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**Understanding ‘vulnerability’ and ‘political skill’ in academy middle management
during organisational change in professional youth football**

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**Understanding ‘vulnerability’ and ‘political skill’ in academy middle management
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ABSTRACT

The use of political skill to further employees’ *self-interests* and their ability to cope with ambiguity and employment vulnerability during periods of organisational change is an important yet under researched phenomenon. Taking a *middle management perspective*, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the experiences of Richard, a newly appointed professional youth football Academy Manager during the process of organisational change. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, formal academy team meetings, co-worker interviews, and informal observations and conversations, which were analysed through the process of narrative analysis. Findings highlighted the hierarchical *sensemaking* challenges of *vertically* ‘managing up’ (e.g. Chairman, Board of Directors, 1st Team Manager) and ‘managing down’ (e.g. academy employees), and *horizontally* ‘managing across’ (e.g. Head of Coaching) during the process of organisational change. Importantly, managing expectations and influencing significant others, through skilled micro-political activity, was central to successfully negotiating the ambiguity and vulnerabilities of organisational life during change.

Keywords: Organisational Change, Middle Management, Sensemaking, Micro-politics, Professional Youth Football.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

This study is the first to examine the micro-political actions and behaviours of middle managers as both recipients and deliverers of organisational change. The self-interests of middle-managers tend to influence strategic change; however, we do not understand how middle-managers make sense of the micro-political nature of such interests during change. This study highlights the complexity of coping with employment vulnerability when negotiating and influencing the actions of senior management whilst also supporting subordinate staff with resistance and uncertainty during change. Furthermore, the micro-political actions and strategies of a middle-manager to develop ‘trust’ amongst colleagues, both vertically ‘above’ and ‘below’ them, and horizontally ‘across’ from them in the organisational hierarchy, are evidenced.

INTRODUCTION

The study of organisational change has developed significantly following early critiques of a largely decontextual and asocial understanding of *change in practice* (Pettigrew, 1985). Following these critiques, Pettigrew et al. (2001) have suggested that research examining organisational change has started to acknowledge the importance of a temporal understanding of change and that ‘context and action are inseparable’ (p. 697). Therefore, the rationalistic and traditional objective view of understanding organisational change has been questioned (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Such conceptual and methodological developments in the study of organisational change have enhanced our understanding of change in an increasingly sophisticated, complex, non-linear, context-dependent and unpredictable manner, which often produces unintended consequences (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Wallace, 2003).

Research designs examining organisational change typically follow ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ perspectives (Burgelman, 1983; Heyden et al., 2017; Raes et al., 2011). Top-down approaches focus upon the role of top managers (e.g. CEOs and Chief Executives) as the initiators of change whereas the bottom-up perspective identifies the role of middle managers (e.g. above first-level supervision and operational level managers or two or three levels below the CEO) in initiating change (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Glaser et al., 2015). Whilst both top managers and middle managers play important roles in initiating, executing, and supporting organisational change (Herrmann & Nadkarni, 2014; Heyden et al., 2017; Huy et al., 2014), within a bottom-up perspective middle managers occupy an important organisational space between top and operating level managers, and ‘what makes middle managers unique is their access to top management coupled with their knowledge of operations’ (Woolridge et al., 2008, p. 1192). Woolridge et al. (2008, p. 1191) have further highlighted that this remains an area of ‘great promise for generating future insight’ into understanding how organisations operate and the enactment of organisational strategy. Therefore, understanding the role of middle managers’ activities and behaviours has important consequences for how strategy forms within organisations (Mantere, 2008; Raman, 2009). Indeed, Woolridge et al. (2008) highlighted that research in this area has demonstrated the importance of understanding the *middle management perspective* in the creation of innovation and organisational learning, strategy implementation, and strategy making processes (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007).

In line with this perspective, Balogun and Johnson (2005) have called for a better understanding of the micro-organisational social processes that are evident within the senior management team on strategy formation (e.g. Balogun et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2003). Importantly, periods of organisational change are often associated with people trying to make sense of the political nature of what is going on around them, and these interactions can lead to gossip, stories, and rumours, in an attempt to contextualise new experiences within personal

interpretive frameworks (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). The active process of understanding the social interactions that occur during the process of change, information seeking, meaning ascription, and resistance to change has been described as *sensemaking* (Ford et al., 2008; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Balogun and Johnson (2004) highlight that sensemaking is ‘a conversation and narrative process through which people create and maintain an intersubjective world’ (p. 524). Balogun and Johnson (2005) further explain that the sensemaking perspective encourages us to focus our attention on processes of interaction between individuals and groups. This level of analysis is particularly important during periods of organisational change, as change requires social actors to act in new ways, and therefore change can be highly challenging and ambiguous (Ford et al., 2008). For example, Balogun and Johnson (2004) found that during periods of organisational change, restructuring led to organisational deidentification (i.e. away from past common goals, trusted practices, and solutions), which led to a loss of meaning and, to ambiguity towards the process of experimentation and active sensemaking for middle managers. In this situation, as past experiences were unable to inform practice, middle managers developed their own interpretations from their direct experiences of the behaviours of others, and from rumours and gossip about senior management (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

Due to their unique hierarchical position within organisations, middle managers’ agency to initiate and support strategic change can be constrained by their own sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Mantere, 2005). However, Guth and MacMillan (1986) highlight that middle managers will intervene in strategic decision-making when their self-interest is at stake. Therefore, the way in which middle managers enact and support organisational change should be considered through a micro-political lens, to encapsulate their self-interests, vulnerability, and current and future employment (Ball, 1987; Guth & MacMillan, 1986). Importantly, Balogun and Johnson (2005) highlight that ‘we need to

understand more about how middle managers, given their central role in change, and recipients, in general, make sense of and therefore contribute to change outcomes in different change contexts' (p. 1597).

Building upon previous work (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), the purpose of this paper is to examine the sensemaking of Richard, a newly appointed professional youth football Academy Manager during the process of organisational change. This work builds upon the existing research which examines management and organisational change in professional sport (e.g. Gilmore & Gilson, 2007; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015; Wagstaff, Gilmore & Thelwell, 2016). Significantly, this work seeks to address empirical, theoretical and methodological gaps in our current understanding of the way in which middle managers within sporting organisations negotiate political, complex, ambiguous periods of organisational change. Through an analysis of the sensemaking process of a middle manager through rich contextual narratives, this paper opens a novel empirical and methodological space, and one which may be used as a narrative resource for neophyte middle managers to reflect upon their own practices.

The present case study forms part of a larger polyphonic multiple participant nested project that involves the academy coaches James, Ian, John, George, and Richard (pseudonyms – see Table 1 and Figure 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Within the present study, the findings and rich empirical insights from Richard's sensemaking are presented (Balogun & Johnson 2004, 2005; Ford et al., 2008; Gioia &

Chittipeddi, 1991; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This study is guided by four interrelated research questions, which explored the participant's sensemaking during the change process:

RQ1: How did the Academy Manager experience the change process, and what changes were evident in the working environment for the Academy Manager?

