

**HRM in the A-League: An Interpretive Study Investigating Recruitment and  
Retention Practices in the 'Global Game'**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |      |
|--|------|
| List of Figures .....                                | vii  |
| List of Tables .....                                 | viii |
| List of Abbreviations .....                          | ix   |
| Attestation of Authorship.....                       | x    |
| Acknowledgements .....                               | xi   |
| AUTEC Ethics Approval .....                          | xii  |
| Dedications .....                                    | xiii |
| Abstract.....  | xiv  |
| Chapter One: Introduction .....                      | 1    |
| 1.1 Background to the Research.....                  | 1    |
| 1.2 Research Context .....                           | 2    |
| 1.3 Purpose of the Research .....                    | 4    |
| 1.4 Overview of the Research .....                   | 5    |
| 1.5 Structure of the Thesis .....                    | 6    |
| 1.6 Delimitations of Scope and Key Assumptions ..... | 7    |
| 1.7 Summary .....                                    | 7    |
| Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .....          | 8    |
| 2.1 Introduction .....                               | 8    |
| 2.2 Human Resource Management Overview .....         | 8    |
| 2.1.1 The Areas of the HRM Framework .....           | 11   |
| 2.1.1.1. <i>Planning</i> .....                       | 12   |
| 2.1.1.2 <i>Recruitment and Selection</i> .....       | 12   |
| 2.1.1.3 <i>Socialisation and Orientation</i> .....   | 13   |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 2.1.1.4 <i>Training and Development</i> .....                           | 14        |
| 2.1.1.5 <i>Compensation and Reward</i> .....                            | 14        |
| 2.1.1.6 <i>Performance Management</i> .....                             | 16        |
| 2.1.1.7 <i>Retention or Replacement</i> .....                           | 17        |
| <b>2.3 A Focus on Recruitment</b> .....                                 | <b>17</b> |
| 2.3.1 Recruitment Practices .....                                       | 18        |
| 2.3.2 Internal Versus External Recruitment .....                        | 20        |
| <b>2.4 A Focus on Retention</b> .....                                   | <b>23</b> |
| 2.4.1 Retention Themes within the HRM Framework .....                   | 25        |
| 2.4.2 Career Incentives and Retention Strategies .....                  | 27        |
| <b>2.5 Human Resource Management Practices in Australian SMEs</b> ..... | <b>29</b> |
| <b>2.6 Human Resource Management: A Sport Perspective</b> .....         | <b>32</b> |
| 2.6.1 Restructuring Player Portfolios .....                             | 33        |
| 2.6.2 Player Development Systems .....                                  | 34        |
| 2.6.3 Player Recruitment Systems .....                                  | 35        |
| 2.6.3.1 <i>Group Routines</i> .....                                     | 37        |
| 2.6.3.2 <i>Internally Developed Resources</i> .....                     | 37        |
| 2.6.3.3 <i>Externally Acquired Resources</i> .....                      | 38        |
| 2.6.3.4 <i>Financial Resources</i> .....                                | 38        |
| 2.6.4 Player Selection Procedures .....                                 | 39        |
| <b>2.7 Recruitment Systems in Professional Football</b> .....           | <b>40</b> |
| 2.7.1. The Development of the Football Transfer System .....            | 40        |
| 2.7.2 Labour Markets and Recruitment of Footballers .....               | 43        |
| 2.7.3 The Role of the Player Agent .....                                | 45        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 2.7.4 Impact of External Restrictions .....                | 46        |
| 2.7.4.1 Salary Caps .....                                  | 47        |
| 2.7.4.2 Age Eligibility .....                              | 48        |
| 2.7.4.3 Nationality and Eligibility .....                  | 48        |
| <b>2.8 Player Migration Theory .....</b>                   | <b>50</b> |
| 2.8.1 Sports Labour Migration Typology Models .....        | 50        |
| 2.8.2 Football Specific World System Theory .....          | 55        |
| 2.8.3 Economic, Historical and Social Determinates .....   | 57        |
| 2.8.4 Push and Pull Factors .....                          | 58        |
| 2.8.5 Other Impacting Factors .....                        | 59        |
| <b>2.9 Research Gap .....</b>                              | <b>60</b> |
| <b>2.10 Summary .....</b>                                  | <b>61</b> |
| <b>Chapter Three: Methodology .....</b>                    | <b>62</b> |
| <b>3.1 Introduction .....</b>                              | <b>62</b> |
| <b>3.2 Research Philosophy .....</b>                       | <b>62</b> |
| <b>3.3 Research Approach .....</b>                         | <b>64</b> |
| 3.3.1 Strategy and Method .....                            | 65        |
| <b>3.4 Research Design .....</b>                           | <b>67</b> |
| 3.4.1 Quantitative Phase – Secondary Data Collection ..... | 67        |
| 3.4.2 Qualitative Phase .....                              | 68        |
| 3.4.2.1 Participant Criteria and Identification .....      | 68        |
| 3.4.2.2 Participant Recruitment .....                      | 69        |
| 3.4.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews .....                   | 70        |
| <b>3.5 Data Analysis .....</b>                             | <b>72</b> |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 3.5.1 Quantitative Phase .....   | 72        |
| 3.5.2 Qualitative Phase .....  | 72        |
| 3.5.2.1 <i>Thematic Analysis</i> .....   | 73        |
| 3.5.2.2 <i>Data Analysis Procedures</i> .....                                      | 74        |
| <b>3.6 Potential Bias .....</b>  | <b>75</b> |
| <b>3.7 Ethical Considerations.....</b>   | <b>76</b> |
| <b>3.8 Limitations .....</b>   | <b>77</b> |
| <b>3.9 Delimitations .....</b>   | <b>78</b> |
| <b>3.10 Summary .....</b>  | <b>79</b> |
| <b>Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion .....</b>                                 | <b>80</b> |
| <b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>  | <b>80</b> |
| <b>4.2 A-League Player Recruitment Patterns.....</b>                               | <b>80</b> |
| 4.2.1 A-League Player Composition.....   | 80        |
| 4.2.2 A-League Player Recruitment Channels .....                                   | 82        |
| 4.2.3 A-League Averages – Players, Clubs and Seasons .....                         | 83        |
| 4.2.4 Marquee Players .....  | 85        |
| 4.2.5 Foreign Players .....  | 86        |
| <b>4.3 A-League Specific Human Resource Management Model .....</b>                 | <b>87</b> |
| <b>4.4 Recruitment and Selection .....</b>   | <b>88</b> |
| 4.4.1 The A-league Recruitment Decision – Local, Foreign, or Marquee Players ..... | 89        |
| 4.4.1.1 <i>Recruitment of Local Players</i> .....                                  | 89        |
| 4.4.1.2 <i>Recruitment of Foreign Players</i> .....                                | 91        |
| 4.4.1.3 <i>Recruitment of Marquee Players</i> .....                                | 93        |
| 4.4.2 Limitation Factors Associated with Player Recruitment .....                  | 95        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 4.4.3 A-league Player Mobility and Migration Channels .....        | 97         |
| 4.4.3.1 Recruitment from European Clubs.....                       | 97         |
| 4.4.3.2 Promotion thru the Australian Football Pyramid .....       | 98         |
| 4.4.4 A-League Player Identification and Recruitment Methods ..... | 99         |
| 4.4.4.1 Player Agents .....  | 99         |
| 4.4.4.2 Scouting Networks .....                                    | 103        |
| 4.4.4.3 Coaching Networks .....                                    | 103        |
| 4.4.4.4 Player Networks .....                                      | 104        |
| 4.4.4.5 Club Networks .....  | 105        |
| 4.4.5 Selection Procedures .....                                   | 107        |
| 4.4.5.1 Completing Due Diligence .....                             | 107        |
| 4.4.5.2 Player Trials and Medicals .....                           | 108        |
| 4.4.5.3 Contract Negotiations .....                                | 109        |
| <b>4.5 Orientation and Socialisation .....</b>                     | <b>111</b> |
| 4.5.1 Player Settlement Procedures .....                           | 111        |
| 4.5.2 Responsibility for Player Settlement and Welfare .....       | 114        |
| <b>4.6 Training and Development .....</b>                          | <b>115</b> |
| 4.6.1 Career Progression – Football Development .....              | 116        |
| 4.6.2 Personal Development .....                                   | 117        |
| 4.6.2.1 Franchises Current Practices .....                         | 117        |
| 4.6.2.2 The Role of the Player Agent .....                         | 118        |
| 4.6.2.3 The Role of the Players Union .....                        | 119        |
| <b>4.7 Contract Extension or Separation .....</b>                  | <b>120</b> |
| 4.7.1 Contractual Obligations .....                                | 120        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 4.7.2 Player Retention Process .....                               | 121        |
| 4.7.2.1 Franchise Review Systems .....                             | 121        |
| 4.7.2.2 Performance Related Factors and Future Opportunities ..... | 122        |
| 4.7.2.3 Contractual Regulations and Balance of Power .....         | 124        |
| 4.7.3 Support Mechanisms for Departing Players .....               | 125        |
| 4.7.3.1 Free Agency – The Search for Future Employment .....       | 125        |
| 4.7.3.2 Retirement and Transition .....                            | 127        |
| <b>4.8 Summary .....</b>   | <b>128</b> |
| <b>Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations .....</b>          | <b>129</b> |
| <b>5.1 Introduction .....</b>                                      | <b>129</b> |
| <b>5.2 Summary of Key Findings .....</b>                           | <b>130</b> |
| 5.2.1 Recruitment and Selection .....                              | 130        |
| 5.2.2 Orientation and Socialisation .....                          | 132        |
| 5.2.3 Training and Development .....                               | 133        |
| 5.2.4 Contract Extension or Separation.....                        | 134        |
| <b>5.3 Concluding Statement .....</b>                              | <b>136</b> |
| <b>5.4 Recommendations .....</b>                                   | <b>139</b> |
| 5.4.1 Recommendations for the A-League .....                       | 139        |
| 5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research .....                    | 140        |
| <b>References .....</b>  | <b>142</b> |
| <b>Appendices .....</b>  | <b>151</b> |
| <b>Appendix A: Additional Findings Tables .....</b>                | <b>151</b> |
| <b>Appendix B: Participant Introduction Letter .....</b>           | <b>157</b> |
| <b>Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet .....</b>             | <b>158</b> |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Appendix D: Consent Form</b> .....       | <b>161</b> |
| <b>Appendix D: Interview Schedule</b> ..... | <b>162</b> |

### **LIST OF FIGURES**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 2.1: Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) three classification of Human Resources .....  | 9   |
| Figure 2.2: HRM framework adapted from Cuskelly et al. (2006); Wiesner and Innes (2010);<br>Huang (2011); Hoye et al. (2012) .....      | 11  |
| Figure 2.3: Bradbury and Forsyth (2012) HRM Selection Process Translated to a Sport Context<br>.....                                    | 39  |
| Figure 2.4: Maguire (1996) typology of sports labour migration model .....  | 51  |
| Figure 2.5: Magee and Sugden (2002) adapted typology of football migrants .....   | 52  |
| Figure 2.6: Magee & Sugden (2002) Football World System Theory: The Global Diffusion of<br>Football and Football Labour Migration ..... | 56  |
| Figure 4.1: The A-League Specific Human Resource Model .....  | 88  |
| Figure 5.1: A-League Football Franchise Recruitment System Framework .....  | 131 |
| Figure 5.2: Three Main Determinates that Influence A-League Recruitment and Retention<br>Processes .....                                | 138 |

### **LIST OF TABLES**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 2.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Internal Recruitment Practices .....           | 21 |
| Table 2.2: Advantages and Disadvantages of External Recruitment Practices .....           | 22 |
| Table 2.3: Retention themes located within the HRM Framework .....                        | 26 |
| Table 2.4: Poli's (2010) three ideal-typical upward career pathways model .....           | 54 |
| Table 2.5: Poli (2010) Football Migration Typology of Spaces Model .....                  | 55 |
| Table 3.1: Strengths and Weakness Associated with an Interpretive Research Approach ..... | 64 |
| Table 3.2: Respondents Assigned Pseudonym Names and Related Position .....                | 71 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 4.1: A-League Players' Country of Origin .....  | 81  |
| Table 4.2: A-League Players' Confederation of Origin .....  | 81  |
| Table 4.3: A-League Player Recruitment Channels Season 2005/06 – 2012/13 .....                                    | 82  |
| Table 4.4: A-League Players' Mean Age on Entry .....  | 83  |
| Table 4.5: A-League Players' Mean Number of Clubs and Seasons .....   | 84  |
| Table 4.6: Marquee Players and Playing Position .....   | 85  |
| Table 4.7: Player Status, Home Confederation and Playing Position of A-League Players .....                       | 86  |
| Table A1: A-League Players' Country of Origin (Full List) .....   | 151 |
| Table A2: A-League Player Transfers in Season 2005/2006 .....   | 151 |
| Table A3: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2006/2007 .....   | 152 |
| Table A4: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2007/2008 .....   | 152 |
| Table A5: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2008/2009 .....   | 153 |
| Table A6: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2009/2010 .....   | 153 |
| Table A7: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2010/2011 .....   | 154 |
| Table A8: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2011/2012 .....   | 154 |
| Table A9: A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2012/2013 .....   | 155 |
| Table A10: Local Players versus Marquee Players: Average Number of Club, Seasons and Age<br>on League Entry ..... | 155 |
| Table A11: A-League Franchises Utilisation of Marquee Players Season 2005/06 – 2012/13<br>.....                   | 156 |
| Table E1: A summary of the Interview Schedule .....   | 162 |

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| <b>Abbreviation</b> | <b>Meaning</b>  |
|---------------------|---|
| AFC                 | Asian Football Confederation  |
| AFL                 | Australian Football League  |
| ABNL                | Australian National Basketball League                                       |
| CEO                 | Chief Executive Officer   |
| CBA                 | Collective Bargaining Agreement   |
| CONCACAF            | Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football |
| CONMEBOL            | Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol  |
| EIHL                | Elite Ice Hockey League   |
| EPL                 | English Premier League  |
| EEA                 | European Economic Area  |
| EEC                 | European Economic Community   |
| EU                  | European Union  |
| FFP                 | Financial Fair Play   |
| FFA                 | Football Federation Australia   |
| HRM                 | Human Resource  |
| HRM                 | Human Resource Management   |
| FIFA                | International Federation of Association Football                            |
| FIFPro              | International Federation of Professional Footballers                        |
| MLS                 | Major League Soccer   |
| NBA                 | National Basketball Association   |
| NFL                 | National Football League  |
| NCAA                | National Collegiate Athletic Association                                    |
| NSL                 | National Soccer League  |
| NYL                 | National Youth League   |
| OFC                 | Oceania Football Confederation  |
| PFA                 | Professional Footballers Australia  |
| PSOs                | Professional Sporting Organisations   |
| RBV                 | Resource Based Values   |
| SMEs                | Small-and Medium-Sized Enterprises  |
| SPSS                | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences                                 |
| UEFA                | Union of European Football Associations                                     |

## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Full Name: Alec John Wilson

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

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I also must give thanks to my team of proofreaders, Ryan Wilson, Josh Mattock, Karl Goddard, and Chrissy Colman as without your editing assistance who knows what would have happened.

