Human resource management in sport organisations: Approaches to paid and volunteer staff

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Abstract: This paper explores the use of human resource management (HRM) strategy and practice in Australian sport organisations. In particular, we investigated recruitment, selection, training and development, and performance management polices used by organisations in the sport industry. The research assessed the application of HR practices in relation to both paid staff and volunteer staff. The results of this examination demonstrated that strategic HRM development is still in an early developmental stage in sport organisations. **Keywords:** sport, volunteers, human resource management.

Introduction

Sport organisations play a significant role in developing social capital and contributing to the economic and physical well-being of Australians. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003), at the end of 2001 there were an estimated 98,267 persons employed in 7,147 sport and physical recreation organisations. Among these persons, just 30,631 were employed as prof^ ional sportspersons, sports coaches, trainers or development officers. In addition to paid employees there were an estimated 178,837 volunteers operating in the sport sector. Notably, the size of the volunteer workforce was almost double that of paid staff, with the proportion of volunteers involved in sport and recreation (34.1%) only second to that found in community and welfare work (35.2%) (ABS, 2000). The strategic use of human resource management in relation to this substantive paid and volunteer workforce is critical.

Sport organisations are a mixture of commercial and not-for-profit bodies that have to compete for participants, employees, volunteers and market share. In the Australian government's sport policy, *Backing Australia's Sporting Ability* (2001) the use of strategic human resource management principles which underpin effective business operations was identified an area in which sport organisations need to improve on current practice. While there is a substantive body of literature examining the elite, participative, psychological and social dimensions of sport, there is scant research on sport organisations from a human resource mana__ment (HRM) perspective. Existing research on people management issues in sport has been dominated by investigations of athletes and coaches with little work on administrative staff or volunteers.

Numerous empirical studies have shown that HRM strategy has a significant influence on an organisation's HR practice (Budhwar & Khatri, 2001; Kaye, 1999). The element of recruitment and selection, training and development, and performance management practices have been much discussed topics in HRM research although each is usually studied individually rather than collectively (Wright & Geroy, 2001; Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Hsu & Leat, 2000; Harris, 2001; McCartney & Teague, 2001; Sels, 2002; Aragon-Sanchez, Barba-Aragon & Sanz-Valle, 2003). The amount of attention received by HRM scholars suggests that these three elements are the major pillars of HRM strategy. In this study, we explored the place of human resource management strategy and practice in Australian sport organisations. In particular, this study aimed to discern the recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management practices, used in the sport industry. Furthermore, we wanted to

know if the application of such practices pertained equally to paid staff and volunteer staff, and if not, in what ways they differed. As the sport industry relies heavily on the effective management of both paid staff and volunteers, the examination of the different HR practices fostered by sport organisations in relation to paid staff and volunteers are pertinent. While qualitative research can assist with an insight into why organisations do what they do, we wanted to have a broader picture of current HR practices used by sport organisations. Given that HRM research into sport organisations is embryonic, this investigatory research will also assist with identifying areas for further study. As a result, we considered a quantitative approach to be most appropriate at this time.

Sport organisations and human resource management

Paradoxically, despite the almost universal presence of a mixture of both paid and volunteer staff in every sport organisation, little systematic research has been undertaken into this dimension of human resource management (Chelladurai, 1999). The impr ive for investigating current strategies and practices for managing this combination paid/volunteer workforce is the increasingly prevalent practice of hiring administrative and professional staff to work in sport and its impact on the recruitment and retention of volunteers. A number of overseas studies have focussed on the organisational dimensions of this professionalisation and bureaucratisation that has occurred within community sport organisations in recent years (Kikulis, Slack & Hinings, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c; Slack, 1985; Slack & Hinings, 1992, 1994; Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991). These studies have explored the nature of professionalisation, the sources of commitment and resistance to change, and the impact professionalisation has had upon decision-making structures within these organisations. The findings suggest that perceived control over decision-making has been a major source of conflict between volunteers and paid staff. However, there has been no Australian research on the impact of this critical shift in the management of sport organisations and its impact on human resource management practice.