RQ2: How did others act towards the Academy Manager, and how did the Academy Manager act towards others during the change process?

RQ3: In what sense did the Academy Manager come to understand the micro-political realities of organisational change?

RQ4: What impact did the change process have on the working conditions and subsequent employment opportunities for the Academy Manager?

METHODOLOGY

Philosophical underpinnings

In this study, we conceptualize organisations as socially constructed networks of social actors' *in-interaction*, which creates a narrative reality for participants within their own interpretive frameworks (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Ford, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 1999; Hazden, 1993; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). In taking the middle management perspective to further our understanding of organisational change, ontologically this paper takes a *process* based approach to understanding change, where at an epistemological level change is conceptualized as a sequence of events best understood through the narratives of social actors, and through how change unfolds within social interactions (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). To examine organisational change within this paradigm, a rigorous and robust interactionist-interpretive nested case study was designed and developed, underpinned by ontological

relativism (i.e. reality is multiple, created, and mind-dependent) and epistemological constructionism (i.e. knowledge is constructed and subjective). Methodologically, the nested case study examines how multiple interrelated social actors come to understand organisational reality through narrative (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2005).

The case, participant, and context

The decision to sample Alder FC (pseudonym of an English professional football club) as a local knowledge case emerged from the principal author's role as an employee within the academy at the beginning and during the ongoing process of organisational change. Table 2 presents the chronology of organisational change at Alder FC along with corresponding data collection points.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

During his employment at Alder FC, the principal author experienced a number of changes at Alder FC during the process of organisational change, which affected different departments of the football club. For example, the principal author witnessed both academy and 1st Team staff leaving the club during the change process. Importantly, upon completion of the ethnographic field notes and at the point of interview data collection with Richard, the principal author left Alder FC and had no employment capacity with the club. Holding such familiarity with the research setting has been advocated by Thomas (2016), in what is described as a *local knowledge case*. Specifically, Thomas (2016, p. 98) outlines the benefits of the researcher in being able to 'read people who inhabit the arena' and 'gain access to the richness and depth that would not be available to you otherwise. At this point, a discussion around the role of the researcher must also be included. Indeed, attempts were made when discussing

initial interpretations of the data in considering alternative interpretations of the data through reflexive conversations with the second author (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) highlight, ‘while it is certainly true that the influence of the researcher on the production of the data is an important issue, this must not be regarded simply as a source of bias that must be, or can be, entirely removed’ (p. 106).

The participant

Before data collection commenced, institutional ethical approval was granted by the departmental ethics committee of the principal author’s institution. The participant was chosen as part of a purposeful sampling process (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007), due to the participant being considered a rich source of data in relation to the phenomena under investigation. An initial approach was made to the participant. Following a discussion around the rationale behind the research, Richard (a pseudonym) agreed to take part in the study, and informed consent was gathered. At the point of data collection Richard was Academy Manager at Alder FC, and had spent 10 years working within the professional football club environment. Richard holds the Union of European Football Associations’ Advanced Licence (UEFA A), and the English FA Academy Managers Licence.

A change in Chairman, Board of Director and 1st Team Manager at Alder FC acted as a catalyst for change in the academy, resulting in a review of the staff employed within the academy and the working practices in the academy. Ultimately, this review lead to staff turnover and the recruitment of new staff within the academy. As part of this review, the participant within this study (Richard) was promoted from the role of Head of Youth Development Phase to Academy Manager. Richard’s remit as Academy Manager included responsibility for overseeing the technical and coaching curriculum for the Professional

Development Phase (U18–21), Youth Development Phase (13–16), and Foundation Phase (U8–U11). Richard was also responsible for one full-time sport science support staff member, one full-time physiotherapist, one full-time youth development phase lead coach, one full-time foundation phase lead coach, and one full-time performance analyst. There were also eighteen part-time academy coaches, various recruitment scouts, one part-time sport science support staff member, one part-time physiotherapist and one part-time education and welfare officer (see Figure 1).

Data collection

Richard participated in four semi-structured interviews, which were conducted at his convenience in a relaxed manner in his private office. Before the first interview commenced Richard was made aware of the nature of the data collection process, and the anonymity of the other actors referred to within the data discussed. During the interviewing process, the primary researcher assumed the role of an ‘active listener’, allowing Richard to discuss his experiences at his own level of comfort and choice (Smith & Sparkes, 2005). Following the overarching research questions, field observations and co-worker interviews (see Table 3), a semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore the participant’s experience of the realities of organisational change.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Indeed, at this point the interviews with other co-workers and ethnographic field observations formed part of a reflexive framework for subsequent interviews with Richard. Such a process provided critical incidents during the change process to support the analysis of the participant’s narrative story through a method of analytical bracketing (Gubrium &

Holstein, 2009). Such a method prompts the researcher to allow for analytic interplay during the research process rather than a strict, procedural endeavour.

The semi-structured interview focused on the *what*, *how* and *why* of the participant's experience during the period of change. The semi-structured interview was designed chronologically to explore Richard's *initial appointment* (e.g. how were you appointed to your current role? What was discussed during your appointment? How did the club view the academy when you took over? What was your remit at the club? What were your thoughts on your first day in the role?), *day-to-day role* (e.g. Who did you have to work with on a day-to-day basis? How would you describe your working relationship with each of these people? How did you manage your relationship with these people?), *problems and solutions during change* (e.g. what sorts of problems did you face in your role? How did you try to manage this? Did this work?).

Narrative Data analysis

Narrative analysis "is a technique that seeks to interpret the ways in which people perceive reality, make sense of their words, and perform social actions" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 281). Because narratives play a central role in how people come to develop a sense of meaning from the interactions they engage in and understand their experiences, analytic methods that focus upon narratives are well placed to examine such experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). The purpose of narrative analysis is to examine how people "impose order on the flow of experiences to make sense of events, actions, and relationships in their lives" (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 281). Narratives also allow for the representation of idiosyncratic, complex, emotional, contradictory, and messy worlds, not represented through the

quantification and reorganisation of objective observations (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Data analysis followed an eight-stage process:

- (1) The principal investigator, conducted an initial interview with the participant following the semi-structured interview guide.
- (2) The initial interview was transcribed verbatim.
- (3) Individually, the research team read the full interview transcript and created initial analytical memos of key features of the narrative. This process focused upon key interactions with people at the club and how Richard make sense of these interactions.
- (4) The research team then discussed the interview and their initial codes and agreed upon the key features of the narrative. This process entailed a narrative-based interpretation of the following features of Richard's narrated experience:
 - a. What is the overall narrative that Richard is conveying to us during the period of change ('what is Richard's story about')?
 - b. Who are the staff that Richard is interacting with during the process of change ('who are the key characters in the story')?
 - c. How does Richard's narrative relate to the co-worker interviews?
 - d. What are the key subcomponents of Richard's narrative during the process of change ('what is the overall plotline')?
 - e. How does this relate to the field-based observations?
- (5) The principal investigator then collected further interview data with the participant focusing upon further contextual information relating to the overall narrative and key features of the narrative identified at Stage 4 (e.g. the story, the characters, the plotline).
- (6) The follow-up interviews were transcribed verbatim.
- (7) Collectively, the research team read the full interview transcripts from Stage 5 and started to build links between the data and existing theory. Here, theorizing of the

middle management perspective was useful to make theoretical sense of Richard's experiences.