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Lastly, and most importantly, I must give thanks to my partner Veera Miskala for all that you have had to endure over the past 12 months while I have been shut away in my office, as without your support I would never have been able to tackle such a task.

## AUTEC ETHICAL APPROVAL



23 April 2013

Sean Phelps  
Faculty of Business and Law

Dear Sean

Re Ethics Application: 13/43 Recruitment, registration, & retention of talented foreigners: A review of HRM practices and player recruitment strategies of A-League football franchises.

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTECS).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 23 April 2016.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTECS:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 23 April 2016;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 23 April 2016 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTECS is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECS approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTECS grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. If your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply there.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

All the very best with your research,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Madeline Banda'.

Madeline Banda  
Acting Executive Secretary  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Alec Wilson [a\\_j\\_wilson17@hotmail.com](mailto:a_j_wilson17@hotmail.com)

## **DEDICATIONS**

To my family

I would never have arrived at this destination,  
without your continued support and ongoing patience.

## Abstract

Professional sports teams according to Madura (1982) possess very similar Human Resource Management (HRM) characteristics to those on display in many other business entities, especially those located in the small-and-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) sector. Research investigating the HRM processes of Professional Sports Organisation (PSOs) has predominately focused on player recruitment systems, with little attention being given to the degree which sports organisations apply established workplace HRM selection processes to athlete selection procedures (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012). Other aspects of the HRM framework (e.g. orientation and socialisation, training and development, and retention) have, to date, largely been ignored from a sport management perspective. The football-related literature in this area, for example, is dominated by examples of labour migration, which is heavily influenced by World System Theory (Magee & Sugden, 2002). While further suggesting that football players are nothing more than commodities which can be sold or traded resulting in either a net profit or loss (Maguire, 1999).

European clubs at the core of world football dominate the transfer market and acquire the best talent. The financial muscle of these particular clubs along with other “push” and “pull” factors has led to a global migration of playing talent, as players now of all ages seek new opportunities to continue plying their trade. To date, current sports migration literature has neglected the connection between player migration and organisational HRM practices, a connection that needs to be established given that a PSO’s success significantly relies on their ability to arrange their playing resources into a collective group, a process that has the potential to generate a competitive advantage. Currently, player registration periods in professional football are a hive of activity, as players and their agents seek new opportunities to advance or prolong their athletic careers, while the clubs utilise these periods to restructure their own human resource portfolios, to satisfy the needs and wants of their key stakeholders (fans, sponsors and financial investors). Traditionally, football clubs recruited players from their own local community, but with the diffusion of the “global game” clubs are increasingly looking further afield to uncover new playing talent, searches that typically occur across the following three distinct levels; (1) between clubs competing within the same competition in the same country, (2) between clubs competing in different competitions in the same country, and (3) clubs competing in different leagues in different countries.

This thesis adopts the traditional HRM framework provided by Hoye, Nicholson, Smith, Stewart, and Westerbeck (2012) to identify and analyse the recruitment and retention

processes employed by football franchises in Australasia's only full-time professional league (the A-League). The interpretive investigation was completed via an abductive mixed-method case study approach, where data was collected in two consecutive but distinct phases. Statistical data related to player recruitment and retention was collected, revealing the average age for a local player entering the league (23 years) was noticeably different to the average age of a European player (30 years old) and that, on average, these foreign imports – most of whom were found to be attack-minded players – spent less than two years playing in the competition. These findings were used as a platform (i.e. conversation-starter) to complete eight semi-structured interviews with purposefully targeted individuals involved in contract negotiation proceedings. To ensure information was gathered that presented the perspectives of both sides interviews were completed with both franchise CEOs and player agents.

Concepts identified during these discussions were refined to explain why the A-League HRM processes surrounding recruitment and retention of football players has evolved in such a manner, while also allowing an "A-League specific" HRM model to be developed. Overall, it was concluded that A-league HRM processes are vastly determined by aspects associated with relationships, responsibility, and reputations. The identification of these three key factors allowed recommendations to be generated to allow all current and any future A-league franchises the opportunity to develop more sustainable HRM strategies, such as developing a formal induction program for all new players. Other recommendations for future research are also presented.

## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Effective Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are critical to organisational effectiveness regardless of the business sector in which they operate (Aiello, Grover, Andrews, & Herszkopf, 2005; Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006; Doherty, 1998; Huselid, 1995; Lawler, Levenson, & Boudreau, 2004; Sirmon, Gove, & Hitt, 2008). Professional sporting organisations (PSOs), especially those involving team sports, have been shown to possess very similar human resource characteristics to those adopted by many business industries because organisation success is entirely placed upon the shoulders of its human resources (Madura, 1982; Wright, Smart, & McMahan, 1995). According to Madura (1982), the organisational success of PSOs involved in team sport can be traced back to their ability to combine their human resources to form an effective collective group, a process which can lead to the generation of competitive advantages over industry competitors (Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001). During sports competition, when teams compete against each other, normally the team comprising players with more valuable industry-specific skills holds the advantage, because game outcomes are significantly influenced by the performance levels of each its members (Gerrard, 2005). Furthermore, Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) identified that professional football clubs looking to develop on-field success face the same recruitment decisions as other organisations in the wider business context, to either recruit internally by developing internal development pathways or recruit previously developed talent from the external labour market. According to Cappelli and Crocker-Hefter (1997) the recruitment method a club employs depends on their overall player development strategy. They identified two specific methods. Firstly, some clubs are shown to prefer a long-term player development approach, by nurturing talent from within and seeking to retain these players by keeping them happy and motivated. This is a system that develops club loyalty and creates long-term relationships between players and fans. Secondly, other clubs prefer to utilise player drafts, trades and transfers to recruit already developed players from other teams, developing a situation where these organisations are effectively trading their most important human resources between each other (Cappelli & Crocker-Hefter, 1997).

In the early years of professional football players were predominately recruited from the local communities surrounding the club. As clubs look increasingly further afield to uncover new playing talent, more players and more professionals are now migrating, both within and between nations located on the same continents, and increasingly between nations on different continents and different hemispheres (Elliott & Maguire, 2008; Maguire, 2011a,

2011b; McGovern, 2002; M. Taylor, 2006). A trend that has resulted in “over half (60%)” of all players employed by English Premier League (EPL) clubs, the top tier of English football, have grown up “beyond England’s national borders”, with players average stay at a club “less than two and a half years”, an all time low (Magowan, 2014). Magee and Sugden (2002) believe that plane schedules have replaced bus and train timetables for the modern day football scout. Furthermore, it is fairly common nowadays for players residing in countries where there is an overproduction of athletic labour in their particular sport to seek out additional opportunities outside their homeland; a trend that is particularly strong for athletes who reside in countries located at the core of a particular sporting world (Darby, Akindes, & Kirwin, 2007; Elliott & Maguire, 2008; Magee & Sugden, 2002; McGovern, 2002).

Although HRM practices employed by business organisations have received notable academic attention, little consideration has been given to applying the HRM framework to a professional sporting environment, apart from Bradbury and Forsyth (2012) who examined the degree to which sporting organisations use HRM selection procedures during athlete selection procedures. To date in relation to professional football, the world’s “global game” (FIFA, 2008), researchers have predominately focused on player recruitment and development methods with little attention being paid towards other aspects of HRM, specifically socialisation and retention of playing staff (e.g. player settlement procedures, induction programs). Moreover, current sport migration literature has tended to focus on the reasons behind why players migrate, as opposed to how these human resources are identified and who leads the recruitment process. For example McGovern (2000) refers to the “brawn drain” where the wealthy clubs in Europe who are at the core of world football acquire the best talent by flexing their superior financial muscle. Research regarding the connection between player migration and football clubs’ HRM practices appears to be decidedly absent from previous literature. This study will therefore contribute to the body of knowledge by examining the applicability and application of HRM processes within the internationalisation of SME sporting franchises, especially in relation to athlete recruitment and retention processes. The context chosen is the A-League football competition, one of the global game's youngest professional leagues.

## **1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The rules and regulations governing player transfers in professional football has been a subject for debate since its beginnings in the late 1800s. Over the subsequent decades there has been a number of legal challenges (Radford versus Campbell,[1890]; Kingaby versus Aston Villa Football Club, [1912]; Eastham versus Newcastle United FC, [1963]) (McArdle, 2000), but none bigger than the landmark Bosman case (Belgian Football Association versus Bosman [1996]),

which introduced the principle of true free agency in football (McArdle, 2000). These legal challenges all concerned themselves with the freedom of movement and how current regulations acted as a restraint of trade (McArdle, 2000), a topic which is still contentious. Recently elected International Federation of Professional Footballers (FIFPro) President Philippe Piat, stated that “professional footballers still do not enjoy the same freedoms that almost every other worker does ... the existing transfer system contravenes laws and infringes footballers’ rights” (Slater, 2013, p. 3). Nevertheless, transfer windows (registration periods) in today’s current football environment have become a hive of activity as players and their agents use these periods to seek new opportunities to advance or prolong their own or clients’ athletic careers (Williams, 2007). Likewise, clubs also see it as an opportunity to restructure their own human resource portfolios in order to satisfy the needs and wants of their key stakeholders (Madura, 1982). Transfers which according to Maguire (1996) occur across three different levels, namely, within nations, between nations on the same continent, and between nations located in different continents in different hemispheres.

The research context for this particular study focuses on player recruitment and retention practice of professional football franchises involved in the Australian A-League. The A-League is a closed league association football competition which is Australasia’s top professional football league, sitting at the top of Football Federation Australia (FFA) football pyramid (Cockerill, 2013). It was founded in 2004 after the disbandment of the forerunning National Soccer League (NSL) and staged its inaugural season in 2005/2006 (coinciding with the Northern Hemisphere’s season) after the disbandment of the original NSL (Lock, Taylor, & Darcy, 2007). This was due to the historical football culture in Australia which was linked with ethnicity. Clubs were developed as vehicles for nationalistic expressionism, which largely alienated the game’s mainstream following (Hughson, 1992; Mosely, 1994). The A-League was developed to engage with a wider range of fans and was initially an eight team league based on one team per city structure (Lock et al., 2007). The number of franchises competing in the league has fluctuated over the initial eight seasons of its existence, as five expansion/replacement franchises have entered the league while three have become defunct and ceased to exist. At present the league is comprised of ten teams, four located in New South Wales, two in Victoria and one each located in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and New Zealand (*Official A-League History*, n.d)

Each franchise’s squad must contract between 20-26 players and are only allowed a maximum of five visa players, which is any player who is not classified as a citizen of Australia or any player holding a refugee or special protection visa, or not classified as a New Zealand or Australian citizen when a franchise is domiciled in New Zealand (FFA, 2011). Additionally, each

squad must also contract a minimum of three under-20 players. The league is controlled by a strictly enforced salary cap which was set at \$2.48 AUD million for season 2012/2013 (FFA, 2011). Since the inception of the league, each franchise has been allowed to sign “marquee players” whose salary can be excluded from the cap in order to help franchises attract big name signings. The FFA extended this exemption prior to season 2010/2011 by allowing all franchises the opportunity to sign one “International” and one “Australian” marquee player per season.

