of the complexities and processes required to foster the potential value of diversity, through accompanying inclusive leadership practices (Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Randel et al., 2018; Shore, 2011). To advance this understanding we now explore the concepts of diversity and inclusion as well as emotional and cultural intelligence as they relate to inclusive leadership practices within sport governance (and tennis boards).

Sport governance – Diversity and inclusion

Although diversity and inclusion are frequently used interchangeably, they are thought to be conceptually distinct and refer to related but differing ideas (Mor Barak, 2019; Roberson, 2006). Cunningham (2015) defines diversity as “the presence of socially meaningful differences among members of a dyad or group” (p. 6) and inclusion as “the degree into which individuals are free to express themselves and have a sense of workplace connectedness and belonging” (p. 7). Or more simply put, “Diversity is what you have. Inclusion is what you do. Accepting and promoting diversity alone is not enough. Diversity is opening the door, but inclusion is the warmth welcoming you in” (Lovett et al., 2020, p. 7).

In terms of diversity and inclusion in sport governance, recent global interest has been tinged with a focus on the associated problems of a lack of diversity and inclusion in organisations such as tokenism, discrimination and bias (Mayo et al., 2016). Another observation is that proactive diversity strategies have often focused on aspects such as gender (Mayo et al., 2016; van Knippenberg et al., 2013). In October 2018, the New Zealand Prime Minister and Minister for Sport and Recreation announced a new strategy, designed to grow female representation in sport governance, called the National Policy of Gender Equity (Sport New Zealand, 2018). The government, together with Sport New Zealand (the government sport agency), committed \$10million NZD over the next three years to ensure diversity and inclusion initiatives were implemented. As of May 2021, 65 out of the 66 qualifying sport organisation partners reached the 40% self-identified female board composition quota requirements and the only non-compliant partner had a plan in place to achieve it.

Tennis New Zealand (Tennis NZ) were among the 65 qualifying partners to achieve the policy with 63% self-identified females occupying director roles within the National Tennis Federation (NTF) board to date. It would appear that the Government’s Gender Equity Policy (with Sport NZ) helped Tennis NZ achieve its own gender equity aspirations as prior to 2021 there were few to no women on the 7–10-member board. Since 2021, inclusive of strategies such as co-option and intern appointments, there has been more than 50% women on the Tennis NZ board (i.e., 5–6). Refer Table 1 below.

Table 1

Year	Females		Notes
	Board members	N	
2001		1	
2002-2004		0	
2005-2008		1	
2009-2011		0	
2012-2016		1	
2017-2019		3	
2020		2	
2021		6	Inclusive of co-option and intern
2022		6	Inclusive of co-option and intern
2023		5	Inclusive of co-option

However, whilst some sport organisation boards are looking to boost representation in broader terms with different ethnicities, LGBTIQ+ affinity, culture, age, disability, and backgrounds, diversity is unlikely to be sustainable without meaningful inclusion frameworks (Buse et al., 2014). Ospina and Foldy (2010) suggest that a diverse representative structure is not enough to foster differences and additional leadership practices need to be implemented to ensure a sense of inclusiveness, openness, and fairness to facilitate bridging the differences. Interestingly, Tennis Australia has reversed its reference to the common discourse of “Diversity and Inclusion” by framing this as “Inclusion and Diversity”, (Tennis Australia, n.d., para. 1), perhaps in an attempt to further emphasise the distinction and importance of inclusion as suggested by the authors above.

The willingness of sport organisations’, and tennis boards in particular, to embrace diversity and inclusive practices, does not come without challenges (Sport New Zealand, 2018; Tennis Australia, n.d). The theoretical knowledge about how to integrate effective inclusive practices into the sport governance context is limited and the tennis leadership and governance landscape is complex. Existing literature and research indicate that inclusion initiatives have predominately focused on strategies and policies at an institutional change level and not necessarily at the intrapersonal and interpersonal level (Cunningham, 2015; Parker, 2019). Perhaps then, in order to ensure the sustainability of diversity occurring through inclusive initiatives, tennis governance practices need to consider how to embed diversity and inclusion practices at a micro level as well (Cunningham, 2015; Parker, 2019).