- (8) Follow-up interviews were conducted until the point of theoretical saturation regarding the topic was reached (e.g. the participant had nothing more to say and repeated previously divulged information).

During this process, analytical memos were used in an iterative manner to make connections to the conceptual frames of *organisational micro-politics* (e.g. Ball, 1987; Ferris et al., 2017; Kelchtermans, 1993), *middle management sensemaking* (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Heyden et al., 2017; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), *managerial identity work* (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), and *organisational culture* (e.g. Ogbonna & Harris, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting Richard's narrative of organisational change at Alder FC, Tables 4 and 5 provide an understanding of how an interpretation of both the participant interview data and ethnographic observational data lead to an understanding of the different stages of organisational change and the impact each stage had on Richard's actions, interactions and managerial behaviours during the change process. Specifically, Table 4 indicates the temporal nature of Richard's managerial actions in relation to stages of organisational change process (e.g. employment vulnerability, managing resistance, understanding cultural issues, managing interactions with senior staff, managing expectations, managing competing agendas across the organisation, building trust, alliances and relationships across the organisation), characteristics of Richard's actions, the temporal timeline of change (e.g. initial phase, mid-phase and late

phase), the locus of management activity (i.e. vertical and horizontal management) and data extracts. In addition, Table 5 illustrates an analysis of the event triggers, characters in interaction, locus of management activity, and the characteristics of the social process (e.g. face-to-face, phone, observation etc.).

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

The following section outlines the findings from Richard's narrative story of how he experienced the organisational change process at Alder FC after being promoted to the middle-management role of Academy Manager.

'Everybody initially is worried about their jobs'

Richard began by discussing his initial feelings during the change process and the manner in which he found out he would be not only maintaining his employment within the football club, but also promoted to the role of Academy Manager after a review of the organisational structure. Richard explained:

I think when anybody new [1st Team Manager] comes into a football club everyone is initially worried about their job and whether it is going to have a negative or a positive effect on you. With ourselves, it was about a month after the 1st Team Manager got around to talking to me because he was very busy with the 1st Team. Then we had an initial conversation on the phone. He was really positive, really interested in the academy and the vision of how he saw the

club. He then said, ‘We would like to make you Academy Manager.’ I was currently in the role of Head of Youth Development Phase.

Richard provided a further insight into his thoughts and feelings around the appointment and the realisation of what it would mean for the member of staff who was then in the role of Academy Manager:

It was horrible because I had known Eric [pseudonym] for a long time after he was Academy Manager at Barnock [pseudonym] and he could tell what was going to happen, the writing was on the wall. I knew he was going through a hard time with his missus too. At one point, he lashed out at me. The U18s had a match cancelled on the Saturday and he wanted me to cancel training for a number of the younger age groups so that they could train. So I said, ‘Can I just book you another venue?’ and he flipped because he knew the scrutiny he was under from the 1st Team Manager about the U18s doing so poorly. But that’s football, it doesn’t matter how good you are at your job, if the 1st Team Manager wants to bring in his own people that he trusts, he will.

The middle management sensemaking perspective enables the illustration of the types of interactions that are evident during the change process between groups and individuals, and in particular the unintended or second order consequences of the change of a newly appointed 1st Team Manager (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015), such as a heightened level of scrutiny of, and interference within, academy working practices. Indeed, the employment vulnerability of staff during the process of organisational change is a key area for middle managers to deal with (Gibson & Groom, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b; Kelchtermans,

1993; Ogbonna & Harris, 2015). Lack of certainty for staff during organisational change can lead to workplace environments that are emotionally charged, driven by employment vulnerability, and subject to challenges to self and ontological security, and unwelcome changes in working practices (Giddens, 1991; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Kelchtermans, 1993; Mantere, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992).

‘Forget about the bloody philosophy!’

Following his appointment and discussion regarding the club blueprint, Richard set about the sensemaking process (i.e. working out what needed to be done), and started to initiate organisational change by devising a new playing philosophy and coaching curriculum for the academy coaches to adhere to when coaching the academy players in each group in training:

I thought, well, to develop players ... we have to start again with this and create our own philosophy. So, John [Youth Development Phase Lead – U12–U16] and James [Foundation Phase Lead – U9–U11] had a massive input in terms of how they saw it. I oversaw both of their curriculums but I wanted them to have an input so they could police it and monitor it. I was giving them a licence ... in terms of the environment, I wanted to create one where players want to try and get on the ball, express themselves and feel happy about doing it.

Importantly the above data illustrates *how* Richard set about implementing organisational change in a way that could be ‘policed’ and ‘monitored’ by other staff. This demonstrates that importance of middle managers working with those around them to implement and support the change process. Heyden et al. (2017) explained that one of the roles of the middle manager during organisational change is to provide opportunities for proactive

involvement in the strategy processes for employees. Specifically, the ability to *initiate* and *execute* change through outlining opportunities for change, initiating day-to-day adjustments, creating periodic milestones, and providing a sense of direction to the receivers of change are crucial roles of a middle manager (Heyden et al., 2017). Indeed, Gibson and Groom (2018a) highlighted, in their case study of a Premier League Academy Manager, that having senior coaches at hand who presented findings to support and monitor changes is a more effective strategy than simply delivering presentations to staff.

The change to the new coaching curriculum created the possibility of tension within Alder FC, where staff may have contrasting values and beliefs. This provided an environment for potential conflict and resistance to the change process. Subsequently, Richard highlighted how and why he dealt with coaches that resisted change:

One coach in particular, a UEFA A Licence coach (Geoff), never played out from the back [passed the ball from the goalkeeper in a controlled manner to maintain controlled possession] once so we sacked him. He was just going direct all the time [playing long passes]. At half time, he actually had the cheek to say ‘Forget about the bloody philosophy’ and that was just the final nail in his coffin. We had a chat about it on the Monday and made our mind up that he was a little too long in the tooth for change. He had his way of playing, but we wanted it to be our way so we decided to let him leave. I rang him up; it was difficult because I knew him really well, I liked him and I knew his Dad had developed cancer and I think that that affected him, where he just lost his patience. It’s horrible. But when it’s justified ... you have to think of the player and the Mum and Dad, the child that you as an academy are developing. The only player that is developing when you play long ball is the person who is kicking it; you’re missing out on all that decision-making.