To date, studies of sport volunteers have been narrowly focussed on exploring volunteers' experiences or characteristics (Coleman, 2002), with little regard paid to the volunteer management practices used by the organisation (Dorsch et al., 2002). While there has been some volunteer management research on major sport events (Farrell, Johnston & Twynam, 1998; Strigas & Jackson, 2003), the transferability of these research findings is highly problematic. The current study aimed to fill this gap by investigating selected human resource management practices and approaches in sport organisations.

The last two decades have seen an emergence of several theoretical models of strategic HRM (Budhwar & Debrah, 2001), and a range of accompanying high performance HR strategies. These HRM strategies have included Bird and Beechler's (1994) utilizer strategy, accumulator strategy and facilitator strategy, and Stace and Dunphy's (1991) paternalist HR strategies, developmental HR strategies, task-focused HR strategies, and turnaround HR strategies. Effective human resource strategy is described in terms of its close alignment with an organisation's corporate and business strategy. Previous studies have shown

that HRM strategy has a significant influence on an organisation's HR practice (Budhwar & Khatri, 2001; Kaye, 1999). However, many organisations still do not have clear HRM strategies to guide their HR activities (Kane, Crawford & Grant, 1999; Gratton et al, 2003; Hsu & Leat, 2000; Kaye, 1999). For example, Gratton et al (2003) found that only 20% of the respondents agreed that their HR department had a clear strategy guiding its HR activities.

Are sport organisations any different? The sport literature suggests that sport organisations are relatively immature in the development of human resource management strategy but are becoming more 'professional' in the way they approach people management issues (Amis, Slack & Hinings, 2004; Chelladurai, 1999). Furthermore, it has been found that although Australian sport organisations often do not have the resources to fully embrace business strategy development and practices in their operations, nonetheless they perceive that they are increasingly engaging in practices that are becoming more formalised and 'professional' (Auld, 1997). These findings imply that, like other industries, many sport organisations will have a set HR prac ·s before they have a HRM strategy. This assumption leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: sport organisations will have similar pattern of HR practices regardless of whether they have a formal HRM strategy or not.

Previous studies have also shown that there is a negative relationship between competition and training. When competition between firms grows, employers are more likely to poach a highly skilled staff from their competitors rather than investing heavily on training their existing staff. It is believed that investment in training can be translated into employee's personal asset rather than the organisation's long lasting asset (Field, Chan & Akhtar, 2000, McCartney & Teague, 2001). Like other industries, sport organisations have to compete for market share and scare human resources, both paid and volunteer. However, Australian Sports Commission (2000) found that sport organisations were unlikely to have human resources management recr· ·nent or training polices for volunteers. It is therefore logical to suggest that sport organisations will put more resources into recruitment of paid staff, and invest minimal resources in recruitment and/or training of volunteers. Hypothesis 2: sport organisations will invest more in the recruitment and training of paid staff and invest less in the recruitment and training of volunteer staff.

Seen from a contingency perspective, an organisation's HRM practices are likely to be dictated by factors such as corporate culture, global strategies, workforce characteristics, management philosophy, unions, labour market conditions, law and societal values (Farley, Hoeing & Yang, 2004). A recent study conducted by Budhwar and Boyne (2004) in relation to HRM strategies employed by both the public sector and private sector in India found that there is little difference between the two sectors. Due to the limited space of this paper, this study will only look at the factor of management philosophy and organisational culture. Hypothesis 3a: The organisational philosophy and EEO/HR program can be used as a predictor for a sport organisation's HR practices regardless of the nature of the organisation

The final aspect which we wanted to explore relates to the under representation of females in sport organisations (Fitzpatrick & Brimage, 1998). Previous research has found that the representation of females and people from culturally diverse backgrounds in both paid and volunteer positions is significantly below national averages and only slowly increasing (Taylor, 2003). Placed under increasing government, community and financial pressure sport organisations will need to respond to issues of discrimination and inequity if they are to survive and remain relevant in an ever-increasing competitive environment (Booth & Tatz, 2000; Taylor, 2000). However, for this study, our focus is on gender rather than other types of diversity as gender-power relations in an organisation are determined by its management culture and structure (Aitchison, 2000). Hypothesis 3b: Organisational philosophy and EEO/HR program can be used as a predictor for an organisation's female representation in paid positions. All hypotheses were tested via a questionnaire survey of a sample of sport organisations.