The league operates under a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) which was negotiated primarily between three parties; the FFA, Professional Footballers Australia (PFA) and the franchises. The agreement covers the terms and conditions of the players’ employment stipulating that a players’ contracted period runs from the 1<sup>st</sup> May – 30<sup>th</sup> April, the salary cap, and within what boundaries the franchises can discipline players (FFA, 2011). Furthermore, the CBA also stipulates the registration periods (transfer windows) franchises can formally sign players. There are two such periods, firstly, “a 12 week period fixed by the FFA between July and October which closes seven days after the commencement of the first official competition Match of the League Season” and then “a 4 week period fixed by the FFA within the months of January and February” (FFA, 2011, p. 1). Finally, the CBA also states that the A-League operates with a free movement (transfer) and no compensation fee system (FFA, 2011).

The FFA further expanded the competition at the start of 2008/2009 season with the formation of the National Youth League (NYL), a league designed to function as a youth development and reserve team system (FFA, 2008). The formation of this new league required all franchises to contract a squad of 14 youth development players each season who must be between the ages of 16 – 21 years old on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January at the start of each season (FFA, 2011). The League also allows each franchise to select four “over-age” players from their current senior roster as a way for allowing them to provide players returning from injury or out of form with valuable match practice. The New Zealand domiciled franchise the Wellington Phoenix, were excluded from this expansion as the FFA was unwilling to invest money into developing young New Zealand talent (“Phoenix's Youth League hopes raised.,” 2008).

### **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

This thesis investigates the applicability and application of HRM practices within the sporting internationalisation of the A-League football franchise model, especially in relation to player recruitment and retention methods.

Its aim is to use empirical data to adapt the traditional HRM framework (refer Figure 2.2) and develop a model which best explains the HRM practices of these SME businesses. The conclusions generated will allow recommendations to be presented on how the A-League operators can develop more sustainable HRM player recruitment and retention strategies.

To achieve this research aim four research objectives were formulated. These objectives were designed to ensure a process that completed the following (a) an examination of existing HRM and player migration literature; (b) uncovers current patterns associated with A-League player recruitment and retention practices; (c) assesses A-League franchises HRM practice; (d) offers recommendations to develop more sustainable HRM processes. Therefore, this study concerned itself with investigating the following:

Objective 1: To implement relevant discourse analysis techniques, which assist in the critical review of existing HRM and athletic labour migration literature, with particular attention being given to their application and applicability to professional football.

Objective 2: To collect and critically analyse secondary player migration data of A-League franchises to uncover current patterns concerned with (a) the recruitment and registration of both international and local players, and (b) the retention (employment) and review (post-employment) of both groups of players.

Objective 3: To access and assess the past and present HRM practices implemented by A-League franchises through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders involved in A-League player recruitment and retention processes.

Objective 4: To construct conclusions with regards to HRM and international staff recruitment (football specific) of A-League franchises, which will allow recommendations to be generated on how current and future expansion franchises can develop more sustainable HRM, player recruitment and player retention strategies.

#### **1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH**

This study was completed via an interpretive approach, using a mix-method case study approach with data collection and analysis occurring in two separate overlapping phases. The first phase involved gathering and analysing related secondary literature. The collection and analysis of secondary quantitative data surrounding player profiles and transfer history then ensued. This data was coded and inputted into SPSS software to allow descriptive statistical testing procedures (univariate analysis) to be completed, results which uncovered A-League franchises' current patterns in association with their recruitment and retention practices.

Moreover, these results were also used to shape more purposeful and insightful questions during the qualitative phase (Yin, 2009). The qualitative phase involved completing eight semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in A-League player's HRM process, from three different subsets. Of these eight interviews, one was conducted with a current franchise CEO, two with former CEOs, four with current player agents, and one with a representative from the Players' Union.

Thematic analysis was completed via a top down theoretical approach (deductive) of the research participant's responses (refer to section 3.5.2.1). These transcribed documents were then reviewed multiple times by the researcher; initial codes were then generated before reviewing and naming the themes. Themes were defined and named in a relation to the pre-existing HRM framework identified during the literature review (refer Figure 2.2). The development of these themes then allowed the researcher to develop his own conceptual model to explain the HRM practices A-League franchises use in recruiting and retaining playing talent (refer Figure 4.1).

## **1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

This section outlines how this thesis is structured. A review of literature is offered in Chapter Two, which discusses concepts in relation to HRM processes, particularly recruitment and retention practices, HRM practices of Australian SMEs, HRM practices relating to professional sport, recruitment systems in professional football, along with player migration theory. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, presenting the research philosophy, approach and methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter Four presents the findings of both phases of the data collection process, using a narrative approach to tell the story behind the data through emphasising the voice of the respondents. The discussion in relation to the pre-identified HRM themes (recruitment and selection, orientation and socialisation, training and development, contract extension and separation) occurs concurrently, allowing the researcher and reader a chance to relate the theory to the practice. Lastly, Chapter Five aligns with the study's main objectives constructing conclusions related to the HRM framework that allow recommendations to be generated for both current and future A-League franchises and researchers wishing to focus their own academic studies on this subject.

## **1.6 DELIMITATIONS OF SCOPE AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS**

The researcher acknowledges that the geographical disparity between the researcher and the researched, along with the competitive/continual nature of their businesses potentially limited the number of respondents willing/able to contribute to the narrative constructed. The researcher also recognises that the narrative offered is highly dependent on the information supplied by the individual respondents and that recruited participants may have volunteered because they held strong opinions on the area of investigation, opinions that may differ considerably from their peers (e.g. other franchise CEOs and player agents). Furthermore, as the findings are developed through the researcher's own interpretation of the information provided by the respondents, the findings generalisability is potentially limited (Myers, 2009). The findings' potential are specifically related to the socially constructed environment from which they reside and non-transferable to other social settings (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, the research findings of this project may not be applicable to other professional sporting franchises located in the Australian sporting landscape, or professional football clubs located in different leagues, in different locations. This was not the aim, although it offers plenty of opportunity for further research in this area.

The case study method adopted shifted it away from the individual franchises and towards the competition, within which they operate, also influenced the findings generated. The implementation of a multiple case study or longitudinal approach would allow for the construction and comparison of sporting HRM practices in terms of performance effects and how practices evolve over time.

## **1.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter has outlined the background and rationale for this research project. The overall aim of this project is to investigate the applicability and application of the HRM practices within the sporting internationalisation of A-League football franchises, by analysing secondary player migration data (to uncover current patterns of recruitment and retention) and assessing the HRM structures implemented by these SME A-League franchises through semi-structured interviews in order to develop recommendations on how more sustainable HRM player recruitment and retention strategies can be developed. The next chapter presents a critical review of existing HRM and athletic labour migration literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW**

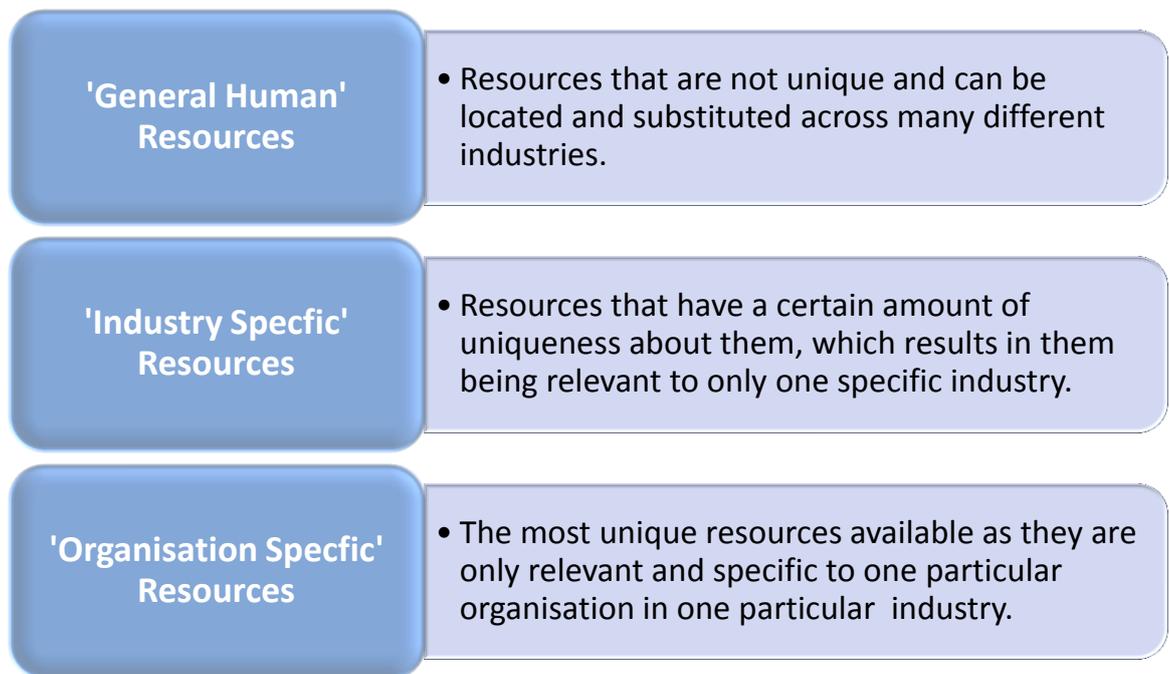
### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter critically reviews theoretical terms and frameworks currently used within the field of HRM and sports labour migration, with particular attention being given to their application and applicability to professional football. This discussion commences with a general overview of the HRM process, before focusing on specific factors related to recruitment and retention practices. It goes on to examine how human resources can be utilised to create competitive advantages, before focusing on HRM practices in the Australian business context. The focus then shifts onto HRM in professional sport, particularly around the restructuring of playing staff portfolios, player development, and recruitment systems. This chapter then concludes with aspects related to player recruitment and player migration in professional football.

### **2.2 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW**

Businesses of all sizes are under constant scrutiny to ensure that the resources at their disposal are managed in the most efficient, effective and profitable manner, with pressure not only coming from the owner(s) or shareholders, but in many cases also from key stakeholders and government agencies, especially with the presence of external funding (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Huselid, 1995; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2005). Any organisation has a number of different resources at its disposal, including physical and financial capital, but according to Huang (2011) the most valuable resource a firm can have is those relating to their human resources. Many organisations have found themselves under increasing pressure to take stock and re-examine the way they manage their employee's skills, talents and abilities. According to Cuskelly et al. (2006) it was this reconceptualisation that spawned the development of Human Resource Management, a response which focuses on the development of human talent to improve organisational performance and gain competitive advantages.

Human resources refers to the pool of human capital a firm has at its disposal, which it controls through an employment relationship (Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994), with the human capital pool being comprised of the collective skills that each individual employee can provide to the firm at any given point of time (Smart & Wolf, 2003). In addition, because organisations are comprised of a number of very different individuals, human resources actually reflect the personal tangible and intangible abilities of each person, along with their staff capacity, skills, knowledge, attitude, and motivation (Huang, 2011). It is these context-specific factors associated with human capital that allow Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) to categorise them into the following three specific classifications.



**Figure 2.1 – Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012, p. 289) three classification of Human Resources.**

Conversely, human resource (HR) practices are the activities that are focused on directing and managing the human capital pool to ensure that the organisation completes its business tasks, activities, and goals (Wright et al., 1994). Furthermore, according to Buck and Watson (2002) the HR practices and functions fall into one of two perspectives: the first focuses on how an organisation can best utilise the human capital at its disposal to achieve organisational accomplishments; while the second is centred around administrative operations which are only completed due to legal or clerical requirements. Their view is also shared by Cuskelly et al. (2006) who suggest that sports organisations in particular are under pressure to change their HRM processes due to government policy and funding stipulations.

The HR practices and systems which an organisation chooses to utilise are important because they bear a major responsibility in shaping the available workforce, due to the fact that their designs play a significant role in attracting, developing, motivating, and deploying talent, skills and knowledge across an organisation to enhance its effectiveness (Choudhury & Mishra, 2010; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Wright et al., 1994). Furthermore, organisations that are prepared to invest time on attracting, developing, and retaining talent are placing themselves in a stronger position in the “war of talent” that exists in tight labour markets (Choudhury & Mishra, 2010; Sheehan, Holland, & De Cieri, 2006). The investment in developing formal HR practices, according to Ulrich and Smallwood (2005), increases the levels of commitment exhibited by current personnel, while also shaping an organisation’s culture, identity, and reputation. The role that HR systems play in creating effective organisations is taken a step

further by Choudhury and Mishra (2010), as they insist that a company's HR practices are also a noteworthy indicator of their competence and credibility, as well as impinging on its ability to attract and develop other types of resources and capabilities which are required for innovation and growth.

Developing human capital through HRM has evolved into a task of substantial importance and now lies at the heart of central business functions, playing "a key role in developing and implementation of corporate strategy" (Lawler et al., 2004, p. 28), and has evolved in such a way that just implementing 'best practice' HRM is no longer sufficient. There is a growing body of evidence which advocates that human resource systems must align with organisational business strategies to improve organisational performance (Buck & Watson, 2002; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Gibb, 2001; Lawler et al., 2004). In fact, Choudhury and Mishra (2010) hold such a strong opinion of the role HR plays they declare that it drives a business's long term strategy, so therefore must be deliberately chosen; when used strategically it allows enterprises to maintain strong organisational boundaries. Furthermore, they also believe that the implementation of purposefully designed practices encourage higher levels of organisational identity, further supporting an organisation's efforts to retain their most valuable assets. Similarly, Sheehan et al. (2006) also deem that HR functions ought to have a prominent position in the senior decision making systems along with a more proactive position in developing staff to ensure that organisations are able to utilise their own people to create competitive advantages.