Creating an environment where members experience a sense of inclusion within tennis boards is therefore potentially dependent on how leaders facilitate this at the micro level, and, enact inclusive behaviours within the board leadership context directly (O’Boyle et al., 2020; Randel et al., 2018). This is supported by O’Boyle et al. (2020) who express concerns

about how leadership behaviours and actions influence decision making processes at the board level. They stipulate that to significantly address the influence of leadership within governance requires an exploration of integration between group processes and dynamics (O'Boyle et al., 2020). Such a process view of leadership shifts the leadership lens from focusing on the individual to a focus on the influencing relationship between and among board members (Ferkins et al., 2018; Jackson & Parry, 2018). Thus, the complexity of group processes and inclusive practices in tennis governance requires appropriate mechanisms, and this potentially could be where the adoption of an emotional and cultural lens could be a means to achieve this.

Tennis governance - Emotional and cultural intelligence

Developing sustainable and inclusive practices within tennis governance structures requires more than a seamless integration of practices - it requires a system that captures leadership complexities and that addresses thoughts that embody the dynamics of intra and interpersonal interactions. If thoughts, emotions, and culture have been addressed as barriers to inclusion (Gerbert et al., 2017), then embedding an emotional and cultural intelligence lens could potentially be a contributor to sustainable diversity.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to monitor one's own emotions to guide one's thinking and actions when working with others (Middleton, 2014). EI is about self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 2020). Developing inclusive leaders with EI skills and abilities particularly at an intrapersonal and interpersonal level may help to promote healthy environments (Jada et al., 2016; Warrier, 2021), such as within a NTF board.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is also recognised as a core competence of inclusive leadership (Paiuc, 2021) and is often linked with EI (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018; Richard-Eaglin, 2021; Rockstuhl et al., 2011). CQ is defined as the capacity to communicate, relate and work effectively within environments that are characterised by high cultural complexity (Andreson, 2017; Ang & Van Dyne et al., 2007; Middleton, 2014). This concept of CQ applied to a leadership context has been garnering increasing interest amongst 'Western' scholars (Ang & Van Dyne et al., 2007; Clark & Polesello, 2017; Middleton, 2014; Thomas, 2006). Whilst the CQ literature is evolving, research still tends to focus around CQ as an individual leader construct rather than an integral component of organisational or board leadership processes (Andreson 2017; Moon, 2010). However, Clark and Polesello (2017) argue that a combined application of EI and CQ can influence positive organisational change with respect to diversity and inclusion barriers.

Thus, if EI and CQ are considered powerful elements of inclusive leadership practices, how then might they influence an aspiration for diverse and inclusive tennis governance? For this, we return to our two director selection strategies (the pursuit of diverse board composition through targeted processes). In other words, why not recruit for EI and CQ, so that those who sit on a tennis board can influence inclusive leadership practices to achieve more diverse and inclusive tennis governance?

DIRECTOR SELECTION IN TENNIS GOVERNANCE

Director selection is the "formal process by which individuals are identified, screened, nominated and elected (or appointed) to corporate boards" (Withers et al., 2012, p. 245). If a NTF wants to achieve sustainable diversity in its board's composition, with directors contributing EI and CQ to inclusive leadership practices, then its director selection processes could be the mechanism to unlock this potential. Importantly, the use of nomination committees (NCs) as part of nonprofit sport director selection processes have recently been recognised for their 'board-shaping' potential (Stenling et al., 2021).

Tennis governance - Director selection

The critical nature of director selection for sport organisation governance has been captured in a visual representation, referred to as the Expanded Integrated Board Performance model (Molloy, Ferkins & Dickson, 2020) set out in Figure 1.

As captured in Figure 1 above, director selection has important implications for tennis governance. This is because identifying and recruiting directors is the important first step for tennis boards to "enjoy the performance-enhancing benefit of directors with the appropriate backgrounds and skill sets (individual factors)" (Molloy, Ferkins & Dickson, 2020, p. 329), who can contribute to the following board factors:

- Structure - appropriate diversity in board composition;
- Processes - adoption and implementation of relevant practices and policies; and
- Intra-group dynamics - constructive engagement with each other in their oversight, foresight, and insight objectives.