Me   res

The variables used to measure the relevant constructs were derived from existing instrumentation. The measurement scales for 'selection', 'training' and 'performance appraisal' were adapted from Wan, Kok and Ong (2002). The training scale encompassed not only the amount of money spent on training but also addressed variety of training, transferability to work, extensive training for general skill, and the structure of the training process. Taken together, all these dimensions are sufficient to reflect the extent of an organisation's commitment to staff training and development, especially in the context of the sport industry in where staff size is limited. 'Selection' was measured with a 6-item scale adapted from Wan et al (2002). Items included effort, spending, process and procedure, and criteria for selection. The items in this scale were broad enough for us to explore a sport organisation's recruitment and selection strategy. Performance Appraisal and reward system for paid staff were measured with a four-item scale partially adapted from Wan et al (2002), items included personal performance, team performance, personal development, performance-based pay incentives. Appraisal and reward system for volunteer staff were measured with a three-item scale derived from the literature. Items included performance-based reward, acknowledgement of contribution, and action taken toward poor performance. Each HR practice was measured by a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very inaccurate) to 6 (very accurate). The different HR practices were interpreted by the average score that they obtained on each scale.

The sport sector has traditionally been characterised as a male dominated arena, as a result, the opportunity for woman to be employed or to advance into the management level has been very limited. Previous studies have tried to ascertain if there is a nexus between organisational philosophy and female representation in sport organisations (Moore, Parkhouse & Konrad, 2001). We used Moore et al's (2001) items on organisation's reputation as an equal opportunity employer; senior management leadership in providing EEO for women, and senior management's involvement in compiling with EEO practices for women. Finally, we used a three-item scale to measure a substantive EEO/HRM program that addresses gender diversity. The items

included hiring considerations with respect to women, hiring goals in relation to women, and managerial development training programs targeted to woman. Both organisational philosophy and EEO/HRM program were measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

Harel, Tzafrir and Baruch (2003) measured 'promotion of women' by using the formula: direct calculation of the percentage of women holding managerial roles divided by the percentage of women employed in the organization, to increase the accuracy of the measurement of this variable. As this study aims to illuminate the extent of allocative discrimination occurred in sport organisations in Australia, we measured the percentage of women employed in each hierarchical level rather than the management hierarchy only, using the same framework as Moore et al (2001): 1= < 10%, 2 = 10 - 19%, 3 = 20 - 29%, 4 = 30 - 39%, 5 = 40 - 49%, and 6 = 50% or more.

The sample

The sample consisted of two types of Australian sport organisations. The first group were state and national sport organisations and the second group were professional or semi-professional sport bodies. The purpose for studying the two different organisational types was to provide a further comparison between the industry sub-sectors in relation to their HRM strategy for different types of staff.

A total of 240 self-report questionnaires were posted to the first group according to the client database provided by the Sport Federation. And a total of 95 self-report questionnaires were sent out to group two's CEO/general manager. Follow-up techniques (Dillman, 2000) were used to ensure a high survey response rate and a total of 105 replies were received. This comprised 62 from group one (26% response rate), and 43 from group two (45%). The lower rate of return from group one was anticipated as the membership of this sector, state and national sport organisations, is largely organisations with only one or two paid staff and typically no dedicated human resource management staff member.

Analysis and discussion

Relevant analytical methods were used in this study according to the hypothesis in question. Instead of using the independent t Test, the different HRM strategies were interpreted according to the different clusters in where organisation using the similar HR approach was grouped together. As a result, cluster analysis, and Multiple Discriminant Analysis were used to identify the different patterns of HR approach designed for both paid staff and volunteer staff (hypothesis 1). In order to explore the place of 'recruitment and selection' and 'training and development' in the creation of HR strategy, factor analysis was used to identify the factor dominating the HRM strategies developed for both paid staff and the HRM strategies developed for volunteer staff (hypothesis 2). To identify the effect of 'organisational philosophy' and 'EEO/HR program' have on sport organisation's HR approach to paid staff and volunteers, standard regression was used to identify the combined effect between 'organisational

philosophy' and 'EEO/HR program' and 'employment size' and their individual effect (hypothesis 3a). ANOVA was used to examine the effect of organisation philosophy and EEO/HR program on female representation in different positions (hypothesis 3b).

