Understanding gendered networking for career advancement in international sport governance

Dr Jordan Matthews

Dr Lucy Piggott

Dr Johanna Adriaanse

WiSEAN 2024   Portsmouth

UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

UTS
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

chi.ac.uk | #chiuni |

Introduction

- Plenty of research on gender inclusion in sport organisations

- 'Experiences' known, but more exploration of what influences these & why

- Few in-depth examinations of the mechanisms of networking in sport organisations

1. What are the **dominant networking strategies and mechanisms** for career advancement in international sport organisations?

2. To what extent are these **gendered** to result in **different experiences and outcomes** for men and women leaders?

Methods

1. Electronic survey completed by 55 British postholders in International Federations: 64% men, 36% women
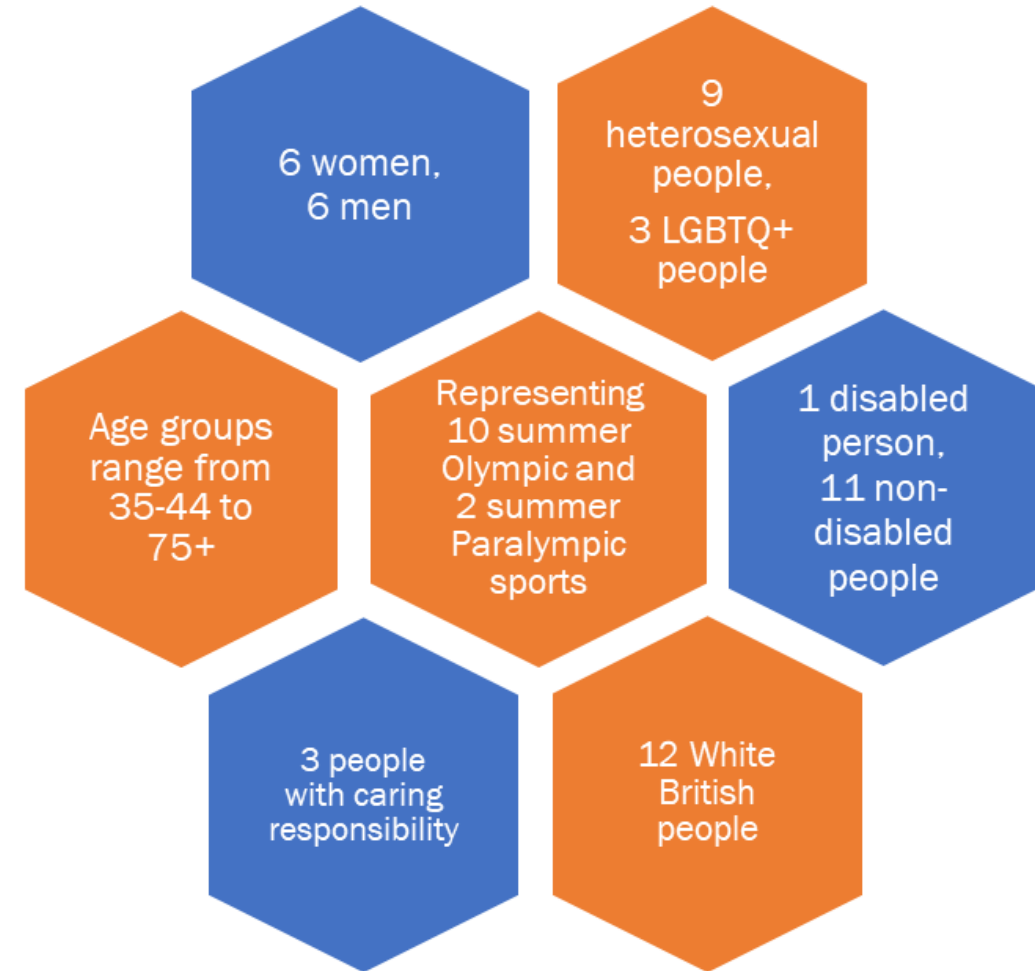
Key factors that were instrumental for the sample obtaining their first post in intl sport by gender (%)
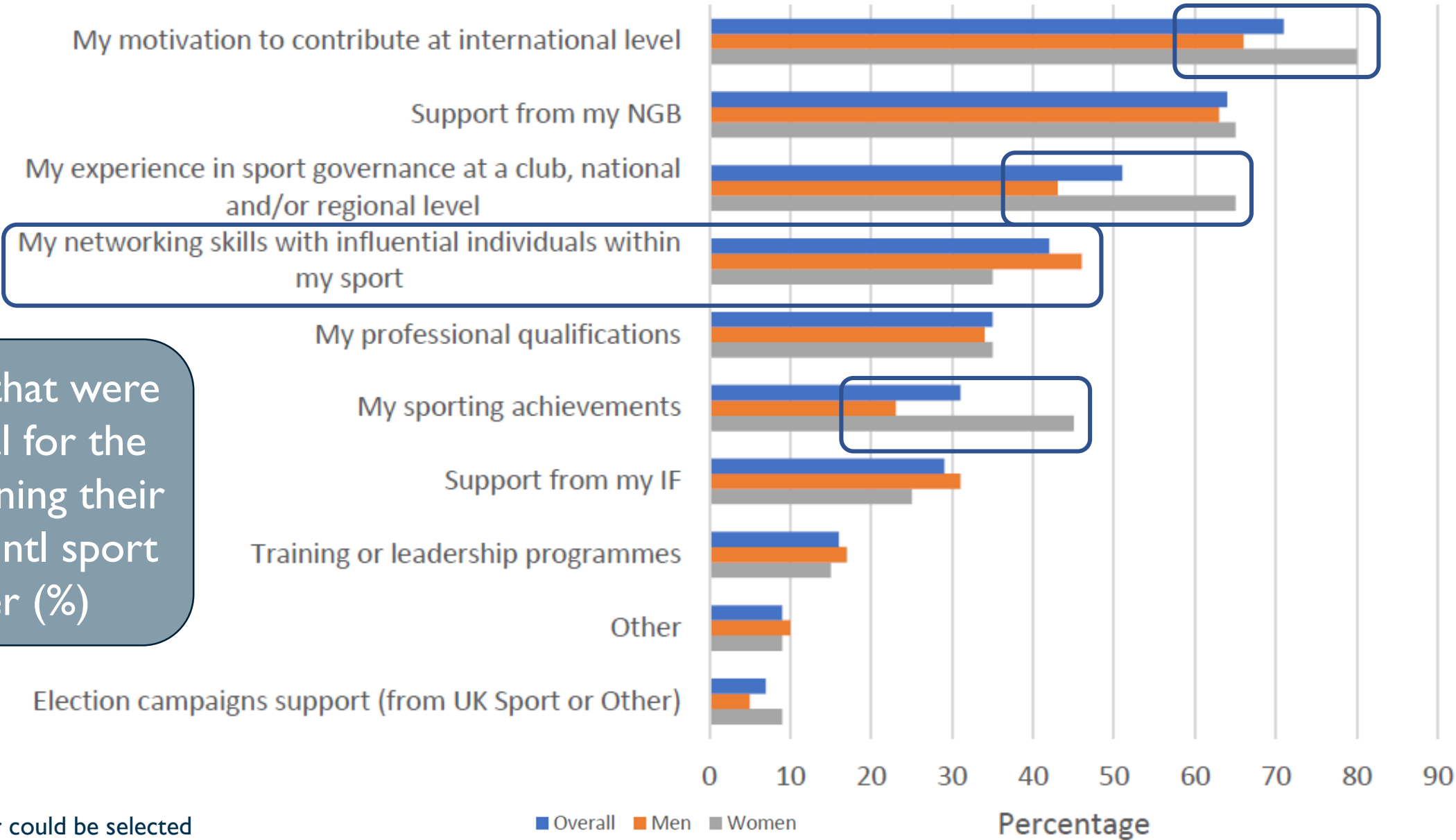
*More than one answer could be selected