There is very little sport specific research about director selection (Molloy, Dickson & Ferkins, 2020), however we can identify four key features of director selection: the structure/model, method, processes, and criteria (Molloy, Dickson & Ferkins, 2020; Molloy, Ferkins & Dickson, 2020). We discuss each below.

Feature 1: Director selection structure/model

In New Zealand and Australia's typically federated sport governance system, there has been a shift away from the traditional "delegate/representative (competitive democracy) model [to] the independent (whole-of-sport) model" (Molloy, Dickson & Ferkins, 2020, p. 338). In the independent model, directors are selected to promote the best interests of the organisation or sport as a whole, not to represent a particular constituency (whether it be club, regional sport organisation, or sport discipline).

Feature 2: Director selection method

National sport organisation (NSO) director selection methods in New Zealand commonly include election (by and/or from within the membership), appointment (by a nomination committee or appointments panel) and co-option (by the existing board). For example, the Ferkins and Shilbury (2010) action research project with Tennis NZ records its shift from a 10-person management committee to a 100% appointed board, to a hybrid approach with four appointed and four regionally elected board members. This hybrid approach

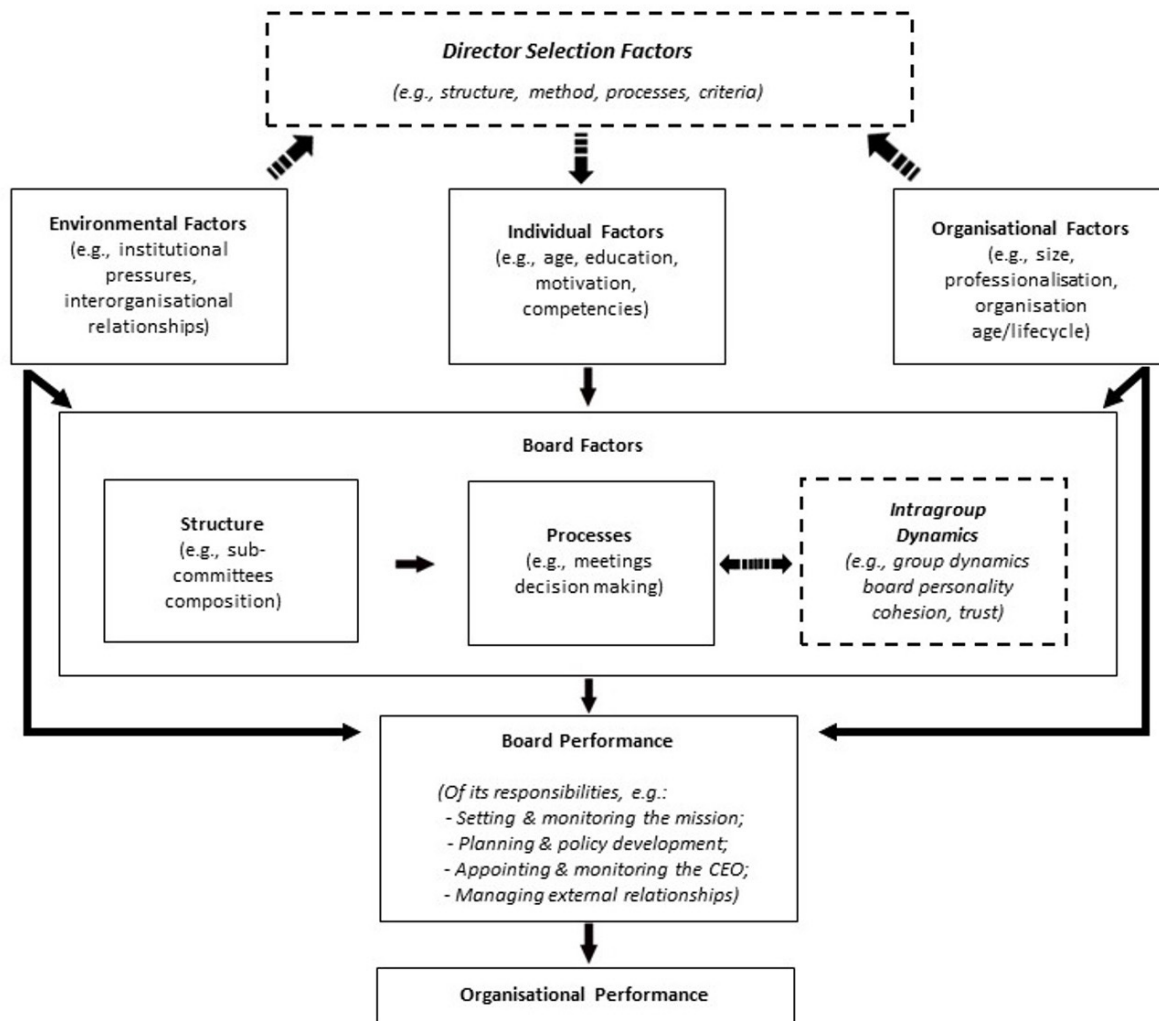


Figure 1. Director Selection in the Expanded Integrated Board Performance Model.

Note. The Integrated Board Performance model was originally produced by Hoye & Doherty (2011) and recently expanded (as denoted by the broken lines and italics) by Molloy, Ferkins & Dickson (2020). From *Routledge Handbook of Sport Governance* (p. 328) edited by D. Shilbury & L. Ferkins, 2020, Routledge. Reprinted with permission.

addressed a sense of “disconnection between the national board and regional perspectives” (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010, p. 241) associated with the prior 100% appointed board approach.

Feature 3 and 4: Director selection processes and criteria