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1 stated that 'sport organisations have similar pattern of HR practices regardless of whether they have a formal HRM strategy or not'. Four clusters were identified for each group (paid staff and volunteer staff) by using K-Means Cluster Analysis. Each cluster demonstrated a unique pattern for HR practice. Multiple discriminant analysis shows that the Group Centroids for paid staff are: .630, 1.852, and -2.509 (function 1 accounted for 92% of the variance), and the Group Centroids for volunteer staff are: -2.162, -0.01216, and .476 (function 1 accounted for 87% of the variance). These results suggest that they are distinctive from each other. However, each cluster of both paid staff and volunteer staff is mixed with respondents with and without a HRM stra   y. A number of differentiating characteristics are noted here, represented in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows that in the case of paid staff, cluster one is consistently above average in all HR practices while cluster three is consistently low in all HR practices. A majority of respondents fall into these two clusters (36 for the former, and 37 for the latter). In examining the bundle of HR practices reported, organisations that reported not having a strategy in place were found to have a set of HR practices similar to those who reported to have a HR strategy in place. Since we did not have information about what type of HR strategy they fostered, we were unable to determine whether their HR practices were congruent with their HR strategy.

Cluster one scored high on the item of 'performance-based pay' but low on 'performance-based pay incentive', this result suggests a mix of performance-based pay system and mechanistic system. Scoring relatively high across all scales and the use of a mixed paid system suggests that this group of organisations are employing/deploying a HR strategy that resembles the 'accumulator strategy' described by Bird and Beechler (1994). Cluster two obtained a very high score on the scale of 'recruitment and selection' and a high score in performance-based pay and incentive system; this implies the use of attractive packages for talented staff and using this same system to motivate and retain high performers. More importantly, the relatively low priority placed on 'training' suggests that this group are keen to use financial rewards to encourage self-development as a means to maintain high quality among their staff rather than providing training. However, the result shows that less than 1/10 of respondents use this HR strategy with paid administrative staff. In contrast, the extremely low score obtained by the third cluster on all scales indicate that this group of organisations are not very concerned about the quality of their employees and/or they have no expectations of their employees. This can be interpreted as having an unstructured approach to HR. Table 1 illustrates that nearly half of the respondents fall into this group.

Table 1: HR practice for Paid staff by cluster

Cluster	Recruitment & Selection	Training & Development	Reward System	HRM Strategy

1 37 cases – 16 have a HRM strategy	Careful – scored above average	Adequate	a combination between performance-based pay and Mechanistic pay system	Resembles Accumulator strategy – recruiting people with high potential and turn them into the organisation's asset through training & development
2 8 cases - 3 have a HRM strategy	Serious – scored high	Inadequate	Performance-based pay	This resembles an up-or-out strategy – acquire the best but only reward and retain those who perform.
3 36 cases- 7 have a HRM strategy	Casual – scored below average	Neglected	Mechanistic pay system	This resembles the parasite system - the organisations have no expectation of their employees.
4 (7 cases)	No paid staff			

Sport organisations did not expend resources on recruiting volunteers (see table 2). A similar pattern of HR practice appears across both paid staff and volunteer staff. However, the average score obtained for each scale differs largely between the two groups. Although it was found that sport employers are more willing to provide training to volunteer than paid staff, the result shows that less than half of the respondents actively provided training to volunteer staff. Those organisations that scored relatively high on the item 'volunteers are rewarded based on performance' also scored high on the scale of 'training and development'. The positive correlation found in this cluster could mean that 'training' is regarded by these employers as a reward for the volunteer; about 1/3 of the respondents fall into this category.

Table 2: HR Practice for Volunteer staff by Cluster

Cluster	Recruitment & Selection	Training & Development	Reward System	HRM Strategy
1 32 cases- 7 have a HRM strategy	Casual – scored very low - money spent on selection was negligible Volunteers' performance is not cared about	Minimum – scored below average	Low to moderate in acknowledging for volunteers' contribution	Negligent
2 14 cases- 6 have a HRM strategy	Careful – scored high but not much money spent on selection Performance appraisal is not emphasised but expect volunteers to perform	Minimum – scored much below average	Very keen to acknowledge for volunteer's contribution (value the contribution of volunteer)	Praise
3 29 cases- 9 have a HRM strategy	Moderate – scored average but not much money spent on selection Performance appraisal not emphasised - care about volunteer's performance	Intensive – scored high	Keen to acknowledge for volunteer's contribution (value the contribution of volunteer)	Acknowledgement
4 (9 cases)	No volunteer staff			