The previous data extract illustrates the importance for Richard of maintaining the club blueprint and reinforcing the change narrative within Alder FC. Indeed, those that exercised agency in actively resisting the club blueprint and shared mental model that Richard and his coaches had designed were dismissed from the organisation (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Gibson & Groom, 2018a, 2018b, 2019) However, alternative courses of action are available to middle managers to address resistance to change. For example, education, communication, facilitation, and support can all lead to supporting change in the desired direction without the need to terminate the employment of staff (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). However, these approaches can be time-consuming and may not always work due to the amount and type of resistance experienced (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Furthermore, and within the context of Richard's narrative story, Geoff was deemed by Richard to be 'too long in the tooth' to be positively affected by alternative courses of action highlighted above.

'You've got to be really diplomatic, agree to disagree'

A significant component of organisational change when a manager is appointed to a new role is working with new members of staff. Richard discussed his experiences of managing the 1st Team Manager who had been appointed:

It really stressed me out, because he was clueless. He didn't understand how an academy works. He wanted to bring in his own coaches [to work in the academy]. We were sat there with a whiteboard with the coaches' names on for each age group and he wanted to get rid of nearly all of them. So I said, "We can't do that" and he said, "Why?" ... "Well, we'll not be able to operate". I just couldn't understand his thinking; he didn't understand how an academy

works and the EPPP [Elite Player Performance Pathway] requirements from the Premier League and Football League [the sport's governing bodies].

As the above data extract illustrates, during the process of organisational change one of the key priorities in the sensemaking process of a middle manager is *managing up*. The above data illustrates the culture of professional football and the desire for senior managers to be surrounded by 'their own people'. Given the short-term nature of employment within professional football, trusting those around you to support your agenda is critical to maintaining your employment. However, as the above example illustrates it is critical to have relevant domain specific expertise and the appropriate professional qualifications required by the sport's governing bodies (e.g. the Premier League & the FA). The process of ensuring that this happens, from the Academy Managers perspective, may include selling issues to top management (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), managing perceptions and expectations of senior managers (Bourne, 2011), managing role expectations and strategic agency (Mantere, 2008), and championing alternatives (Ahearne et al., 2014; Floyd & Woolridge, 1992; Mantere, 2005, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). This was one of the first priorities that Richard had to address during the initial period of organisational change in the academy, in particular, winning battles with the senior management regarding potential staff and resourcing changes.

Richard continued to discuss his feelings and emotions in such situations when dealing with and attempting to negotiate with the new 1st Team Manager:

You've got to be really diplomatic; agree to disagree. A lot of the time you just turn a blind eye. At first I'd go home, have a stressed neck, bad headache ... I'd really let it affect me in the first two or three months. Then I read a book

by Bob Jackson and I adopted it; now I might be pissed off for five minutes, but no longer than five minutes.

Within this situation Richard made a political decision not to exert his managerial agency against the wishes of the senior management, in an attempt to avoid conflict, and instead developed an emotional coping strategy to deal with disagreements to protect his own self-interests (Ball, 1987; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Kelchtermans, 1993; Mantere, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992). Furthermore, Richard expanded on his political activity when managing the 1st Team Manager in certain situations:

I just constantly analysed his character and understood that he is extremely impulsive. So, if someone is impulsive then they are quite easy to manipulate ... I always try and make out as if it is his idea and not mine. So, subliminally, I might mention something earlier on and then he'll come out with it and we'll do it.

When asked to expand on his strategic interactions with the 1st Team Manager, Richard elaborated with the following example:

With Michael [pseudonym], one of the U15 players, the 1st Team Manager wanted to release him. He was going through a growth spurt and was really uncoordinated. So, one day I was talking to other staff and I mentioned that there was a player that I had once coached that was going through a growth spurt and that you should just leave players at 14, 15. He wasn't in the conversation but he was in the room so I knew that he would hear what we were saying. Then, after lunch, he came to me later on and said, "I think

Michael might be going through a growth spurt.” I went [laughs], “Alright ...

OK ... yeah ... I get that, Gaffer, it’s a really good point.”

As the previous excerpt demonstrates, the ability of a middle manager to ‘sell’ ideas to top management and influence decision-making is paramount to success during organisational change. The work of Ahearne et al. (2014) has illustrated the importance of middle managers engaging in upward strategic influence to champion alternative strategies to senior management. Furthermore, Rouleau and Balogun (2011) explained that ‘skilled managers are able to use their knowledge of their organisational context and their colleagues/subordinates/seniors to influence those around them to adopt their point of view’ (p. 953). However, this study adds to our understanding of *how* middle managers may engage in micro-political strategies to influence others and achieve such goals. Whilst the manipulation of others during the change process can be a relatively ‘quick’ and ‘inexpensive’ tactic to overcome resistance, this can lead to problems in the future, if people feel that they have been manipulated (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Alternatively, education, communication, and support can help persuade people of better alternative courses of action during change; however, they are often time-consuming and may not always work (Gibson & Groom, 2018a; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Indeed, the process of training and preparing Academy Managers for engaging in such activity during organisational change remains limited. At the time of writing education provision for Academy (middle) managers is in a period of transition. Previously, the English Football Association delivered the Academy Managers Licence, which has now been disbanded with prospective Academy Managers directed towards the UEFA Professional Licence for training and education. However, at present, neither qualifications focus on implementing, managing and coping with organisational change as an Academy Manager within their course content.

‘I’ve never once gone up against him’

Richard also discussed his embedded socio-cultural understanding of working in professional football at Alder FC, and the necessary discursive practices that he engaged in to retain his employment and ability to manage the senior management:

A lot of the time its ... “Hiya, Gaffer, how are you? You OK?”, licking arse and keeping him happy. It’s hard though because you know what he’s like. He can be nice to you then stab you in the back and you find out off someone else what he’s said. For example, I know that at the back end of last season ... so three years after he come in and decided to keep me on, I found out that he had asked George [Head of Coaching Phase and U18s Head Coach] if he wanted to become Academy Manager. George laughed and said no, and joked about the workload. But I couldn’t believe that he offered someone else in the club my role, and I had to find out off someone else.

Through the development of his own managerial micro-political literacy and social astuteness, Richard demonstrated that he understood the importance of ‘keeping senior managers happy’ to protect his own self-interest through the process of *vertical management* or ‘managing up’. Indeed, an awareness of vertically managing senior stakeholders within an organisation is a key factor in the success of a middle manager (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Kelchtermans, 1993; Mantere, 2005; Pettigrew, 1992). This is a novel area for further exploration within the sports management literature, which has important implications for Academy Management practice. Within mainstream management literature for example, the ability to engage in such impression management has been found to be a

useful political skill for middle managers (Ferris et al., 2007). As in the work of Balogun and Johnson (2004, p. 54), social communication through the process of sharing ‘stories about their experience with each other’ is important for middle managers in a *horizontal management*. Interestingly, the above data extract further emphasises the distrust that can be apparent within a professional football club (Kelly & Harris, 2010). Specifically, Richard highlights that after George was recruited from another football club into the role of Head of Coaching, George was also offered the role of Academy Manager to replace Richard. Whilst, the 1st Team Manager’s rationale for offering George, Richard’s role, is unclear, the secretive manner in which the incident occurred adds to the complex, political and ambiguous nature of working in professional football, and also impacted upon how Richard made sense of organisational life in professional football. Such empirical insights into the micro-political working of organisation life in professional football are scarce.