Director selection processes include planning (e.g., identifying board needs, candidate criteria development) and assessment (e.g., interviews, reference checking, suitability synopsis development) type functions/activities (Molloy et al., 2022), with nomination committees (NCs) playing an increasingly visible role. In terms of criteria, Elms et al. (2015) advocate for the importance of achieving an effective balance between ‘role-fit’ criteria (i.e., complementary skills and experience) and ‘group-fit’ criteria (i.e., social compatibility). Sport scholars recognise that “possessing cognitive competencies such as technical abilities, strategic skills or financial skills is not enough to be an outstanding performing board member. Emotional and social intelligence competencies are important pillars in perceptions of competencies” (Balduck et al., 2010, p. 228). However, many sport organisations still favour, in their constitutions at least, an emphasis on the role-fit type criteria.

Tennis NZ - director selection criteria

The Tennis NZ constitution requires its NC (or board appointment panel) to make merit-based decisions considering factors such as governance, sport, and occupational experiences “including skills in commerce, finance, marketing, law or business generally” (Tennis NZ, 2012, p. 21). This constitutional focus on ‘role-fit’ over ‘group-fit’ and diversity/EI/CQ type criteria is common but may be overcome by how ‘criteria’ is outworked in practice.

A practical example of ‘group-fit’ and diversity type criteria is demonstrated in recent changes made by the Tennis NZ board to its board needs matrix. The matrix now specifically includes ‘Cultural Competency in New Zealand Context’ as well as consideration of board dynamics and interactions (T.A. Scorer, personal communication, 22 June 2023). Further evidence of Tennis NZ’s practices beyond what its constitution requires can be found in its board charter, which was updated in 2023, some 11 years after the present constitution (Tennis NZ, 2023). The following clauses signal a stronger focus on inclusive leadership practices in relation to board member responsibilities and expectations and state that the board:

- Determines the appropriate culture for Tennis NZ and models behaviours that both reflect and promulgate the desired culture (p. 3).
- Bring[s] a diversity of opinions and views to bear on its decisions (p. 4).
- Board Members must demonstrate high ethical standards and integrity in their personal and professional dealings and be willing to act on - and remain collectively accountable for - all board decisions and speak with one voice on all policy and directional matters (p. 6).