The overall results indicate that many sport organisations function without a formal strategy in place. Our findings correspond Ezzamel and Willmott's (2004:45) comment that " 'strategy' is simultaneously absent and present. There is no direct reference to 'strategy', yet the CEO can be heard to invoke notions of strategy." Here we can see that practice and strategy are closely related. This explains why organisations can plan their HR practice in the absence of a formal HRM strategy. However, the question raised by Chia (2004:29) as to "are these visible practices really strategy-shaping or are they in fact the mere manifestations of an underlying unconscious pattern of dispositions that provides consistency to managerial actions that we might more accurately call "strategy-in-practice" ?" remains unanswered in this study. Since this study shows that almost every organisation has a unique pattern of HRM practice regardless of whether they have a formal HRM strategy, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hy: iesis 2 stated that 'sport organisations will generally invest more in the recruitment of paid staff and invest less in the recruitment of volunteer staff'.

For paid staff, since the item 'performance appraisals are tied to personal development' loaded equally high in factor 1 and factor 2, it was removed to avoid confusion. The scale of 'recruitment and selection' comes as factor 1 (eigenvalues: 9.079). This is followed by 'training and development' as factor 2 (eigenvalues: 1.090), and 'reward system' as factor 3 (eigenvalues: 0.808). Factor 1 alone has accounted for 60.5% of the variance in the HRM strategy while 'training and development' only accounts for 7.3% of the variance. This result suggests that the issue of 'recruitment and selection' has generally overshadowed all other issues in the creation of a formal or informal HRM strategy for paid staff.

For volunteers 'training and development' emerged as factor 1 (eigenvalues: 8.996), followed by 'recruitment and selection' (eigenvalues: 1.249). However, the item 'volunteers are rewarded based on performance' was loaded on factor 1, suggesting that training was used as a means to reward volunteers. It is congruent with our findings presented in Table 2. 'Poor performance by volunteers is acted upon' was loaded on factor 2, suggesting that volunteers who perform poorly may not be assigned to important tasks. With regard to volunteers, factor one alone has accounted for 60% of the variance in the HRM strategy. The contrasting results exist between their treatments to paid staff and volunteer in the area of 'training and development' (7.3% Vs 60%) indicate that 'training and development' carries more weight in the development of a HRM strategy for volunteer staff than paid staff.

In relation to spending on recruitment, previous studies have shown that organisations resorting to internal promotion will spend less on recruitment (Budhwar & Yaw, 2001). In a similar vein, Snell and Dean (1992) argued that the more complicated the task involved, the more likely for employers to employ a qualified person to do the job. With regard to paid staff, our finding has highlighted three aspects. First, the strong emphasis placed on recruiting and selecting paid staff signifies that internal promotion

may not be very common in sport industry. Second, placing a strong emphasis on 'recruitment and selection' at the expense of 'training and development' may indicate an increased complexity of workforce requirement. The benefit of selecting a right person outweighs the benefit of training existing staff. Third, the extra effort used in recruiting and selecting paid staff suggests that sport organisations generally believe that employing a right person will pay off in the long run.   However, the finding for volunteers is quite different. The strong emphasis that sport organisations placed on training and developing volunteers implies volunteers are expected to learn the required skills and knowledge but not required to initially possess these required skills and knowledge at their time of entry into the organisation.   The different HR approaches that the sport organisations have for paid staff and volunteers highlight the different nature of these two groups.   Given the mixed results, hypothesis 2 is not fully supported. Further research into this aspect is required.