When prompted to discuss his experiences of disagreeing with or challenging the 1st Team Manager, Richard replied with:

I’ve never once gone up against him. How football works is ... if you fall out with him, he’s really impulsive; there is no coming back from it. You’ve gone. You can’t go to war with the 1st Team Manager, you won’t win. I’ve seen it happen with the 1st Team players. I’ve observed it with first year pros who are really keen to learn and have asked him a question on the training ground and he’s not involved with them anymore. So, you can’t really cross him because you’re going to lose. They [first year pros] just asked him a question, and then they’ve not been involved since. He [1st Team Manager] turned around and said “You’re not good enough, we made a mistake signing you, the senior pros aren’t having you” ... and all he did was ask him a question, and the 1st Team Manager never knew how to answer it.

Richard highlighted that his new role and limited social power within Alder FC reduced his direct and overt political influence with top management. Richard went on to explain that his political and strategic decisions were driven by a sense of employment vulnerability at Alder FC. The structural condition of employment vulnerability in professional football drove Richard to engage in subtle micro-political strategies and actions to achieve his goals. In his own words:

I think that it's because of the position that I've been in ... if I had been recruited from a different club and I wasn't here previously when this regime came in it would have been different. I would have had a lot more power. I've always been vulnerable because I was already here, whereas George got bought in from the outside. So, if I ever went to another club, I would be a little more confrontational and probably have more battles.

Bourne (2011) states that 'for successful outcomes, the manager must know how to work within the organisation's cultural and political environment to ensure the important relationships are managed' (p. 1003). Indeed, Richard's experience of witnessing players challenging the 1st Team Manager impacted his own behaviour towards that Manager. Moreover, Munyon et al. (2015) highlight the importance of *social astuteness* in middle managers, 'which involves incisive observation of others' (p. 145). Such political skill and the understanding of power and political dynamics appear to be crucial during periods of uncertainty throughout organisational change in professional football to reduce employment vulnerability. Interestingly, although Richard occupies a more senior position within the club's hierarchy (see Figure 1), because George had been appointed directly by the Chairman to assist

the change process and had a closer network tie (i.e. more frequent interactions) to the 1st Team Manager, Richard perceived that his own social power and social capital were less than George's. Indeed, whilst the influence of being an 'insider' change agent and an 'outsider' change agent has received attention within the business management literature (Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2010), studies investigating the impact of being recruited from *outside* a professional club versus the impact of being promoted from *inside* a professional football club to implement organisational change have yet to emerge. Furthermore, employment within professional football. Importantly, further understanding the influence of organisational hierarchies and social networks upon social power remains an important area for future work in investigating organisational change in professional football.

'I'm thinking, you're deluded'

After being appointed to the role of Academy Manager, Richard was aware of the need to also manage his relationship with the Board of Directors. An aspect of this relationship was managing the expectation of the Directors regarding the academy. As Richard outlined:

That's one of the biggest challenges we have is educating the Directors, and one in particular who is obsessed with results ... "How did you get on?" ... "Oh, we played well" ... "What was the score?" ... "I don't know, we had all the ball though" ... "Yeah, but what was the score?" ... "I don't know, I think we got beat 2-1." That's the first question they ask.

Gibson and Groom (2018a) reported similar findings when investigating the experiences of an English Premier League Academy Manager in managing expectations during organisational change. Whilst education and support can be time-consuming, this is often one

of the lowest risk strategies to adopt in supporting organisational change (Gibson & Groom, 2018a; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Within the context of elite professional football, Gibson and Groom (2018a) highlighted the need for middle managers entrusted with the development of the youth academy to be able to balance short-term failures (i.e. losing youth matches) with a plan for long-term success (i.e. developing players for the 1st Team) when challenged by senior managers at the club.

Richard explained that through education and support the club Directors eventually became better able to understand the importance of long-term planning over short-term success in professional academy football:

I think the penny has dropped now and they are starting to understand that it's not about short-term results and that winning youth leagues doesn't necessarily mean success. So now they're seeing some income from the academy products, their biggest concern and their marker for success is how many players are in the shop window playing for the 1st Team and who could be sold on? Very rarely now do I need to tell people what the score was in certain games. It's irrelevant; I'm more concerned with how individuals have done.

Another challenge that Richard faced was attempting to manage the expectations of the Board of Directors regarding the limited player recruitment budget allocated to the academy. Richard explained a specific situation with a number of senior staff members when reviewing the current U18 playing squad:

In one of the meetings we had, they [Chairman, Chief Executive, 1st Team Manager] got up all the U18s players at the Marriott Hotel and they were saying, "Who's signed him, who's signed him, he's shit, he's shit ... next ...

he's shit". At the time, we were top of the Youth Alliance, we won the league the previous season and they said the players we were signing weren't good enough. You look at our recruitment budget and it's about £2,500. So, I'm thinking, "You're deluded". If you look at the teams we were up against, one is now a Premier League club and the others were much bigger in terms of fan base.

In her work that investigated middle managers advising upwards, Bourne (2011) highlighted that, with a robust relationship and effective communication, over time experienced and politically astute middle managers are in a position to actively change the perceptions of those around them towards more realistic and achievable goals. Additionally, in their investigation of top and middle managers, Heyden et al. (2017) identified that middle managers are better equipped to address inconsistencies between 'ideal' and 'real' business and economic realities, with their knowledge of the context that the business operates within through relatable language.

'Success has many fathers but failure is an orphan'

In addition to managing the expectations of the senior management above him, Richard also discussed the limited recognition given to both himself and the other academy staff in discussing the success of the academy. Since Richard was appointed as Academy Manager, following the process of organisational change the academy has had 'thirteen lads involved in the 1st Team squad, nine players have signed professional contracts' whilst also selling 'three players for a combined fee of about £750,000'. Richard went on to state that 'We recently just sold a player for £350,000 and the club haven't even said thank you or bought me a coffee out

the coffee machine'. Following this, Richard highlighted the political nature of success within a professional football club:

We have a saying now, 'success has many fathers but failure is an orphan'. Everyone wants to be a part of it when you are winning. They're all standing on the touchline when you're winning. But when you're losing, they're all sat away from you. That's where we are at, at the minute with the academy. There's a lot of people ... the Chief Executive, he's dying to get involved; Joe [pseudonym, Head of Football Operations], he's dying to get involved ... because it helps to promote them. The Chief Executive had an interview with Sky Sports and he doesn't even know anything about the academy. But it was all about him and how he's changed the academy and all that bollocks.