Methods

1. Electronic survey completed by 55 British postholders in International Federations: 64% men, 36% women

2. In-depth interviews with 12 of these senior postholders:

- 6 women, 6 men
- 9 heterosexual people, 3 LGBTQ+ people
- Age groups range from 35-44 to 75+
- Representing 10 summer Olympic and 2 summer Paralympic sports
- 1 disabled person, 11 non-disabled people
- 3 people with caring responsibility
- 12 White British people

A "4 Ps Typology" on the mechanisms and role of networking for career advancement in international sport governance

(Piggott, Matthews & Adriaanse, forthcoming)
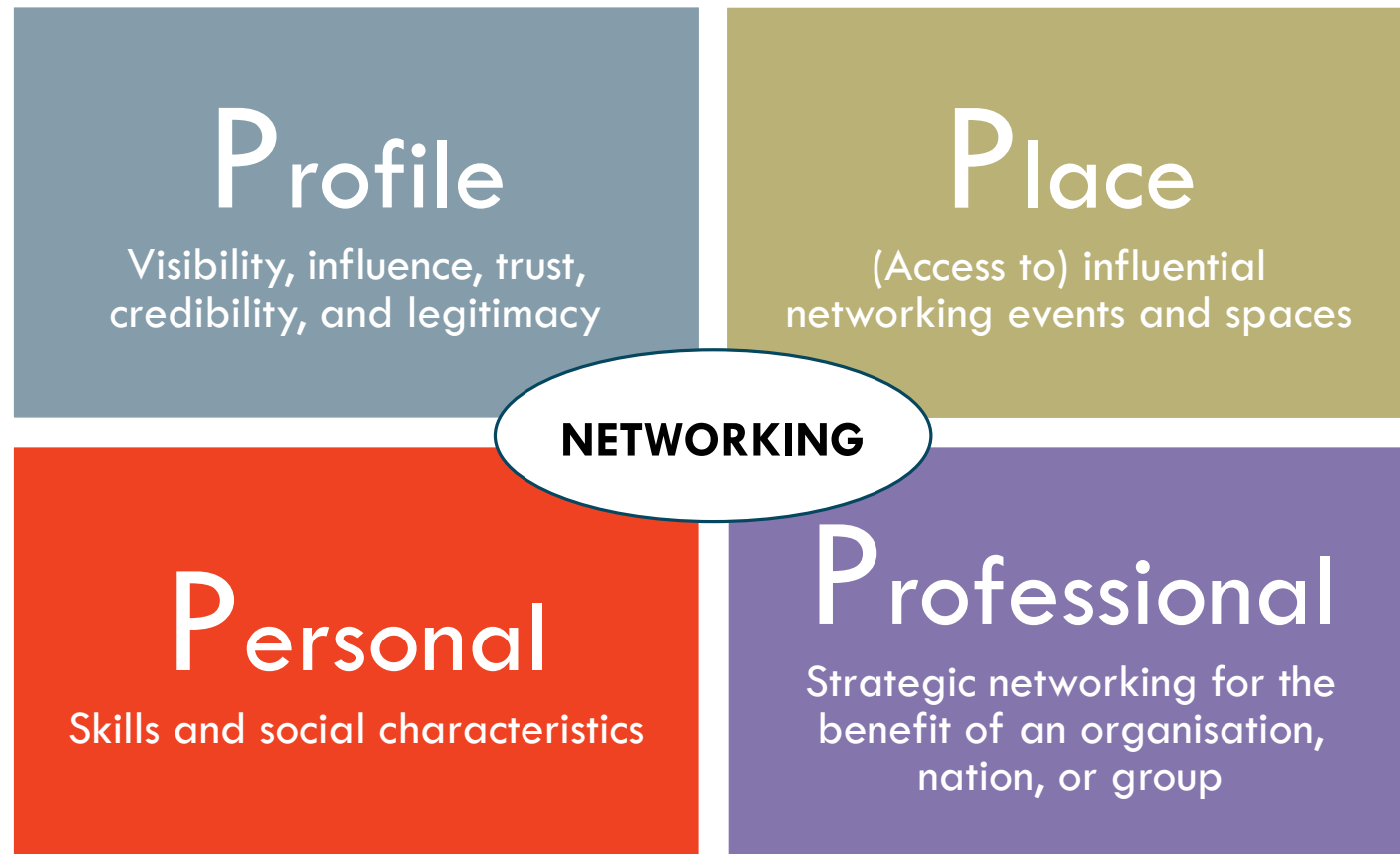
Profile

"You can spend all your time networking and getting to know somebody, but if they've got no influence in the body that you're trying to influence yourself, you've wasted your time. … You have to understand who the key runners and riders are." (Woman postholder)

Valuable member

Credible
Legitimate
Trustworthy
…visibility

"I was lucky because I'm an athlete, there's a recognition and people are like, 'we know who you are'. … It really helps."

(Woman postholder)

"[I've had] no problems with the [election] process" because *"I've been on the circuit for [my sport] for many years. … I think people vote for people they know".*
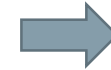
(Male postholder)

Profile and gender
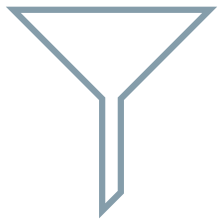
Supporting women athletes to pursue governance careers

A need for gender balance in pipeline positions

Support

Credible?
Legitimate?
Trustworthy?
Valued in the
same way as
men?