The alignment of the utilisation of efficient HRM practices to help create competitive advantages presented by Sheehan et al. (2006) is a perception that is well supported by Cuskelly et al. (2006), Choudhury and Mishra (2010) and Hsu et al. (2003), who all agree that effectively managed HRM configurations allow firms to generate and retain competitive advantages over others in an industry, helping to create higher financial returns (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2005). The notion of higher financial returns being associated with HR practice is not surprising according to Huang (2011), as a substantial amount of HRM practices focus on manpower planning, education, training systems, and performance activities of current staff members to improve their performance, and develop potential. Furthermore, according to Choudhury and Mishra (2010), these practices not only encourage those individuals already located in the organisation to increase their knowledge and human capital, but also assist in recruiting higher individuals (in terms of skills and knowledge) from the external labour markets. In addition these HRM activities can be associated with helping organisations achieve their business goals more efficiently by increasing its core competitiveness (Huang, 2011) and

creating more value over rival firms due to possessing higher industry-specific skills (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012; Sirmon et al., 2008).

### 2.1.1 The Areas of the HRM Framework

The HRM framework is a structure which has been developed to explain the processes (normally in a step by step manner, usually containing between 5-8 steps) which organisations draw on to firstly recruit and then secondly to retain their most valuable resources (Huang, 2011). As a variety of slightly different frameworks have been presented by a number of different academics it is important to clarify the main areas of consistency when comparing a number of different HRM structures. For the purpose of this study, HRM has been classified into the following seven discrete HR activities: planning, recruitment and selection; socialisation and orientation; training and development; compensation and rewards; performance management; and retention (Hoye, Nicholson, Smith, Stewart, & Westerbeek, 2012; Huang, 2011; Wiesner & Innes, 2010). Furthermore, according to Hoye et al. (2012), the HRM framework can actually be broken down into two specific sections, with the initial steps (planning, recruitment and selection) focusing on acquiring human resource, and the subsequent focus shifting to maintaining human resources from orientation and socialisation onwards. The following adapted figure is the HRM framework for this study.

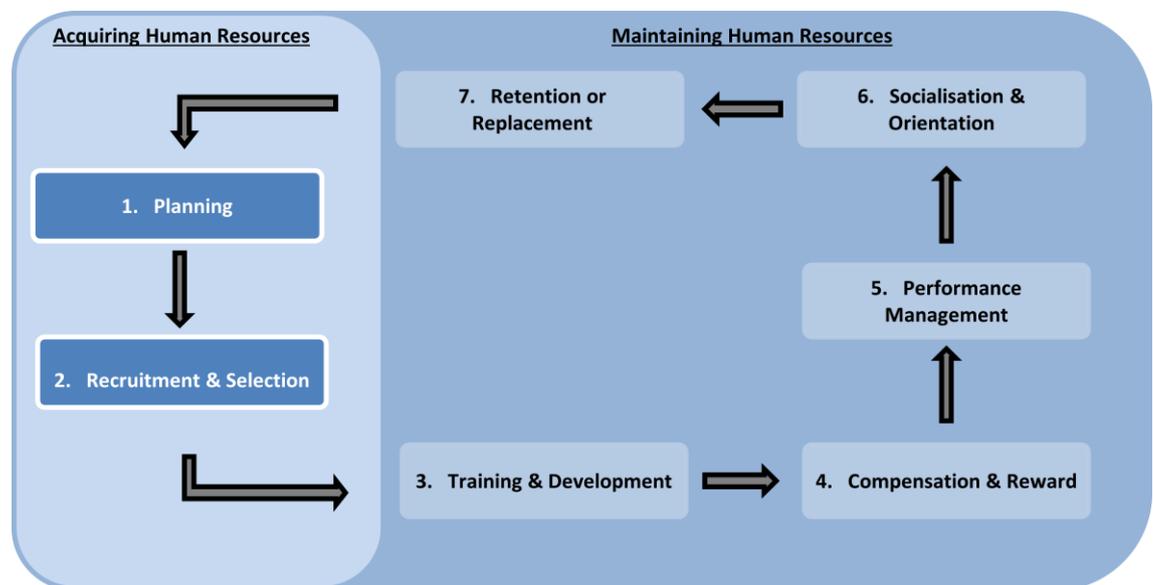


Figure 2.2 – HRM framework adapted from Cuskelly et al. (2006); Wiesner and Innes (2010); Huang (2011); Hoye et al. (2012).

### **2.1.1.1 Planning**

The first step in any effective HR program is planning (Chaudhuri, 2010), which can be looked upon as the bridge between HR strategy and HR function, helping to ensure that organisations meet their objectives in a manner which utilises their HR in the most efficient and cost effective way (Nankervis, Compton, & Baird, 2005). The overriding principle employed by this process is to ensure that the organisation has the right resources in place, with the right capabilities, at the right time (Chaudhuri, 2010; Mathis & Jackson, 1999; Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2010). It is an ongoing process which adopts a long-term view that works not only towards preparing organisations to cope with the current demand, but also achieve both their current and all future strategic objectives (Foot & Hook, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 1999; Nankervis et al., 2005). This will also help to create competitive advantages over others in their industry (Noe et al., 2010). According to Noe et al. (2010), HR planning encompasses three specific stages, with stage one relating to forecasting. Attempts are made during this stage to determine the organisation's future HR demands in terms of supply and demand for the firm's various roles. This process helps the organisation identify and predict areas of business operation which will experience either a shortage or surplus of labour supply. The focus for the second stage is the completion of goal setting and strategic planning processes, as these provide the firm with ways of identifying and measuring problem areas in relation to either surpluses or shortages of HR labour. It is important that these processes include specific figures, actions, and areas these activities are needed, along with a timeframe which indicates when such activities need to be concluded so that tasks can be allocated accordingly and progress can be tracked. The final stage focuses on program implementation and evaluation, which are both processes associated with holding the individuals accountable to achieving the organisation's goals. Regular progress reports help the organisation to remain on track, ensure that planned activities occur in a timely manner with expected results, and ultimately that they remain on course to avoid costly shortages or surpluses of labour.

### **2.1.1.2 Recruitment and Selection**

Recruitment is the attraction phase which organisations facilitate when employee labour is required. It is a process which commences the instant new recruits are sought and ends once applications have been submitted (Chaudhuri, 2010). Furthermore, it encompasses all activities associated with identifying and attracting appropriately adept applicants for employment vacancies (Foot & Hook, 2011; Noe et al., 2010). Once a suitable and large enough pool of applicants has been identified the selection process begins. This is a matter of identifying the most appropriately qualified applicant that best fits the requirements of the

position (Chaudhuri, 2010). Organisations have two specific methods available to them when recruiting. The first utilises internal recruitment initiatives, where the organisation effectively recruits from within and fills vacancies through promotion and transfers. This is an activity that Nankervis et al. (2005) insist allows organisations to capitalise on the costs invested in recruiting, selecting and training current employees, as well as serving as a reward for past performances. A common way jobs are sourced internally is through the utilisation of job-posting on internal bulletin boards and through the organisation's intranet (Noe et al., 2010). The second recruitment method utilises external initiatives, where new employees are recruited from outside the organisation. The specific requirements of each individual position determine how wide the net is cast for new recruits, as positions that require relatively little skill will generally utilise local labour markets and focus in a relatively small geographical area. However, as the level of competency required for the position grows, so too will the geographical area involved in the recruitment process, often leading to searches of a national or even international scope (Nankervis et al., 2005). For this type of recruitment the most common methods involve the utilisation of newspaper/internet advertisements, unsolicited applications, recruitment agencies (both public and private), employee referrals, training programs and educational institutional graduate programmes (Foot & Hook, 2011; Nankervis et al., 2005; Noe et al., 2010).

### **2.1.1.3 Socialisation and Orientation**

Socialisation and orientation can be looked upon as the first step in helping organisations to retain their human resources. The process of socialisation is the way in which new employees go about acquiring the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will help them transition into becoming successful organisational members (Nankervis et al., 2005). A common approach centres around the use of induction programmes, which can be referred to as a type of training that new employees receive to help them adapt to the new job and surroundings (Mathis & Jackson, 1999). Importantly this course of action should start as soon as the employee selection is confirmed because as Sparrow and Cooper (2012) indicate, transition into a new role begin well before the individual's actual first day in the new environment and newcomers will appreciate understanding "the lie of the land" before they start. Well-constructed induction programs have been shown to benefit the new employee and the organisation in a number of ways. It helps employees settle more quickly into their new role as it fosters familiarity about the job requirements and the organisation, along with formally introducing co-workers which helps them accept each other (Foot & Hook, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 1999). From the organisation's point of view not only does it accelerate integration of

new employees, which helps ensure that performance and productivity commences quickly, but most importantly it aids employee retention when administered correctly (Mathis & Jackson, 1999).

#### **2.1.1.4 Training and Development**

The utilisation of training and development programmes for human resources is an organisational attempt to develop the capabilities of their employees in a way which benefits both parties, as it provides employees with new specific knowledge and skills to remain competitive in their particular industry (Foot & Hook, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 1999). Furthermore, if organisations are to be successful with their training incentives, it is vital that a positive learning culture is developed which recognises that not everybody learns in the same manner, and understands the importance of offering a wide range of different learning experiences (Foot & Hook, 2011). Nankervis et al. (2005) offer two specific reasons why many companies are now providing training opportunities for staff which go beyond their immediate job requirements. Firstly, they believe that employment roles steadily evolve and develop over time, which requires that employees must also grow their skills and knowledge base. Secondly, it is suggested that many roles will actually be replaced with entirely new roles which will require an appropriately matched skill set, particularly the ability to learn new skills which is enhanced by participating in ongoing training programmes. Training programme design and the methods employed to deliver such programmes also specifically depends on other related purposes, as some programmes are designed for mass participation by all organisational personnel, while others purely focus on individuals who have either been identified with a lack of desired skills or selected for future advancement (Noe et al., 2010). Organisations have two different systems open to them to complete training activities, they can utilise either “in-house” or “out of house” methods. According to Mathis and Jackson (1999) the most widely used internal methods are “informal training systems” which occur through interaction and feedback amongst employees, and “on the job training”, which is when a manager conducts training and shows the employees what to do. In addition they also suggest that generally firms will outsource training when they lack the capability or speciality to complete the activities in-house.

#### **2.1.1.5 Compensation and Rewards**

The compensation and reward structure that an organisation employs should be considered as the single most important factor which influences the employee-employer relationship, and plays a critical role in an organisation’s ability to attract and retain staff (Chaudhuri, 2010; Foot

& Hook, 2011). Furthermore, according to Foot and Hook (2011), it is an area of HR that in the past has often been neglected. There are a number of different remuneration strategies that organisations can utilise, but the methods selected need to align with their overall strategic directive. This directive may include rewarding past performance, remaining competitive, attracting and retaining good staff or reducing unnecessary turnover (Nankervis et al., 2005). However, whatever strategy an organisation employs it must be one which satisfies the workforce's needs while at the same time brings profit to the organisation. Additionally, the remuneration an employee receives in return for their contribution can be presented in both monetary and non-monetary forms (Chaudhuri, 2010). Before highlighting the most commonly used compensation and reward practices it is important to draw attention to the fact that this area of HRM is strongly influenced by legislation, especially in regards to equality in pay (ensuring fairness between genders), minimum wage or overtime regulations, and youth rates (Foot & Hook, 2011; Noe et al., 2010).

The typical compensation package that an employee receives can comprise of either a wage or salary component which could also include incentives, perquisites or fringe benefits. The most basic compensation system is what Mathis and Jackson (1999) call "base pay", which refers to payment of a set amount negotiated at the time of employment. When it comes to this form of compensation they believe that wage or salary increases are the result of two different compensation advancement philosophies. The first is through entitlement which assumes that individuals are entitled to payment increases which have no association to performance, such as cost of living increases. The second is performance based, where changes in compensation are related directly to the performance of an individual, a group, or the organisation, often resulting in bonuses and incentives payments. Incentive payments and performance are generally directly related to the achievement of sales, profit or productivity goals over a period (monthly or quarterly) and may be measured either by individual performances or through group incentive schemes (Chaudhuri, 2010). These systems are designed to motivate employees to work harder or more creatively as the achievement of targets are linked with financial rewards. However, this system will only work if the employees believe that the target can be met and that the reward is of value (Noe et al., 2010).

Sales commissions and profit sharing are another two popular compensation methods according to Noe et al. (2010). In reference to a sales commission they show that its effectiveness can vary tremendously across different industries and works on the principle of receiving a percentage cut of the sale. Some organisations employee remuneration packages are based on commission only while others may pay a base salary plus commission. However, Noe et al. indicates that these practices will only work when an employee is prepared to

accept an element of risk. On the other hand, profit sharing is a system where organisational members are paid a percentage of the profit generated by the organisation, either in the form of a monetary payment or allocation of shares (Foot & Hook, 2011). Moreover, Noe et al. feel that this method encourages employees to act more like owners and promotes a focus on organisational effectiveness, thus providing an ideal incentive for organisations which are finding themselves leaning towards financial difficulties, due to the fact that if profit levels are low or non-existent the incentive pay out is very minimal, if it is paid at all.