Furthermore, Richard also discussed occasions where he felt that 1st Team staff were actively trying to sabotage the success of the academy as the performances of the 1st Team were poor. Richard provided an account of his experiences and his understanding of these experiences:

We were going for the league title, and this has happened on numerous occasions when the 1st Team aren't doing particularly well. We had the chance to win the league for the first time in about 13 or 14 years and the manager is watching the game against Barnock and we needed to win. The 1st Team Manager sent one of his staff over and told us to take our best player off because he might be playing with the 1st Team on Monday. The staff member came around and said it with a smile on his face. I saw that as sabotage. There was no other explanation for it. It got worse, with more players going into the

1st Team who weren't going to play for them, but then couldn't play for us either. It's still happening today. Greg Moulton [pseudonym] was flying for us ... "You can't have him now, he's playing with the 1st Team" They only played him [in the 1st Team] in one game, but he still couldn't play for us. I think he felt a threat. The annual presentation the season before was all about the success of the academy because there were no success stories from the 1st Team.

Interestingly, here is the meaning Richard attached to the actions of his senior manager [1st Team Manager]. Whilst Richard's perception that the 1st Team Manager was actively trying to sabotage the success of the academy remains interpretive, the work of Ogbonna and Harris (2015) highlighted tensions within football clubs brought about by cooperation versus competition and the 'frictions between individual needs and organisational requirements' (p. 226) that emerge within the culture of football. Ogbonna and Harris (2015) go on to explain the power play between subcultural relations during organisational change, in this case depicted as the 1st Team Manager exerting power over Richard due to being threatened by the success of Richard and the academy. Whilst the primary remit of the Academy at Alder FC was to develop players who are either capable of playing for the 1st Team or have the potential to be sold to another club for a significant fee, short term success for the Academy was also reflected in the results of Academy matches.

Similar to the work of Rouleau and Balogun (2011), this demonstrates the importance of an interconnected understanding of the context in which middle managers operate, the sensemaking process, and the ability to act politically. Indeed, Richard's assertion that the 1st Team staff member 'said it with a smile on his face' when delivering bad news provides us

with an insight into Richard's sensemaking of such a situation, and how this process is interrelated with his contextual understanding of the culture of professional football. Indeed, Heyden et al. (2017, p. 7) further explain that middle managers may 'be prone to position bias and favouring their unit's goals [i.e. long-term academy success] over organisation-wide goals [short-term 1st Team success]'. In this situation, the meaning Richard attached to the actions of the 1st Team staff may have been 'muddled' by his desire for the academy's U18 team to succeed and achieve his own role related goals. The potential for internal conflict between departments in highly competitive and dynamic organisational settings remains an important and complex issue, and one that deserves to be investigated further.

'He knew that he could trust me and I knew I could trust him'

Central to Richard maintaining his ability to perform and work in the pressured environment of a professional football club was the support network that he and his staff had created for each other when faced with challenging circumstances:

There is a bond there that helps you cope. You know that if you are going to say something it doesn't go out in the open. You need that ... someone to bounce your ideas off. Some days, I'll have really up days and George will be quite low and I'll pick him up; the other days it's the other way around.

Richard discussed how the trust developed between himself and George, who had been employed by the club as an outsider during the initial period of organisational change:

It's a mutual respect. I remember once at East Holt [pseudonym] in the FA Youth Cup and George was under a lot of pressure at that time. On this

occasion, we played East Holt on their home ground and it's one of the biggest pitches in the [English] Football League; it's huge and we couldn't get our distances right. They were playing through us, there were too many gaps between our lines and notoriously we are a pressing team. At half time, he took me in the shower and said, "What the fuck has gone on out there?" I said, "It's just our distances, we need to be a lot more compact all over the park." So, we changed and we won the game. It was just stuff like that, that made us a lot closer. He knew that he could trust me and I knew I could trust him.

Richard highlighted the importance of trust in developing strong working relationships with colleagues that will withstand the pressures that come from working in professional football during a period of organisational change. Key to the development of trust was Richard's increased *reputational social capital* (Ahearne et al., 2014), that was enhanced after he demonstrated his knowledge and support for George during the half-time period of a competitive game. Reputational social capital is acquired through the 'prestige of being knowledgeable in the circles of peer middle managers' (Ahearne et al., 2014, p. 70). Rouleau and Balogun (2011) highlight the importance of understanding 'social and cultural systems' in determining with *who*, *how* and *where* middle managers should be having conversations. Importantly, the trust between Richard and George developed through increased reputational social capital, thus ensuring Richard had a strategic ally and a confidant during ambiguous periods of organisational change.

CONCLUSION

Rouleau and Balogun (2011) have called for a ‘stronger focus on the actual activities managers engage in to accomplish their strategic work’ (p. 955). The findings of this study provide us with new insights into the political behaviours of a middle manager appointed during organisational change. In his role, the middle manager had to deal with employment vulnerability, complexity, and ambiguity and strategically negotiate the actions and behaviours of senior management during organisational change. Taking a *middle management perspective*, the present case study demonstrates the active process that Richard took in initiating and supporting organisational change on a day-to-day basis at Alder FC (see tables 4 and 5).

Specifically, during the change process, Richard’s task was to interpret and make sense of ‘what should be done’ in the organisation. Challenges during this period entailed *managing down* the staff in his charge (see tables 4 and 5). However, during this process Richard also had to deal with resistance to change and the emotions associated with employment vulnerability of staff during the process of organisational change. Similarly, to the findings of Gibson and Groom (2018a), one strategy that Richard developed to implement and support the change process was to share some of the day-to-day decisions and ownership with subordinate line managers. This enabled Richard to maintain a narrative control during the period of organisational change, where the club’s new blueprint was reinforced by the narratives of co-workers (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). By winning the trust and respect of his subordinates, Richard was able to increase his own social capital (Ahearne et al., 2014).

In addition to managing subordinate staff, Richard also had to *manage up*, which included selling issues to senior management (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), whilst managing the perceptions and expectations of senior managers (Bourne, 2011; Mantere, 2008), and championing alternative courses of action (Ahearne et al., 2014; Floyd & Woolridge, 1992; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). At times, to protect his own self-interest and ontological security, Richard took political decisions not to exert his managerial agency against

the wishes of the top management, and instead developed an emotional coping strategy to deal with disagreements (Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Mantere, 2005). Such political decisions were guided by Richard's sensemaking process, and in particular the meaning he attached to the actions of senior management based upon his socio-cultural understanding of his working context (see tables 4 and 5).