There is also the opportunity for Tennis NZ to continue to evolve its board charter via the mechanism of board agreement, rather than constitutional change. In this way, it may continue to more strongly call out EI and CQ as elements of inclusive leadership practices within the written expectations and responsibilities of board members found within its charter. An evolving board charter, and more overt alignment of the charter content with the board needs matrix and NC briefings, also has the potential to have greater influence in director selection criteria, processes and outcomes.

With NCs being an emerging phenomenon in the sport director selection literature (Molloy et al., 2022; Stenling et al., 2020), we turn now to explore the NC's 'board-shaping' and EI/CQ board capacity building potential.

Sport governance – nomination committees

NCs are described as the “primary institutional mechanism designed to strengthen director selection processes” (Kaczmarek et al., 2012, p.474) with the overarching role to enhance board composition. Again, there is very little sport specific research on NCs, however drawing from for-profit, nonprofit, and sport governance literature we can examine NCs from structural (composition and powers) and process perspectives.

NC structure - composition and powers

In terms of NC composition, in the for-profit sector, recent concerns relate to the ratio of independent versus executive directors and/or external experts on the NC (Aperte, 2016; Kaczmarek & Nyuur, 2016; Nachemson-Ekwall & Mayer, 2018). Similar concerns echo in the nonprofit sport sector, with New Zealand NSO NCs being variously composed of a mix of external independents, board member nominees, and NSO member nominees (Molloy et al., 2022). Of significance are the links, in the for-profit sector, between NC gender and 'nationality' diversity and associated board diversity (Kaczmarek et al., 2012). Whilst needing empirical validation, we suggest the same may be true for EI/CQ capacity and inclusive leadership practices and pose the question - if an NTF wants these intra and inter-personal skills on its board - should it have people with, and who can recognise, such skills on its NC?

In terms of NC powers, in the sport sector these include the power (and responsibilities) to identify, recruit, assess, recommend, appoint, monitor and/or evaluate board directors (Bradbury & O'Boyle, 2015; Brunzell & Söderman, 2012; Enjolras & Waldahl, 2010; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; K. Ingram & O'Boyle, 2018; Stenling et al., 2021). From a balance of power perspective, Molloy et al. (2022) identified the need to explore the appropriate balance between community (democratic legitimacy) and corporate (professionalisation/efficiency) logics reflected in NC composition. NSO NCs in

New Zealand range from those effectively having the power to select 100% of the board members to those appointing or recommending only the minority (Molloy et al., 2022) with the majority of board members being elected by the voting members.

NC processes

In terms of NC processes, the for-profit sector has identified a range of decision comprehensiveness (Walther et al., 2017): unplanned (low planning, low evaluation), projecting (high planning, low evaluation) and inclusive (high planning, high evaluation). In the sport sector, Swedish studies have identified NC processes involving minimal transparency and formalisation (Stenling et al., 2021) within an environment where NCs undertake a range of complex rankings of candidate evaluation criteria (Stenling et al., 2020). New Zealand NSO constitutional data (Molloy et al., 2022) suggests a low planning and high assessment approach with an assessment focus on role-fit over group-fit/diversity type criteria (see Molloy et al., 2022, Table 4). Accordingly, there may be an opportunity for NSOs (including NTFs) to better enshrine at constitutional level, as well as in their practices, a more balanced approach to the planning and assessment of candidate evaluation criteria.

Tennis NZ - NC features

The Tennis NZ (2012) constitution requires its NC to be composed of the Chair (or Deputy or other board member if the Chair is re-standing), a person appointed by the Regional Centre chairpersons and an independent expert (appointed by the board). The NC is responsible for identifying and inviting candidates, advertising for and assessing candidates, determining appointments (up to four directors) and making recommendations for the elected directors (such NC recommendations to be considered by the voting members along with all valid applications). As previously identified, the constitutionally mandated criteria to be applied by the NC has a strong 'role-fit' emphasis however this may differ operationally with 'group-fit' and diversity/EI/CQ type criteria being considered during the actual process.