Overall, if organisations are to be successful the compensation method they select needs to be able to attract, motivate and engage the right calibre of employees. Regular checking is also required to ensure that remuneration rates remain comparable to others in the industry and are based on market rates (Nankervis et al., 2005). Furthermore, organisations who decide they want to attract or hold onto the leading individuals in an industry may find they have to pay slightly above the going rate (Foot & Hook, 2011).

#### **2.1.1.6 Performance Management**

Performance management procedure can be viewed as a series of activities that are designed to manage individuals and teams in order to ensure that high levels of performance are obtained to drive an organisation towards achieving its goals (Foot & Hook, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 1999; Noe et al., 2010). This is a process which has the ability to influence employee behaviour by rewarding and further motivating top performers, while at the same time helping weaker individuals or groups identify, address and resolve the underlining problems affecting their performance (Noe et al., 2010). Furthermore, according to Nankervis et al. (2005), it offers the organisations a feedback system that can provide information in relation to many other HRM processes such as managerial planning, training and development, and remuneration management. Nankervis et al. also point out that performance management practices are not a new initiative, citing numerous examples dating back to the early 1800s where they appear to have been used to full effect. One of their examples is a law passed by the United States federal government in 1842 which made a yearly performance review mandatory for all department clerks. Overall, the most common method utilised to complete these review process is via performance appraisals, a method that determines and evaluates an employee's actual performance against the desired outcomes (Chaudhuri, 2010; Mathis & Jackson, 1999). Performance management activities should be completed in such a manner that both the manager and the employee have ownership of the processes, as this will lead to them both knowing and understanding each other's expectations and ensure that delivery

expectations are understood, along with providing the employee with a chance to discuss and contribute to the organisational objectives (Foot & Hook, 2011).

#### **2.1.1.7 Retention or Replacement**

Retention or replacement of staff is the final step in the HRM model, and concerns itself with an organisation's ability to hold onto their key employees. Ideally organisations should have developed strategic plans focusing specifically on how they can retain staff; organisations which fail to do so are more likely to have problems with staff motivation levels and high turnover rates. According to Maund (2001) terms and conditions of employment, career progression and continuous development are three areas of importance that organisations must monitor in order to ensure they retain loyal and motivated staff. However, on the other hand Noe et al. (2010) prefer that the focus should be on job satisfaction, job involvement and organisational commitment. They believe that organisational members who are satisfied with their jobs, in terms of experiencing personal fulfilment, are less likely to explore other opportunities. In regards to organisational commitment, which is the degree to which an employee identifies with the organisation and the levels of effort they are willing to put in to their performance, Noe et al. insist that staff members who exhibit high levels of organisational commitment will push themselves to help achieve organisational goals, whereby, those with low levels are likely to leave at the first opportunity of a better job. Additionally, Foot and Hook (2011) maintain that if organisations are keen to keep talented staff in a job and benefit from their skills and experiences they need to use a retention strategy which matches their profiles and beliefs. They even take this a step further by suggesting that a one-size-fits-all method is not productive because it does not allow for generational differences between workers, as they believe that Generation Y (a demographic cohort for people born early 1980s – early 2000s) employees are placing significant amounts of importance on matters relating to access to information, technology, and good corporate responsibility when compared with older generations. Therefore strategies which firms use to motivate and retain staff should reflect these differences.

### **2.3 A FOCUS ON RECRUITMENT**

The act of recruitment for any organisation is one of the key acts of management and HR function, as the outcome of this process exerts a major and sustainable influence on the organisation and its future direction (Buse, 2009). Comprehensive employment recruitment procedures are also classified by Choudhury and Mishra (2010) as one of the three most important high performance work practices. Therefore, the overriding objective for any

recruitment processes must be to identify a large number of potential applicants, as effective personnel selection can only be accomplished if the recruitment processes provides a recruitment pool that is stocked with a high number of competitive candidates. When recruitment activity follows these guidelines it ensures that candidates employed to fill a position are the candidates who best satisfy the selection criteria requirements (Buse, 2009).

Wang, Shieh, and Wang (2008) offer their own points as to how organisations can ensure efficiency during a time of recruitment. First of all, prior to recruitment, they believe an organisation needs to decipher the correct number of employees that it requires, along with staff member distribution to ensure that the right people are in the right positions. They then place an emphasis on ensuring that personal features and job requirements are well matched to produce the greatest effectiveness for the organisation, and label it as a core component of the recruitment process. Furthermore, they also insist that the correct employee fit helps to ensure new staff members are accepted and able to merge successfully into the organisation's current culture because they possess the desired skills and qualities, allowing harmonious relationships to develop with likeminded colleagues who share a similar outlook.

### **2.3.1 Recruitment Practices**

There are a vast number of different methods available for firms to identify potential applicants (formal versus informal, or internal versus external) , but in most organisations the courses of action selected to attract talent are guided by specifically developed recruitment initiatives and generally depend on the HR planning process and the specific requirements of the actual job position (Buse, 2009; Sheehan et al., 2006). The exact recruitment methods an organisation selects are shown to correlate with its size, scope and modus operandi. Research completed by Lewis, Massey, Ashby, Coetzer and Harris (2007) indicated that managers of small businesses strongly preferred the usage of informal, low cost recruitment strategies and highlighted word-of-mouth and unsolicited applications as two of the most prevalent methods to attract new staff. In addition they indicated that generally smaller organisations will only tend to use formal and expensive recruitment channels such as newspaper/Internet advertisements or recruitment consultants when recruiting applicants with specialised skills sets or in areas of skilled labour shortages. In regards to the debate surrounding formal versus informal recruitment methods, Bartram (2005) offers a word of caution for those organisations which place heavy reliance on informal recruitment practices, warning that this method does not always insure that the right applicant is always employed as the pool of suitable candidates often remains untapped. However, more importantly it "also has the potential to leave a firm open to accusations of discrimination"(Bartram, 2005, p. 141).

According to Maxwell (2004), the traditional recruitment practice of newspaper advertising is one of the least cost-effective ways to attract potential candidates. Instead she suggests that firms should utilise both tracking former favourites (tracking former employees who you may wish to re-employ again in the future) and employee referral programmes (where current employees are offered financial rewards for successfully nominating people they know to fill vacancies) as effective short term tactics to assist with an efficient recruitment process. Maxwell also refers to employee referral programs as being one of the most cost effective recruitment tools available, a sentiment that was also shared by Haesli and Boxall (2005). Maxwell (2004) insist that referral programmes typically work because committed organisational members refrain from referring sub-par employees and only refer those who are they think are qualified for the position and possess good working habits, as not only is their reputation on the line, but a poorly performing new recruit generally means more work for them over the long run.

Another cost effective recruitment practice organisations have available to them is to construct graduate advancement programs by recruiting recent graduates directly from universities. A major perceived benefit of this recruitment method is that these candidates have a particular freshness about them and are thought to be more capable of being moulded to the cultures and work-styles of the organisation (Haesli & Boxall, 2005). This perception aligns agreeably with the first of two tendencies provided by Buse (2009) concerning recruitment based on professional seniority. Here he suggests that organisations will recruit young, inexperienced candidates believing they can easily be moulded to fit the organisation's culture or objectives; also, the new recruits' salary requirements are generally more modest than more experienced recruits. The other practice an organisation can utilise is to only recruit personnel with certain levels of experience, which works on the principle of quality and avoids training costs.

Further research completed by Wiesner and Innes (2010) also demonstrates that any increase in organisational size also increases the likelihood of formal recruitment practice being employed. They feel that this is logical given that the larger the firm, the greater the level of hierarchical specialisation leading to the presence of HR managers. It is the prevalence of these managers, along with the associated strategic HRM plans, that increases the prevalence of formally structured recruitment methods (Wiesner & Innes, 2010; Wiesner & McDonald, 2001), such as internal databases for internal applications and external recruitment consultants for those from the peripheral environment (Wiesner & Innes, 2010). Furthermore, it was found that without the presence of HR managers and strategic plans, organisations

place a considerably greater reliance upon utilising government recruitment agencies (Wiesner & McDonald, 2001).

Finally, according to Wang et al. (2008), recruitment practices which organisations employ can be classified into two distinctive categories. The first is via internal systems where human capital investment focuses on training up employees already located within the organisation to fill vacant positions, while the second is via market systems where human capital is recruited from outside the organisation. Each of these recruitment practices will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

### **2.3.2 Internal versus External Recruitment**

As previously established, the recruitment processes for organisations looking to fulfil vacant positions rely on recruiting potential employees from either an internal or external source. Internal practices effectively means recruiting from within the organisation, which results in an employee being selected for a particular position from an internal labour market, often as a result of a firm's own training programs. Worldwide there are a number of companies who are well known for their practices of internal recruitment and promotion, with IBM being one such company (Buse, 2009). External practices generally refers to recruitment of new employees into the firm from labour markets outside the organisation (Haesli & Boxall, 2005). The methods that firms can utilise to complete external recruitment procedures, according to Buse (2009), depend on the nature of the role and the size of the organisation but generally involves recruitment offices, advertisements, placement agencies, referrals, or graduate training programs.

The debate around which recruitment practice is most effective is an interesting one, as there are arguments presented which supports both sides. Buse (2009) demonstrates the difficulty in determining which method is most effective when asserting that internal recruitment processes from within an organisation can have a series of advantages but also some disadvantages when compared to external recruitment, and vice versa. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 explore this debate.

**Table 2.1 – Advantages and Disadvantages of Internal Recruitment Practices**

| <b>Internal Recruitment - Advantages</b>    |  |
|---|--|
| Dixon, Noe, & Patore (2004)                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Makes entry level job look more attractive.</li> <li>- Pre-existing employees are well known to the organisation</li> <li>- “New” recruits are already familiar with the job requirements</li> <li>- A faster and less expensive appointment process</li> <li>- Reduces the need for socialisation and basic training</li> </ul>  |
| Lechner & Gudmundsson (2012)                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less expensive recruitment method</li> <li>- Organisational-specific and embedded with organisational specific tacit knowledge.</li> <li>- Increases the performance effects of group routines</li> </ul>   |
| Choudhury & Mishra (2010)                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elevates the need for basic training and socialisation</li> <li>- Those promoted already know the business and are able to take ownership of task completion from the outset</li> </ul>   |
| Roach & Dixon (2006)                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A less expensive option and a faster overall process</li> <li>- Contribution is almost immediate, while adding predictability and enhancing employee commitment</li> <li>- Reduces the time needed for socialisation</li> </ul>   |
| Talyor & Ho (2005)                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hiring from within is generally more cost effective due to lower recruitment costs</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Internal Recruitment - Disadvantages</b> |  |
| Dixon, Noe, & Patore (2004)                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can appoint under qualified individuals in specialised positions.</li> <li>- Develops like-minded thinking and become resistant to change</li> </ul>  |
| Roach & Dixon (2006)                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can appoint staffs who are not the most appropriately qualified, especially in highly specialised positions.</li> <li>- Can lead to a likeminded workforce which becomes resistant to change</li> <li>- Reduces potential for innovative ideas, which could compromise business growth</li> <li>- Potential for stagnation through a static learning environment</li> </ul> |
| Lechner & Gudmundsson (2012)                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Risk of developing an inwards focus, which can lead to stagnation.</li> </ul>   |

**Table 2.2 – Advantages and Disadvantages of External Recruitment Practices**

| <b>External Recruitment -Advantages</b>     |  |
|---|--|
| Lechner & Gudmundsson (2012)                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Create superior value as they challenge the accepted norms</li><li>- Diverse groups perform better than homogeneous groups after a short blend in period</li><li>- Fosters the development of cultural diversity</li></ul> |
| Haesli & Boxall (2005)                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provides a firm with a consent stream of fresh blood</li><li>- Develops group diversity and stimulates innovation</li><li>- Graduates can be moulded to the organisation’s culture and working style</li></ul>             |
| <b>External Recruitment - Disadvantages</b> |  |
| Haesli & Boxall (2005)                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- New employees’ impact and impetus can be stifled by an unreceptive culture</li></ul>   |
| Choudhury & Mishra (2010)                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Fail to capitalise on investment in training and upskilling current staff, if they fail to promote</li></ul>   |

In relation to the information presented in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, one of the first advantages internal recruitment has over external hiring is the time and cost required to complete the process, as a number of researchers agree that it is a faster and less expensive appointment process (Dixon et al., 2004; Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012; Roach & Dixon, 2006; Taylor & Ho, 2005). Another advantage is that because these employees are already well known to the organisation a significantly less amount of time is required to socialise individuals into their new roles. Additionally, because these employees already know the organisation’s business and are familiar with the requirements of their role they can start making an immediate contribution by taking ownership of task completion from day one (Choudhury & Mishra, 2010; Dixon et al., 2004; Roach & Dixon, 2006).