Hypothesis 3a: Organisational philosophy and EEO/HR program can be used as a predictor for an organisation's HR approach. Pai   aff : Using standard regression found that the combined effect between 'organisational philosophy', 'EEO/HR program' and 'employment size of paid staff' explained 58% of the variance in training (p<0.000), 42% in selection (p<0.000), and 19% in reward system (p>0.05) of semi-professional/professional sport organisations. With the exception of 'reward system', all items were highly significant. However, an examination of the T-value suggests that only EEO/HR program contributes to the prediction of training (p<0.000), selection (p<0.000), and reward system (p<0.05). Having controlled both 'organisational philosophy' and 'employment size', EEO/HR program was found as a significant predictor for the semi-professional/professional sport organisation's overall HRM strategy for paid staff (R square .52, p<0.000).   In contrast, this combined effect was found insignificant for the state/national sport organisations in training (p>0.05), selection (p>0.05), and reward system (p>0.05). In their group, neither 'organisational philosophy' nor 'EEO/HR program' can be used as a predictor for their HRM strategy. **Volunteer** : The combined effect of 'organisational philosophy', 'HR/EEO program', and 'number of volunteer' explained 29% of the variance in 'training (p<0.01)', 10% in 'selection (p>0.05) for state and national sport organisations. However, the t-test indicated that only HR/EEO program was a significant predictor for training (p<0.05) and it was also significant in predicting the organisation's overall HRM strategy towards volunteer staff (p<0.03). In contrast, this combined effect was found insignificant as a predictor for both 'training' and 'selection' amongst the semi-professional/professional sport organisations although 'organisational philosophy' by itself was found significant as a predictor of selection (p<0.05) but not significant in predicting the organisation's overall HRM strategy toward volunteer staff (p>0.05).

The reason for EEO/HR program can be a predictor for the professional sport organisations could be due to the fact that this type of organisation has greater exposure to media and public awareness or just having the resources to implement such programs. The different impact that EEO/HR programs have on paid staff and volunteers is still unproven. As a result, further study is required to help explain the EEO/HR program's ineffectiveness for volunteers. The result shows that HR/EEO program can be a predictor for the organisation's HRM strategy depending on the type of organisation. Consequently, hypothesis 3a is not

supported.

Hypothesis 3b stated that organisational philosophy and EEO/HR program can be used as a predictor for an organisation's female representation in paid positions.

While 'organisational philosophy' is not an important predictor of HRM strategy, a higher score in 'organisational philosophy' is closely associated with higher female representation in paid position for manager and supervisor. For example, management level (less than 10% - mean for organisational philosophy: 3.7; 50% or more - mean for organisational philosophy: 4.6 , $p<0.05$), and supervisory level (less than 10% -mean for organisational philosophy: 3.5; 30-49% and 50% or more - mean for organisational philosophy: 4.6, $p<0.05$). However, no significance was found in the executive staff level or support staff level. Since significance was found in the middle management level (manager and supervisor), this finding suggests that if an organisation fosters a philosophy which promotes gender-equity in the workplace it will at least reflect in a better gender balance acrc middle level management positions. On the other hand, as a better balance of gender-mix was only found in the middle management level, we cannot assert with confidence as to whether this will eventually transcend levels. Given the inconsistent findings, Hypothesis 3b is only partially supported.

Conclusion

Although the sample size for this study was relatively small, it allowed us to look at certain HR issues from a new perspective. In terms of HRM approaches, we found that there is a mixture of practices for paid staff and volunteers. Sport organisations are still in the process of developing strategic approaches to human resource management and in this regard are relatively immature players in the marketplace in recruiting staff that will best meet their organisational goals. This is particularly the case for volunteer employees who are largely recruited by word of mouth. For paid staff, more emphasis is put on recruiting people that the organisation will not have to spend much time/resources on training and development. Performance management practices are not widely used, and rarely employed with volunteer staff.

Our study also discovered that EEO/HR programs can be a predictor for some organisation's HR approaches but not for others. With regard to the relationship between 'organisational philosophy' and 'female representation in paid positions', differences are only seen in middle level positions. Organisations that scored high in this area were staffed with higher proportions of female representation. However, like previous studies on this issue, the causal direction was not established. That is, does having more women in senior position make the organisation foster a philosophy which encourages more women in higher position or does organisational philosophy promote female representation into paid positions. As we have mentioned in the beginning of this paper, it was our intention to use a quantitative study to construct a broad picture/map that can direct our future research effort in the area of HRM in sport industry. This study has raised some important questions in relation to HRM in sport organisations. Future studies are needed to address these issues from different perspectives with different instruments.

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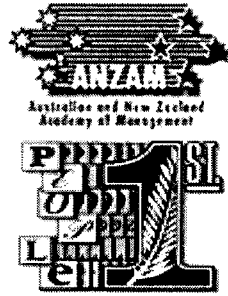
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