At the practice level, as noted above, Tennis NZ has more recently undertaken several initiatives to influence a greater focus on 'group-fit' criteria into its NC processes. In addition to updating its board needs matrix and board charter, Tennis NZ has also recently established a 'new to governance' programme (to grow more diverse and inclusive governance capability), as well as invoked its co-option clause to enable a more inclusive board environment for indigenous (Māori) people. A recent board internship has also meaningfully contributed a youth, Māori and Pasifika voice to the Tennis NZ board (T.A. Scorer, personal communication, 22 June 2023).

Another part of its practices is the Tennis NZ diversity, equity and inclusion policy. Approved in August, 2022:

This policy provides a framework for Tennis NZ's current and future diversity and inclusion initiatives and applies to every level and aspect of the sport, including but not limited to the Board and Staff of Tennis NZ and the wider tennis community. (Tennis New Zealand, Te Tēnehi o Aotearoa, p. 3, 2022)

As noted in the scope of this policy, its purpose is to influence board leadership practices, which, as per our argument within the present article, needs to also influence not only what the NC's are looking for but the very composition of the NC itself.

A further key element of the diversity, equity and inclusion policy relates to a stated commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) by Tennis NZ, to the founding agreement with the indigenous (Māori) peoples of New Zealand (also known as tangata whenua – peoples of the land). For this Tennis NZ (TNZ), recognises Te Tiriti o Waitangi as Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document. TNZ is committed to upholding the mana of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.... This commitment is brought to life in TNZ's partnership with Aotearoa Māori Tennis Association and the Rangapū partnership agreement (p. 3).

A recent Tennis NZ NC report reflected this commitment in noting the diversity of candidates (including eight females, three Māori and four other non-European ethnicities) and recommending that any unsuccessful Māori candidates be approached to explore other ways in which they could contribute to Tennis NZ's bicultural aspirations (T.A., Scorer, personal communication, 22 June 2023). In this way, Tennis NZ is currently navigating its relationship with tangata whenua, Māori, as part of its ongoing practices to create a more diverse and inclusive environment for tennis in New Zealand.

We argue that the success of Tennis NZ's diversity and inclusion aspirations will be heavily influenced not only by a diverse and inclusive board, but by a diverse and inclusive NC. Linking back to the Tennis NZ constitution, the Regional Centre chairpersons and Tennis NZ board have the power, through their NC appointments, to support this vision of a diverse and inclusive NC and Tennis NZ board. They can do this by appointing people who reflect, and can recognise in others, diversity, EI, CQ and inclusive leadership potential.

A final acknowledgement, regarding jurisdictional limitations, relates to the extent to which NTFs may be restricted by their national regulatory context. For example, the Australian Sports Commission (2020) recommends a majority of elected directors (but with all being 'independent' by holding no other 'office' within their membership structure). In Canada, nonprofit legislation requires that directors be elected by the members with the board having limited co-option rights (co-options not to exceed one third of the elected positions) (Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act 2009; Parent, Naraine & Hoye, 2018). In Sweden, for all NSOs belonging to the Swedish sport confederation, their NC "must consist of members elected by the NSO [General Assembly]" (Stenling et al., 2021, p. 6). Notwithstanding any such restrictions, NTFs are encouraged to explore ways in which they can engage with their exiting director selection (and nomination committee) structures, powers, and processes to maximise the diversity, EI, CQ and inclusive leadership capacity in their board composition.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of our article was to demonstrate how inclusive leadership practices can be threaded into the director selection process as a way to achieve not only more diverse, but also inclusive tennis governance. To do this, we brought together a growing body of knowledge on inclusive leadership practices for sport boards which focused first on the nuanced distinction between diversity and inclusion. We then related these ideas to the inclusive leadership practices of EI and CQ. We used this evolving understanding of inclusive leadership practices to suggest considerations for the director selection process as a way to achieve more diverse and inclusive tennis

governance. We argue that the time has come for the board's insight objective (intra/extra-organisational reflections on matters such as societal contributions) to sit alongside its oversight (compliance/risk management), and foresight (performance/ strategy) objectives as 'equal partners' in the governance of sport organisations. Perhaps National Tennis Federations (as exemplified by Tennis NZ) may be able to lead the way as the insight-ful sport within a complex governance landscape.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest and that they did not receive any funding to conduct the research.

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