However, even though external selection procedures incur higher recruitment costs and mean that it takes longer for new employees to settle while becoming familiar with the organisation’s culture, expectations and objectives, the process still holds some significant advantages. First and foremost, it provides an organisation with a consent stream of fresh blood which fosters and develops both group and cultural diversity, which can lead to some accepted norms being challenged stimulating the innovation of new ideas (Haesli & Boxall, 2005; Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012). This is important as without this fresh thinking organisations run the risk of developing an inward focus which develops like-mindedness amongst employees and potentially leads to organisational stagnation, compromising business

growth (Dixon et al., 2004; Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012; Roach & Dixon, 2006). Furthermore, unlike internal recruitment, it decreases the risk(s) associated with appointing an under-qualified employee, especially in relation to highly specialised positions (Dixon et al., 2004; Roach & Dixon, 2006). Nevertheless, even though external recruitment offers an organisation fresh ideas and new impetus, its impact can be stifled by either an unreceptive culture or any other process that results in a new employee failing to settle (Haesli & Boxall, 2005). Finally, it has been shown that organisations who invest in staff development but fail to promote from within are actually failing to capitalise on their own investment (Choudhury & Mishra, 2010). Promotion from within also has the ability to motivate the current work force and make entry level positions more attractive (Dixon et al., 2004).

Overall, it can be concluded from the evidence presented that each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, therefore organisations should utilise both practices and existing internal resources should be complemented by resources recruited from the external marketplace. This notion is supported by Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) who insist that diverse groups have been shown to perform better than homogeneous groups after a short blending-in period.

#### **2.4 A FOCUS ON RETENTION**

Achieving superior organisational performance does not rest exclusively on the shoulders of a firm's recruitment practices, as even the most efficient recruitment procedures will count for little if an organisation is unable to keep hold of its key personnel. This is because carefully designed retention policies are deemed by Ortlieb and Sieben (2012) as one of the most critical tasks of HRM practices, especially in regards to the current labour market. In addition they also add that the ability to retain the organisation's human capital pool – its most valuable resource – is a fundamental managerial task; firms that are unable to complete this undertaking place themselves at risk of a considerable competitive disadvantage. HR practices that focus on retention can heighten commitment amongst the workforce and reduce turnover rates, corresponding directly with decreased recruitment costs and allowing organisations to optimise their time and focus on other activities more directly associated with their overall mission and business goals (Buck & Watson, 2002). Furthermore, when these practices are utilised to retain and motivate employees, managers must understand how to appropriately combine employee preferences, workplace characteristics and the implementation of appropriate retention initiatives (Aiello et al., 2005; Haesli & Boxall, 2005).

Employee turnover is a costly (administrative activities, severance pay, recruitment and training costs) and disruptive process which starts long before and continues well beyond actual separation (Buck & Watson, 2002), as both employees who are intending to leave and those being socialised into new positions are associated with lower productivity (Hsu et al., 2003). This situation is not only undesirable, disruptive and costly for the organisation and its customers, but can also lead to ineffective operations. Along with these effects, dysfunctional employee turnover has also been shown to correlate with a decline in morale amongst a firm's remaining employees (Buck & Watson, 2002).

There are a large number of methods organisations can use to create retention strategies which can help them keep those individuals who possess the skills necessary for allowing firms to create and maintain a competitive advantage (Wright & McMahan, 1992). A starting point according to Wang et al. (2008) is the development of trust between the employee and the organisation, which they believe is one of the most important concepts in helping employees to cope in the working environment; without it there is no future in the relationship between the employee and the organisation. In addition they consider that the presence of trust in the relationship allows for staff to develop deep loyalty naturally, which improves organisational performance.

According to Holtzhausen and Fourie (2009), trust, commitment, and control mutuality (giving employees the opportunity to participate in decision making processes) are the three most important indicators when examining the quality of the employee-employer relationship. High levels of relationship satisfaction have been shown to facilitate feelings of importance amongst employees, thereby helping organisations to achieve their objectives. In relation to each of these three indicators Holtzhausen and Fourie found that: trust helps both parties develop confidence in each other, with organisations suffering from a lack of trust being more open to conflict, leading to further feelings of uncertainty developing; commitment is crucial because without it neither party will believe that it is worth spending their time and energy on developing a relationship, and employee commitment levels are enhanced when employees believe that the organisation is living up to their side of the agreement; and control mutuality helps create a sense of control for the employees, as it allows them the opportunity to participate in decision making processes, thus creating the feeling that the organisation has listened to and considered their points of view.

The role that commitment plays in helping to retain staff is also a key aspect according to Huselid (1995), as he suggests that a focus on increasing employee commitment helps to produce a stable core of employees. Buck and Watson (2002) also agree with the important

role that commitment plays in staff retention, as they indicate that an employee's decision to remain with a firm is largely determined by their commitment levels towards the organisation; a positive correlation has been shown to exist between individual commitment levels and a person's intention to stay. Furthermore, they indicate that HRM practices a firm deploys are most influential when it comes to increasing an employee's level of organisational commitment. Organisational commitment has been defined by Meyer and Allen (1997) as "a psychological state that characterises the employee's relationship with the organisation, and has implications for the decision to continue membership in the organisation" (p. 11). Furthermore, Buck and Watson (2002) construct three separate classifications (affective, continuance, and normative) which describes the different emotional attachments formed by employees towards the organisation, created by organisational commitment. Affective organisational commitment works on the premise that the individual is enjoying being part of the organisation and wants to stay. Continuance organisational commitment is the result of associated and perceived costs which may be incurred if an employee decides to leave the organisation, and creates the feeling of having to stay. Finally, normative organisational commitment refers to those situations when individuals feel like they are morally obliged to stay.

#### **2.4.1 Retention Themes within the HRM Framework**

Along with trust and commitment, there are several other areas within the HRM framework which have been shown to have a considerable amount of influence on the ability for organisations to retain their key individuals. These areas can be regarded as key retention themes and include the following fields: induction programs (Hendricks & Louw-Potgieter, 2012); training and development (Choudhury & Mishra, 2010; Sheehan et al., 2006); financial rewards (Haesli & Boxall, 2005; Hsu et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007); culture (Brundage & Koziel, 2010); and work-life balance (Deery, 2008; Sheehan et al., 2006). The following table highlights each of these key themes and the role they play in retaining employees.

**Table 2.3 - Retention themes located within the HRM Framework.**

| Theme                  | Authors  | Findings  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Financial Rewards      | Hsu, Jiang, Klien and Tang (2003)              | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Deem that issues around pay and employee's benefits are two very significant antecedents to employees' intention to leave.</li> <li>2)Organisations compensation practices need to reflect market pay and provide a sufficient enough reward to encourage employee motivation.</li> <li>3)They indicate that in some circumstances employees will remain with a below market pay organisation if they have got a long history of providing a safe and stable working environment.</li> </ol>   |
|                        | Haesli and Boxall (2005)                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Highlighted the fact that many companies used financial benefits such as medical insurance, superannuation payments and student loan repayment schemes as retention incentives .</li> <li>2)The effectiveness of these retention strategies relates to the managers' ability to understand and meet the employees' levels of expectations.</li> </ol>  |
|                        | Lewis, Massey, Ashby, Coetzer, & Harris (2007) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Considered that individual financial rewards, such as higher pay and regular bonuses was a traditional mechanism mangers used to retain valued employees.</li> </ol>   |
| Training & Development | Sheehan, Holland, & De Cieri (2006)            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Consider training and development to be an important issue in employee retention and as such should be recognised as important lures in the 'war for talent'</li> <li>2)It helps negate one of the main reasons why people seek new employment opportunities - to pursue more interesting and stimulating work.</li> <li>3)Overall results suggest that organisations focus on training and development should be stronger</li> </ol>  |
|                        | Choudhury & Mishra (2010)                      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)It is a process that should start during the induction program and should continue with ongoing technical training, leadership development and executive coaching</li> <li>2)An important process as it increases an employees' skill set, which aids the creation of motivated and committed employees.</li> <li>3)It reduces shrinkage by enhancing the retention of quality employees and encourages those not performing to leave.</li> </ol>  |
| Work-life Balance      | Sheehan, Holland, De Cieri (2006)              | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Theorised that work-life balance not only allows organisations to retain employees through allowing them to meet their personal needs, but also acts as a method of attraction.</li> <li>2)If it was used effectively as an incentive it retained and rewarded good employees but also boosted the firm's reputation and add to their standing as being an "employer of choice".</li> </ol>  |
|                        | Deery (2008)                                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)They insist that job stress and work-family conflict, along with the characteristics of the job play a vital role in the decision for the employee to remain employed with the organisation.</li> <li>2)Long and irregular work hours were shown to be an antecedent of employee turnover.</li> <li>3)When levels of conflict exist between family and work life the level of support provided by the employer will result in the conflict further escalating or it will have a moderating effect.</li> </ol>  |
| Induction Programs     | Hendricks & Louw-Potgieter (2012)              | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Induction programmes completed by new employees during the initial stages of the employment is a retention strategy implemented from the outset of employment.</li> <li>2)Helps to reduce new employees' feelings of anxiety and vulnerability during the first few weeks of employment.</li> <li>3)Comprehensive induction programs help foster sentiments of belonging, which significantly lower the risk of staff turnover.</li> </ol>   |
| Culture                | Brundage and Koziel (2010)                     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1)Believe that it is in a firm's best interest to view retention strategies not as separate initiatives but as inherent to a firm s' culture</li> <li>2)Insist that that to achieve retention through firm culture the organisation must ensure that its people are the top priority. This process must start from the leadership hierarchy and flow down through the organisation.</li> <li>3)Indicate a culture based on retention promotes positive energy and a desire for employees to remain in the organisation through feelings of belonging.</li> </ol> |

#### **2.4.2 Career Incentives and Retention Strategies**

This section looks at two studies which investigate employee retention from a different angle to those which have already been presented. The approach taken by Hsu et al. (2003) investigates aspects of career incentives which play an important role in an employee's decision to remain in or leave an employment position. A prominent notion which was identified through their research was the concept of career anchors, which can be classified as fundamental properties or needs that the employee seeks during their career. Moreover, Hsu et al. believed these career anchors can be further categorised into both internal and external factors. Internal career anchors centre on aspects related to an individual's self-concept and psychological attractions that serve as a guide to an individual's career. Most of these internal anchors are based around non-salary incentives such as job security, location and autonomy of the workplace. Furthermore, they showed that once these internal anchors have been strongly established people were more reluctant to change even when opportunities arose which possible maybe more rewarding. External career anchors focus on the extent to which the individual perceives that the employer satisfies their internal anchors through benefits and incentives (Hsu et al., 2003).

Overall, in relation to career anchors and an employee's intention to leave Hsu et al. (2003) conclude that employees whose career anchors were compatible with their job setting reported lower intentions to leave the organisation. However, a lack of employer-employee fit lead to the development of feelings of anxiety, strain, job dissatisfaction, and turnover. They recommend that firms should pay special attention to the alignment of career anchors of their employees, especially around aspects related to job security, along with incentives to maintain employee stability.

Carefully designed retention policies are deemed by Ortlieb and Sieben,(2012) as one of the most crucial tasks in today's labour market, however they are very critical of previously completed retention research as they believe it focuses too heavily on the retention of individuals. Instead they focus their energies on developing a set of retention strategies focused on the organisation's capacity to ward off job offers by rival organisations. The three prominent retention strategies presented by Ortlieb and Sieben are the following:

1. Retention through incentives – Commonly this method utilises different economic motives to retain valued employees through the use of financial incentives such as stock options and retirement funds, along with career prospects. In addition many companies may also choose to make use of off-the-job incentives like sabbaticals or childcare facilities. However, the effectiveness of these incentives hinges on the

employees' view of their associated value and whether their loss would represent a significant sacrifice.

2. Retention through norms and values – these are measures and rituals which are aimed at communicating and promoting the company's vision and mission to help create a sense of identity within their employees. Retention methods utilising this strategy generally revolve around the communication of intensive feedback which encourages employees to identify with the business's goals and objectives, and often utilises company social events or seminars to strengthen the organisation's culture.
3. Retention through coercion – this strategy can be looked upon as a safeguarding method an organisation can employ to ensure that highly valuable and difficult-or costly-to-replace employees remain within a firm. Effectively policies surrounding this retention method encompass sanctions and employee contract regulations which limit an employee's career mobility, which most commonly centre on restraints on competition upon leaving, secrecy obligations and financial penalties associated with early contract termination.

In general, Ortlieb and Sieben (2012) indicate that the most effective retention method for accruing a motivated and dedicated labour force is retention practices based upon an organisation's norms and values. However, results from interviews conducted with 159 HR managers showed that the majority favoured material and immaterial incentives over coercion practices as their mainstay retention strategy. The researchers explain that this result is due to the supposed effect of the retention effort as coercion practices result in valuable employees calculating the cost of quitting, whereas incentives affect an employee's desire to stay with the organisation. Nevertheless, these researchers insist that retention practices which focus too heavily on incentives do run the risk of becoming counterproductive, particularly when extrinsic rewards embark on undermining intrinsic motivation.

Finally, in regards to retention strategies Aiello et al. (2005) argue that employers must work hard at identifying the workplace characteristics their employees most prefer. This is because achieving a close fit between work place characteristics and employee preferences, if done so correctly, can "provide a business with a distinct competitive advantage by enabling the organisation to attract and retain talented and motivated employees" (Aiello et al., 2005, p. 261). Furthermore, Deery (2008) also adds that employees who are more satisfied with the intrinsic components of their jobs are generally more satisfied with their daily lives. Overall, though, to ensure employee retention organisations should "recruit their people every day", a

saying that implies if you do not constantly look to keep your most talented and important organisational members in a job somebody else will ("It's the employees, stupid!," 2013).