The findings from Richard's narrative story provide us with new insights into the (micro) *political* behaviours of a coach promoted to a *middle management* (Balogun & Johnson, 2005) position during organisational change and his relationships, interactions and lines of communication with employees within the same organisation (see Figure 1). Such findings have added additional rich and complex narrative dimensions to the *middle management* literature that highlights the role that middle managers play in significantly influencing strategy during organisational change (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Floyd & Woolridge, 1992; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Heyden et al., 2017; Woolridge et al., 2008) through a variety of face-to-face or observational interactions and formal or informal phone calls and conversations (see table 5). Furthermore, Kelly and Harris (2010) have highlighted the significance of 'trust' amongst individuals employed within professional football clubs, with Buchanan and Badham (2008) discussing the importance of trust during organisational change. Building on such a notion, the findings from Richard's narrative account have provided us with a theoretical understanding of the micro-political nature of developing 'trust' between a middle management figure and those vertically above or below him and those horizontally aside him within the hierarchy of an organisation (see tables 4 and 5). Such an approach was a key component in maintaining employment within a middle management role during a period of high vulnerability.

Limitations of the Study

Whilst the methodological strengths of the study have been discussed within the Methodology section, consideration must be given to the limitations of the chosen approach. As an already existing employee at Alder FC during the ethnographic observational data collection and a former employee during the interview data collection, it was felt that there were potential limiting factors when researching in the primary author's 'own backyard' (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 74). Reflexive conversations (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) with the research team considered questions such as 'is the participant withholding information that, in their opinion, may influence my perception of them?'. Furthermore, the sensitivity of the interview topics prompted the data being generated to be of a personal nature. This brought about the notion of how an interviewer who was not already an employee of Alder FC would be received. Specifically, would the data generated throughout the interview process be richer in nature if this was the case?

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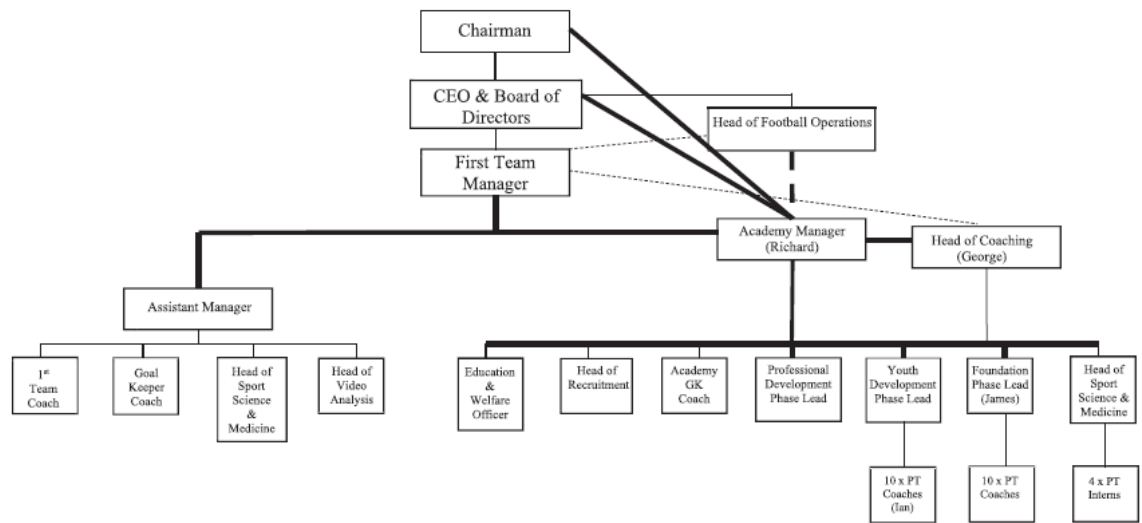


Figure 1. Alder FC Organizational Hierarchy Chart.

Table 1. Key social actors with Alder FC Academy

Key Actors	Organizational Role within Alder FC Academy¹
Richard	Academy Manager ²
George	Head of Coaching & Professional Development Phase ³ and U18s Coach
John	Head of Youth Development Phase (YDP) ⁴ and U13s Coach
James	Head of Foundation Phase (FP) ⁵ and U11s Coach
Ian	Academy Coach U12s (FP) ⁵
Principal Author	Academy Coach U16s (YDP) ⁴

Notes

¹Within the Youth Development Rules, an Academy is an establishment for the coaching and education of Academy players operated by a Club in accordance with the requirements of the rules and by the Professional Game Board of the Football Association (PGB).

²Within this structure, the Academy Manager is the person responsible for the strategic leadership and operation of a Club's Academy. An Academy Player is a male player (other than an Amateur or a Trialist) who is in an age group between Under 9 and Under 21 and who is registered with and who is coached by or plays football for or at a Club which operates an Academy.

³Head of Coaching oversees and supports all coaching within the Academy. Professional Development Phase (PDP) players aged 17-21 years.

⁴Youth Development Phase (YDP) players aged 13-16 years.

⁵Foundation Phase (FP) players aged 6-12 years.

⁶Under the Youth Development Rules, each club is required to prepare a Coaching Programme that states (a) the Club's Football Philosophy, (b) the Club's Academy Performance Plan, and (c) the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) which stipulates the minimum hours of coaching across each level in the Academy.

Table 2. Timeline of organisational change at Alder FC.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Key Events in the Organisational Change Process</u>	<u>Points of Data Collection</u>
December	New Chairman takes over the football club & a new 1 st Team Manager is appointed Academy Manager (Steve) leaves his position	Ethnographic observational data collection
February	Head of Coaching (Eric) is sacked and replaced by a new one (George – recruited from another professional football club) New Academy Manager (Richard) is promoted from within the football club Lead Foundation Phase Coach (James) remains in his position	Interview data collection starts with U12's Coach (Ian) & Lead Foundation Phase Coach (James)
March	U18 Fitness Coach (Wesley) is sacked from his position U12 Coach (Ian) is sacked from his position	Ethnographic observational data collection
June	U16 Coach leaves his position Youth Development Phase Coach (John) leaves his position and new one (Alfie) is recruited from another professional football club	Ethnographic observational data collection
September	Lead Foundation Phase Coach (James) leaves his position and a new one is appointed (Gerald) from within the football club	Interview data collection starts with Academy Manager (Richard)

January	<p>1st Team Manager is sacked</p> <p>Director of Football and Head of Coaching (George) appointed in temporary 1st Team Management positions</p> <p>Academy Manager (Richard) manages additional position as temporary Head of Coaching</p>	Ethnographic observational data collection
March	<p>New 1st Team Manager and Assistant Manager appointed from another professional football club</p> <p>Director of Football appointed 1st Team Coach</p> <p>Head of Coaching (George) resumes position after temporary 1st Team Management position ends</p>	Interview data collection starts Head of Coaching (George)

Table 3. Overview of source and process of data collection.