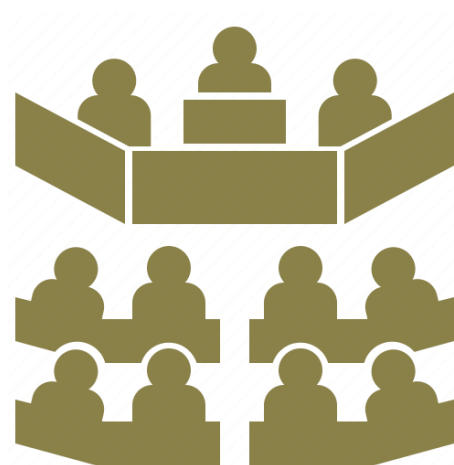Gendering of knowledge and experience

Changing cultures and value systems

Place

Importance of accessing certain core networking spaces and events, particularly congresses and major championships

Formal spaces = important to attend

Informal spaces = most influential

Place and gender

Women, but not men, discussed how childcare responsibilities created both logistical and financial challenges in attending overseas congresses and events

"I became a mum last year and I tell you it's much more complicated now. … If I look at the travel schedule for [the IF's] 3-5 day meetings, … either I'm going to spend seven days apart from my [baby], which for me is not okay right now, ... or I'm going to spend £3,000 shipping my baby and my mother out there to spend seven days with me for a volunteer position. People tell you that women are not committed, but that's really the choice when you lay it on the line. … I can't see myself continuing at the IF level until [my baby's] of an age where I feel comfortable with taking that time away. … They don't have policies in place to cover this kind of thing."

(Woman postholder)

Place and gender

"Annoyingly, it does happen a lot in the bar which is a bit frustrating. I can't hold my alcohol very well, but it's that thing of balancing, trying to have one drink that you nurse for a very long time. It's a funny culture. It's very old fashioned." (Women postholder)

"Men will talk shoulder to shoulder. They won't talk face to face. And that's where I think influencing at a bar works because you're looking at your drink, you're not looking at each other necessarily." (Man postholder)

Hotel bars or other drinking places can be more favorable networking spaces for men than women

Personal

Certain skills and characteristics are important for networking, e.g., people and listening skills, being analytic, getting to know someone, and having an open mind

Individual identities, or shared social characteristics, also influence networking experience and behaviours

UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

UTS
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

chi.ac.uk | #chiuni |

Personal and gender

'Soft skills' celebrated

Women may develop collective agenda setting

Isolation or silo-ing of underrepresented groups within the broader IF environment

A coping strategy of migrating to 'spaces of comfort' with others who share similar identity components

"I would migrate more to the other woman, give her a nod, 'we're the two women in the room', end up talking, whether it's a passing remark at the sink washing your hands or in the coffee line, sometimes you get commonalities, don't you?" (Woman postholder)

…working to reproduce forms of hidden power?
…normalising the dominant identity?

Professional
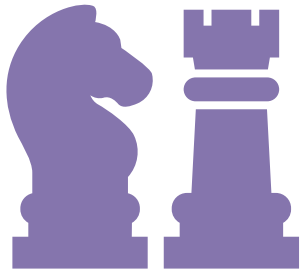
Strategic networking is needed to influence decisions for the benefit of an organisation, nation, or social group

One man postholder highlighted how, whilst networking at a Congress, he would *"compliment [other postholders] on their arguments"* to build rapport, as well as be prepared with something *"soft"* that *"we were quite happy to lose"* as a bargaining tool in trying to achieve other higher priority outcomes.

Formal and informal information gathering via networking was also used as a tool to improve governance within and across sports through sharing good practice and knowledge

Professional and gender

More women than men discussed strategic, agenda-driven networking, contrasting with previous research that has found men to be more instrumental, and women to be more relational, in their networking.

Women were particularly motivated to use networking opportunities to challenge and improve existing governance practices in international sport.

Recommendations

Embed an understanding of the mechanisms, and influence, of networking into training
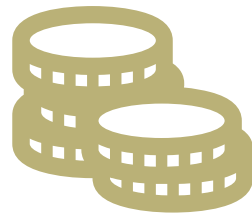
Review financial support for travel expenses to networking opportunities

Ensure support throughout the pathway, not just the start

Open dialogue about inclusive, cross-identity, cross-cultural, informal networking spaces, so all can benefit