## **2.5 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN AUSTRALIAN SMES**

The focus of this section is to investigate recent developments of HRM practices for organisations in relation to an Australian business context, as HRM policies not only need to support business strategies but must also assume a prominent role in developing the organisation's human capital as a source of competitive advantage (Sheehan et al., 2006).

Investigating current developments in the area of HRM in Australia was the aim of the study by Sheehan et al. (2006), when they analysed 1372 survey responses provided by Australian Human Resource Institute members across a wide range of industries. Overall, results from the subsequent analysis appears to paint a picture that the majority of the organisations currently placed more emphasis on developing practices and policies which encouraged the development of specific recruitment initiatives to attract the right talent. This indicated that organisational focus was centred on the initial contact point with potential employees in the areas of recruitment and selection. Furthermore, these researchers stipulated that Australian organisations generally needed to foster more significant HRM approaches focusing on internal organisational mechanisms which encourage employee retention. Although they acknowledged that organisations were often focusing their efforts on training and development, they believed it needed to be significantly stronger as their results indicated low levels of significant policy development supporting HRM activities within this area. Overall, this article generates a solid overview of where the focus lies in regards to HRM activities in Australian organisations, highlighting their general strengths and weaknesses. However, they provide no indication on how organisational size may impact on HRM activities or policies.

The impact that organisational size has on HRM practices is the focus of research by Wiesner and McDonald (2001), when they completed a comprehensive study focusing on the HRM practices of 1435 Australian small-and-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They define SMEs as organisations which employ between 20 – 200 employees, small businesses being those which employ less than 100 staff and medium-sized ranging from 101 – 200 employees. The overriding aim of their study was to determine whether these SMEs could be categorised as a "bleak house" scenario, suggesting limited employee participation and involvement in HR practices, or as a "bright prospect", which suggests a high adoption rate. A significant amount of the focus of their investigation centred on the five traditional areas of HR (recruitment, selection, compensation, training and development, and performance appraisals), with results

showing that overall small businesses implemented more informal practices when compared to their medium sized counterparts. Results focusing on the areas of recruitment showed that generally most organisations used newspaper advertising for recruitment, but formal recruitment practices were more prevalent in medium-sized enterprises, especially with the presence of an HR manager and a strategic plan. In reference to selection practices it was found that mixtures of both formal and informal practices were used, however a small proportion of SMEs did not seem to use any form of interview process. Once again organisations which were associated with a HR manager and strategic plan were shown to utilise more formal selection procedures. Additionally, three-quarters of the organisations surveyed reported introducing formal training systems in the three years prior to the commencement of the study, where previously there had not been any.

Moreover, findings uncovered by Wiesner and McDonald (2001) suggest that many of these SMEs had failed to complete HRM policies linked to legislative requirements, with results revealing that one-quarter of all SMEs investigated failed to have occupational health and safety polices and only around half had policies covering sexual harassment, equal employment opportunities or affirmative action policies. Overall, their research showed that HR practices were only moderately represented in Australian SMEs. Furthermore, due to the low levels of participative HR practices, a low presence of formal HR managers, and the fact that almost half of all SMEs do not have a strategic plan, Wiesner and McDonald declared that a “bright prospect” scenario is most doubtful.

Bartram (2005) has also completed an investigation into the HRM practices of small firms operating in Australia by scrutinising the degree of formality to which these firms adopted formal HR systems. In relation to firms such as those researched by Wiesner and McDonald (2001), Bartram also classifies a small firm as an organisation which employs between 20 and 100 employees. The central finding of this study was that smaller operating firms are less likely to utilise formal HRM practices in comparison to their medium and large counterparts, while also further suggesting that managers of some small firms are ignoring participative HR practices. Other evidence also reveals that smaller firms are less likely to utilise formal HRM practices particularly when it comes to formal training, recruitment and selection procedures, and humanisation practices. Such firms are also less prone to conducting formal reviews, staff appraisals and evaluations than larger firms, but do report a similar usage of individual contract provisions and performance related pay. Finally, in regards to legislative HRM policy implementation Bartram’s results mirror those found by Wiesner and McDonald (2001), indicating that smaller firms are significantly less likely to have formal written policies –

particularly in the areas of health and safety – and grievance procedures relating to sexual or racial harassment.

Lewis, Massey, Ashby, Coetzer, and Harris (2007) also reference the term “bleak house” when investigating HRM practices of SMEs in Australia, because they also feel that these organisations lack systematic HRM practices. They also conclude that many small businesses hold a strong preference for the use of informal, low cost recruitment process, often relying on word of mouth or unsolicited applications. Furthermore, they also insist that typically more formal procedures such as advertising and engaging with recruitment specialists tend only to be used when the role required the recruitment of an applicant with a specialised skill set or in an area of skilled labour shortage. In regards to selection processes subsequent results revealed that, even though CVs and references were sought, often the final decision to recruit still centred on either intuitive selection methods or via candidates completing work samples. Additionally, the way in which a person fit within the organisation was often seen to be more important than whether they fit the requirements of the job. Finally, in regards to this study, many employers indicated that they preferred to employ staff members with low job mobility due to family or other commitments in order to reduce voluntary employee departure; formal employee retention strategies were rarely utilised.

So far to date, the general consensus in relation to HRM practice in Australian SMEs is that a firm’s size has a significant impact on the utilisation of formal HRM practices, as smaller firms tend to employ more informal practices than their larger counterparts (Bartram, 2005; Lewis et al., 2007; Sheehan et al., 2006; Wiesner & McDonald, 2001). However, as significant as these findings are they are limiting because they are only concerned with the HRM practices that are currently employed; they do not provide an overall view of how HRM practices in Australian SMEs have developed over time. Nevertheless all is not lost, as Wiesner & Innes (2010) examines this exact point by replicating Wiesner and McDonald (2001) study to investigate the changes in HRM practices used by Australian SMEs over the past decade, with the main objective again being to determine whether these SMEs are still considered to be “bleak houses” or whether they have transformed into “bright prospects”. Findings once again centre on the five traditional areas of HRM practice, with results in relation to recruitment practices again showing that an increase in organisational size generally increases the likelihood of formal recruitment practices. However, subsequent results do indicate an increased reliance on external sourcing for potential employees. Changes were also shown to be afoot around selection practices, as it was shown that over the recent decade firms of all sizes have adopted more formal selection procedures, moving away from informal selection approaches; the majority now utilises structured interviews and verbal reference checks.

Training and development was another area where progress had been made as the utilisation of both formal in-house training and training provided by an external consultant had significantly increased. Finally, it was found that Australian SMEs were now adopting formal performance appraisals at a significantly higher level, resulting in a significant decline of informal appraisal practices.

The overall findings of Wiesner and Innes' (2010) study suggest that Australian SMEs have completed a significant shift away from the "bleak house scenario" as indicated by Wiesner and McDonald (2001) and are closer to being labelled "bright prospects", but have not yet fully completed the journey. They note a significant shift forward across all five HR functional areas, but more significant improvements have been made in some areas than in others. The overall assessment of training and development is practically bright, along with that of recruitment practices, with results being consistent with an overall increase on the reliance on external sources for specialised positions. However, the opposite appears to be true for the use of strategic planning, as results showed that formalised strategic planning to drive day-to-day operating procedures has actually decreased over the past decade.

## **2.6 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: A SPORT PERSPECTIVE**

This section looks to build upon the ideas and notions that have already been presented to illustrate the principle of HRM in the realm of professional sport, which according to Madura (1982) can be segmented into two specific groups based on its general characteristics. In the first instance you have professional sports such as boxing, tennis, or golf which generally do not require the formation of a team. In addition the nature of competition generally involves individuals competing against each other with competitive livelihood mainly being derived from individual prize money or appearance fees. The second group principally consists of team sports such as football, basketball or rugby, sporting codes that require the combination of human resources to constitute a collective group and conform as a team. Therefore their ability to select and develop a team's human resource is not only critical for organisational success, but more importantly organisational survival. This is a point which Olson and Schwab (2000) further specify when they emphasise that the calibre of players a club has at its disposal directly affects their ability to beat other teams. In turn, higher success rates help to develop a bigger support base and can draw more spectators through the gates on match day or create a larger TV audience, helping to generate the necessary revenue to provide the owners with a return and resources to invest in new playing talent. Additionally, professional sports organisations (PSOs) which belong in the second subset have also been shown to possess very

similar HR characteristics to those displayed in many other business industries, as in both situations (sport and business) one of the organisation's primary goals is to obtain maximisation of firm value (Madura, 1982). However, Wright et al. (1995) take a slightly different approach, as they imply that both organisations have key decision makers who are responsible for selecting and implementing human resource strategies designed to increase their competitive stature.

### **2.6.1 Restructuring Player Portfolios**

Research completed by Madura (1982) illustrates how during the course of a season PSOs' player capital can be subject to both depreciation and appreciation. Depreciation is usually linked to player injuries and age related performance declines, while appreciation is associated with players returning from injury or experience gained through matches played. Furthermore, Madura states that it is because of the changes in player value over the course of a season that "labour managers must periodically evaluate the quality of his [sic] employee portfolio in attempt to improve it so as to maximise firm value" (Madura, 1982, p. 14). Madura further insists that this annual review leads to a rearrangement of a team's labour portfolio as depreciated capital is deleted to allow replacements. Once these depreciated resources have been deleted he maintains that their replacement is normally selected by one of the two following means. The first is via a financial transaction in acquiring a player with proven experience who was employed by another club during the previous season, or by securing an off contracted player via "free agency" who is freely available to sell their playing rights to the highest bidder (Madura, 1982; F. A. Scott, Long, & Somppi, 1983). The second method involves the employment of a newly developed resource, either through the acquisition of a rookie (draft systems) or by internal promotion of a player from the youth or reserve team system.

Overall, Madura (1982) demonstrates that the decision to replace a player is made on a case-by-case situation, which ultimately hinges on the subsequent changes in the firm's portfolio value. Before a manager deletes a player from their team roster they consider the cost associated with recruiting or promoting a replacement player. If both options are still available after considering their feasibility the ultimate decision is determined by the contribution the new player offers to the value of the firm. If either replacement will result in lowering the firm's value the current player will remain employed and the labour portfolio will remain unchanged. Moreover, resulting statistics generated during the study suggest that free agents are much safer replacements than rookies due to the fact they are already proven resources, thereby increasing the probability that they will improve the team's value.

Wright, Smart, and McMahan (1995) take a different approach in their research into human resource portfolios in PSOs. Their approach focuses on the relationship between strategy, human resources, and performance by examining the links between human resources and playing strategies of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's basketball teams in North America. Their results allowed them to conclude that team success relies considerably more upon the associated links between different human resource components (coaches and players) than it does on technology or equipment, a point which these researchers believe represents an extremity of labour intensity. Subsequently, from this research the researchers also identified the three generic strategies of speed, power, or finesse that sports teams generally employ. They believe that although each team uses all these strategies to an extent, they tend to favour one more specifically than the others, normally reflecting a head coach's preferred playing style. Therefore, they conclude that because different strategies require different player attributes a coach should recruit players whose skill-set matches directly with the coach's preferred strategy. They do acknowledge, however, that there are always going to be occasions when coaches find themselves in situations where the human resources available are not going to possess the necessary abilities to carry out their preferred method, which could be the result of injuries or inheriting a playing group they have not assembled themselves. In these situations the researchers stipulate that the coach has two alternatives, either to implement the strategy anyway or to adopt a strategy that better reflects the playing group's capabilities until players who align with the preferred system can be recruited. Overall, Wright et al.'s (1995) study concludes that the most important aspect of a sports labour portfolio is to match player attributes with the coaches' preferred playing style, a task which can be accomplished through recruitment, development, and selection of team members. Nevertheless, they maintain that it is not an overnight process and argue that it takes a new coach an average of four to five years to fully implement their preferred system, due to the time it takes to recruit a team of players whose skill-sets are fully consistent with their strategy.

### **2.6.2 Player Development Systems**

The performance effects of human resource development practices is the focal point for Olson and Schwab's (2000) investigation into interclub networks in North American professional baseball in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their study identified two different industry-specific human resource management innovations which dramatically changed the way professional baseball clubs selected and developed their players. These two structures are commonly referred to as the "reserve team" and "farm team" development systems.

The reserve team system can be viewed as a simple alliance between a Major League (the top league of the North American Baseball league system) and minor league team (the hierarchy of leagues that complete underneath the major league), an alliance that allows players to be transferred between the two sides to meet short-run staffing needs. This system provides Major League teams with a pool of substitute players who gain valuable experience through participation in a high level minor league, and whom they can call on to solve short term staffing problems. The farm team system in contrast is a more structuralised approach, where a Major League club owns several minor league clubs, using them to grow their own talent and allowing the club to contract a large number of promising athletes early on in their career. Players are then developed by transitioning them through teams in order of competition rank. In addition, the farm team system represents an example of an internal labour market system due to the fact it has well defined entry point and career pathway (Olson & Schwab, 2000). While it was the reserve team system that gained the initial traction and was the main system of choice in the 1920s, the situation started to change rapidly during the early 1930s with a sudden acceleration of baseball clubs applying a farm system approach. The researchers believed that the reason why the farm team approach initially diffused more slowly than the reserve team was due to the difference in comprehensiveness between the two systems, as the farm system was a more radical approach which required far more financial commitment and managerial resources than previous systems. Furthermore, research also suggests that because the farm system requires the adoption of new bundles of resources it took time to develop cohesion and took several years for the innovation to show through and prove its performance effect.