<u>Method of Data Collection</u>	<u>Quantity of Data Collection</u>	<u>Source of Data Collection</u>
Semi-structured interviews	5 Interviews (circa 7.5 hours)	Academy Manager
Semi-structured interviews	5 Interviews (circa 7.5 hours)	Head of Coaching
Semi-structured interviews	5 Interviews (circa 7.5 hours)	Lead Foundation Phase Coach
Semi-structured interviews	5 Interviews (circa 7.5 hours)	U12 Coach
Ethnographic observational data	17 Events (circa 34 hours)	Academy training sessions
Ethnographic observational data	11 Events (circa 33 hours)	Academy fixtures
Ethnographic observational data	1 Event (circa 4 hours)	Academy assessment night
Ethnographic observational data	6 Events (circa 12 hours)	U18 training sessions
Ethnographic observational data	2 Events (circa 4 hours)	Coaches' meetings
Ethnographic observational data	2 Events (circa 10 hours)	In-house training sessions

Table 4. The stages and process of organisational change at Alder FC.

Stage of Organisational Change Process	Characteristics of Participant Actions	Temporal Timeline of Change	Locus of Management Activity	Data Extracts (Interview & Observational)
(1) Employment Vulnerability	Managing job role change through interactions with others	Initial Phase	Vertical Management (above and below)	<p>“He [1st Team Manager] would watch a session and berate the coaches afterwards to myself. So, it was a juggling act.” (Participant Interview)</p> <p>The 1st Team Manager wants me to work with the U16’s instead of the U11’s. I’m not sure if he’s moved me because he rates me as a coach, or he thinks the U16’s just need to be kept ticking over before they get released. (Ethnographic Observational Data – Academy Training Night)</p>
(2) Managing Resistance	Creating shared ownership of a new philosophy to monitor and self-enforce	Initial Phase	Vertical Management (below)	<p>“I gave a lot of responsibility to James because I wanted him to have such a big input, rather than saying, ‘Oh, I don’t agree with this’.” (Participant Interview)</p> <p>James discusses the new Academy Management staff with me, ‘if you approached the previous guys with an idea, they would just pie you off. Whereas Richard and George are enthusiastic, you can put new things into place’. (Ethnographic Observational Data – Assessment Night)</p>

(3) Understanding Cultural Issues	Drawing on past experience of the organisational cultural norms	Initial Phase	Vertical Management (above)	“They’re all standing on the touchline when you’re winning. But when you’re losing, they’re all stood away from you.” (Participant Interview)
(4) Managing Interactions with Senior Staff	Ensuring that disagreements with senior staff are explained but non- confrontational	Mid Phase	Vertical Management (above)	“I’ve always felt vulnerable because I was at the club previously. But I’m getting to the stage of being respected... you saw me with the Chairman before, he wants to negotiate my contract. So, we’re getting there but it has taken a lot of time.” (Participant Interview)
(5) Managing Expectations of Senior Staff	Educating senior staff about the constraints and realities of the organisation	Mid Phase	Vertical Management (above)	<p>“One of the biggest challenges we have is educating the Directors, and one in particular who is obsessed with results.” (Participant Interview)</p> <p>Richard makes us [Academy Coaches] aware that the academy match results have to go to the Directors. We start to discuss the impact this might have in terms of how we coach and the information we give on matchday. (Ethnographic Observational Data – Academy Training Session)</p>

(6) Managing Competing Agendas Across the Organisation	Balancing needs across the sectors of the organisation (e.g. 1 st team, academy and business)	Late Phase	Vertical and Horizontal Management (above, below and across)	<p>“We’re not developing players for the 1st team, we’re developing players to be sold to the (English) Premier League.” (Participant Interview)</p> <p>“You have to develop a thick skin for this role” (Participant Interview)</p>
(7) Building Trust, Alliances and Relationships Across the Organisation	Building trust and support of co- workers	Late Phase	Vertical Management (below)	<p>“This season has been the best because the 1st Team Manager had allies in John, but now that he’s left, he hasn’t really got any allies in the academy office.” (Participant Interview)</p>

Table 5. Summary of analysis of key narrative events, participants in-interaction, locus of management activity, and characteristics of social process

Event Trigger	In-Interaction	Locus of Management Activity	Characteristics of Social Process
<p>New 1st Team Manager appointed & employment vulnerability</p> <p><i>‘Everybody’s worried about their jobs’</i></p>	Richard - 1 st Team Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Positive phone conversation
<p>Training session cancelled</p> <p><i>‘Eric lashed out’</i></p>	Richard - Eric (Departing Academy Manager)	Horizontal (managing across)	Uncomfortable face-to-face conversation
<p>Devising a new playing philosophy</p> <p><i>‘John and James had a massive input in terms of how they saw it’</i></p>	Richard – John (Youth Development Phase Lead) & James (Foundation Phase Lead)	Vertical (managing down)	Face-to-face collaborative work for shared ownership
<p>Resistance to change</p> <p><i>‘At half time, he actually had the cheek to say, forget the bloody philosophy’</i></p>	Richard – Geoff (U15 Coach)	Vertical (managing down)	Uncomfortable phone conversation
Managing the 1 st Team Manager	Richard - 1 st Team Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Face-to-face negotiation of understanding academy staffing

<i>'You've got to be diplomatic, agree to disagree'</i>			rules and regulations
Understanding the 1 st Team Manager <i>'I get that Gaffer, that's a really good point'</i>	Richard - 1 st Team Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Face-to-face interaction to manage impulsive behaviour and using political skill to sell ideas to the 1 st Team Manager
Positive interactions with the 1 st Team Manager <i>'Hiya, Gaffer, how are you? You OK?'</i>	Richard - 1 st Team Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Face-to-face positive interactions to build a rapport, whilst being aware the 1 st Team Manager has spoken to other people (e.g. George) about them taking his job
Understanding employment vulnerability <i>'I've never once gone up against him' (1st Team Manager)</i>	Richard - 1 st Team Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Observation of how others have been treated by 1 st Team Manager
Educating Club Directors <i>'One of the biggest challenges is</i>	Richard - Directors	Vertical (managing up)	Face-to-face interactions to shape questions by changing response to Academy aims

<i>educating the Directors'</i>			
<p>Reviewing Academy transfer signings</p> <p><i>'Who's signed him, who's signed him, he's shit, he's shit'</i></p>	Richard – Chairman, Chief Executive and 1 st Team Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Face-to-face interactions during a meeting to shape understanding of limited transfer resources
<p>Understanding the actions of others</p> <p><i>'The 1st Team Manager sent one of his staff over and told us to take our best player off'</i></p>	Richard – 1 st Team Assistant Manager	Vertical (managing up)	Face-to-face interactions with member of 1 st Team coaching staff during an Academy fixture
<p>Working together with U18 Head Coach</p> <p><i>'I'll have really up days and George will be quite low and I'll pick him up; the other days it's the other way around'</i></p>	Richard – George (Professional Development Phase Lead & U18s Head Coach)	Horizontal (managing across)	Face-to-face interactions to work together and support each other to develop trust