Overall, Olson and Schwab (2000) were of the opinion that the introduction of the farm team system drastically improved the way in which baseball clubs managed their playing resources. The new management routines involved directed improvements in player recruitment, development and selection routines through investment in multi-layered training systems. Additionally, it also restricted player labour mobility and gave the parent club control over playing resources even when they were farmed out and loaned to minor league clubs, thus giving clubs with farm systems a competitive advantage.

### **2.6.3 Player Recruitment Systems**

This is the focus of a study by Elliott and Maguire (2008), where they examine the player recruitment systems utilised to recruit professional ice hockey players from North America to teams participating in Britain's Elite Ice Hockey League (EIHL), a league which is ranked in the lowest tier of European Ice Hockey. A case study approach is utilised which tangents off Bale's

(1991) research arguing that athletic recruitment is facilitated through a network comprised of two contact groups either through coaching colleagues or via current and former players. To determine their results, Elliott and Maguire interview both the recruited players themselves and the coaches involved in their recruitment.

Their results concluded that majority of the North American players that grace the EHL are doing so through players and coaches facilitating their own move through informal networks of social relationships, which in most cases negate the involvement and the associated expenses of player agents. Coaches completed player recruitment by tapping into networks they had with not only other coaches but also the networks related to current and former players. Networks between coaches also allowed them to take advantage of knowledge available from their coaching colleagues, which not only allowed them to identify potential recruits but also receive scouting reports about these players, helping to reduce the risk involved in recruiting a migrant player. Tapping into networks of players who had already migrated was effectively utilised and often provided the vital or pivotal link between a club and potential recruit. Since the majority of the migrated players were predominately towards the end of their careers they had built up a large network of playing acquaintances (both teammates and opponents), which provided contact points between coaches and potential players but also provided players (who were looking to migrate) with contact points for potential teams.

In conclusion, these researchers not only showed that recruitment of sporting labour does not always require the use of a third party (player agent), as often informal systems involving friend and colleagues can be utilised to circulate information about potential employees and employers; they also indicated that these recruitment mechanisms in a sporting context mirror many of the aspects which have been identified in the recruitment processes of highly skilled workers in the corporate business world. Moreover, this study demonstrated how player recruitment systems also facilitated sports labour migration, a topic for discussion in a subsequent section of this chapter (refer section 2.10).

Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) investigated player recruitment systems in professional sport, a study which focused on the management of internally developed and externally acquired resources, along with the development of group routines in professional football. These researchers believe that professional sport can be viewed as a somewhat unique industry as only industry-specific human capital can be traded, which is constituted by a player's technical and physical abilities along with their knowledge about their playing position and tactics. They insist that a sport's organisational-specific human capital heavily depends on

the specific working conditions and mechanisms each club employs, along with the experiences gained by team members and coaching staff. The results of their study focus on the following four main areas: group routines; internally developed resources; externally acquired resources; and financial resources.

#### **2.6.3.1 Group Routines**

A team's capacity is directly associated with its performance, a process that, according to Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012), is enhanced by promoting internally developed resources, because the more time a player has spent within a club the greater the familiarity built around its routines and practices. In addition those individuals who spend their entire career at the same club develop into an ambassador role as they have internalised the organisation's norms and values, helping promote social integration of other players into the squad. Manager tenure was also another important aspect positively associated with better performing group routines, as experiences over time allow managers to better understand the internal working relationships amongst organisation specific resources (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012).

#### **2.6.3.2 Internally Developed Resources**

The greatest advantages to internally developed resources, according to Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012), is that they are organisational-specific and have been developed with the club's playing style and tactics engrained, as they are players that have graduated through a club's youth structures. Just as importantly these players can be integrated into the professional set up at no cost, or can be transferred to another club to generate revenue streams. Furthermore, because these young players belong to the club a strong bond between the player and the club develops. However, as not all players from a club's youth system manage to break into the professional ranks, the researchers concluded that financial outlay in such ventures is an uncertain investment.

The relationship between internally developed resources and managerial tenure was also examined by Lechner and Gudmundsson's research. Overall, it was shown that as managerial tenure increased so too did the manager's reliance on internally developed players. This result suggests that over time managers generate greater social relationships within their club, becoming more committed to developing the club's culture and the development and integration of players from the youth system. Furthermore, these researchers conclude that experienced managers are also more capable at extorting additional value from organisational specific resources.

### **2.6.3.3 Externally Acquired Resources**

In the world of professional sport, “Externally Acquired Resources” are players which have originally been developed by another club. According to their research Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) resolved that clubs tend to focus towards this recruitment method when they identify that there are resources missing in their player portfolio which cannot be developed internally, or could not be developed in the available time span. Furthermore, they also believed that the value of an externally acquired player can be measured by the amount of industry specific knowledge the player has accumulated over time, which in football can be related to the number of appearances a player has amassed in the top echelon leagues, as increased appearance directly correlates with increased levels of football industry experience. What’s more, they believe that the true measure of a player’s quality is demonstrated by that player’s services still being in demand even after a long playing tenure.

Clubs were also shown to be acquiring external resources that help generate advantages through group diversity, as results show that teams which are constructed with the inclusion of externally acquired resources perform better than homogeneous teams after short blending in period. This is because these teams contain players who have been developed by other clubs under a different process and different playing styles. These experiences help develop team diversity which increases open-mindedness, creativity, flexibility and problem solving capabilities within a team, thereby strengthening their competitiveness and adaptability.

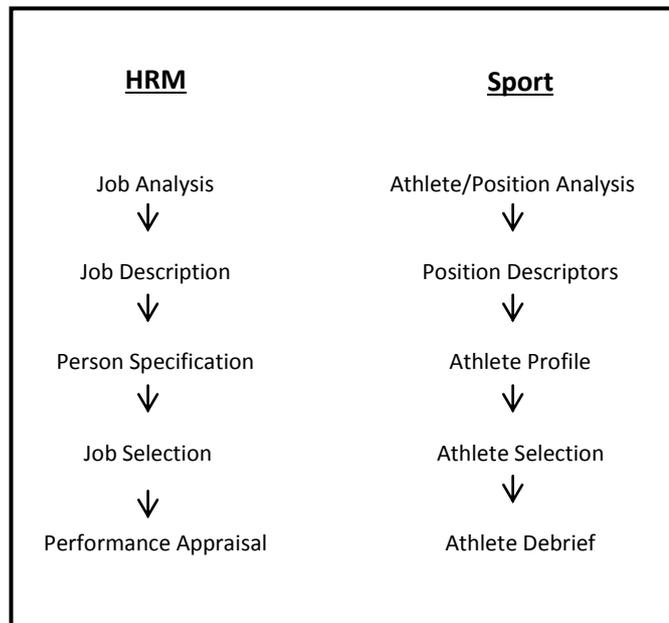
### **2.6.3.4 Financial Resources**

Financial resources a club has at its disposal not only dictate what the organisation can do with its resources, but also impacts on what resources they can acquire, along with which resources they can retain (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012). Furthermore, Lechner and Gudndsson also believe that the relationship between on-field performance and wage demands is a circular one, as clubs who have access to more substantial financial resources are not only able to restructure their playing portfolios more effectively, but are also able to recruit and retain a higher level of industry specific staff (key players). Another key finding Lechner and Gudmundsson highlight in relation to financial resources shows that clubs who encounter more financially constraining circumstances rely more heavily on internal player development systems, while clubs who have access to more financial freedom flex their muscle and pursue more aggressive player acquisition strategies. However, their results also indicated that simply outspending rivals does not necessarily guarantee success; while increased spending does appear to have a positive impact on the performance of mediocre sides, the level of influence diminishes when more top performers are added to the mix.

#### 2.6.4 Player Selection Procedures

Examining the degree to which sporting organisations use workplace HRM selection procedures during athlete selection procedures was the premise for Bradbury and Forsyth's (2012) study. Their research involved recruiting 25 coaches from 15 different team sports, at both provincial and national level, to examine the procedures they utilised to complete team selection procedures, and then analysing whether these coaches' practices were similar to those suggested in existing HRM literature. The assertion behind this research, according to Bradbury and Forsyth, is that many selection controversies, which are often much published in the media are due to "unclear or unspecified selection procedures" (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012, p. 7), are increasingly resulting in challenges or disputes being taken to sporting arbitration panels. This is because poor selection decision can effectively end an athlete's career or severely limit their career progression through a reduction in their ability to generate financial revenue through funding, sponsorship, or endorsement deals (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012).

To complete this research Bradbury and Forsyth developed their own version of a HRM selection process by adapting the main components of that process into a sporting context, as shown in Figure 2.3.



**Figure 2.3 - Bradbury and Forsyth (2012) HRM Selection Process Translated to a Sport Context**

The researchers then completed semi-structured interviews with the recruited coaches to identify the selection criteria they employed when completing athletic selection procedures. Overall, their findings suggested that even though a majority of the coaches were well versed

in the theory, and supported the application, of formal HRM selection procedures, the majority had not formally implemented these practices during their own selection procedures; instead, many reported that they often relied on their “gut feeling”, an intuitive selection method. Findings which mirror selection procedures implemented by many small business organisations, as many tend to employ informal selection procedures, leaving themselves open to accusations of discrimination and legal challenges (Bartram, 2005). Similarly, Lewis et al. (2007) also showed that often these managers rely profoundly upon intuitive selection procedures.

Further findings also suggested that although the athletes were notified about upcoming trial proceedings, they often tended to be in the dark about “exactly [what] would happen during selection or what their selection would be based on” (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012, p. 16). Finally, the results of their research allow Bradbury and Forsyth to conclude that transparency during athlete selection procedures should be a prerequisite for all team sports, as this transparency will protect the organisation against potential legal action. This will be achieved by ensuring that all athletes are informed of the selection procedures, and the transparency makes it clear that they are completed in a fair and equitable manner. Therefore, the researchers strongly advise all sporting organisations to adapt “workplace HRM selection principles and practices” (Bradbury & Forsyth, 2012, p. 17).

## **2.7 RECRUITMENT SYSTEMS IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL**

This section provides an in-depth investigation into the recruitment processes clubs utilise for attracting and developing players in the world of professional football. The initial focus of this discussion will be placed on how the football transfer system has evolved over the years, the two main sources of recruitment, and how they have been applied in the English Football League. The focus will then shift to examine recent changes that have either altered the way transfers are completed or have placed limitations on the way clubs contract players through transfer activity.

### **2.7.1 The Development of the Football Transfer System**

The existence of professional football leagues can be traced back to their beginnings in the late 1800s, as the first fully professional football league in England – known simply as the Football League – was established in 1888 (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999). The sport’s governing bodies demanded right from the outset of the professional game that clubs must field players registered with them and that a player’s registration could only be held by one club at a time (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999). This ruling effectively set up what is known as the football transfer

market, as the movement of players between clubs required the transfer of their registration. This process quickly came to involve the recruiting club paying the club currently holding the player's registration a "transfer fee". Furthermore, in 1891 the sport's governing body invoked another restraint to further restrict player movements between clubs (McArdle, 2000). This new rule stipulated that any player wanting to transfer to another club must hand in a transfer request. The club then holding the registration had one of two options; either to transfer the player's registration after the completion of a satisfactory transfer fee, or to deny the player's request which left the player the choice of either remaining with the club or leaving the league and seeking employment outside of football (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; McArdle, 2000). This original transfer system became widely known as the "retain and transfer system" (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999, p. 260) and the idea behind it was to help preserve the competitive balance by preventing the clubs with greater financial strength from acquiring all the star players. It also served as a method which clubs could enhance their profitability, by restricting the player's bargaining power (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; Gerrard, 2002).

This transfer system remained largely unchanged for a significant number of decades as clubs could effectively end player's careers by refusing to release their registration unless their transfer fee demand was met, even if the club no longer wanted the player (McArdle, 2000). In 1963, following a legal challenge by Eastham against Newcastle United, the "retain and transfer" system was found to be an unreasonable restraint of trade (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; Gerrard, 2002; McArdle, 2000); as a result the "retain" part of the transfer system was removed (McArdle, 2000). New rules governing player transfers were invoked to give players more freedom to move between clubs at the end of their contracts, although transfer fees still remained in many cases (Gerrard, 2002).

This new system, now simply known as the transfer system, allowed clubs to retain a player by renewing their contract when it expired, but it also allowed players more flexibility between clubs at the end of their contracts. At the end of each season a club had two options available to them in regards to a player coming off contract. The first was utilised if the club wanted to retain the player; an offer was made and if the player agreed with the terms it was accepted. Unlike the previous "retain and transfer" model, the new system now allowed players to reject any offer from their current club and seek employment elsewhere without the fear and possibility of being frozen out of the game. In the event of a player refusing to sign a new deal, a provision had been put in place to settle the dispute, with the case being referred to the Independent Transfer Tribunal (McArdle, 2000). This invariably resulted in the player getting an improved offer from the original club, which they accepted, or being granted a transfer to another club (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; McArdle, 2000), with the player's new club

compensating their former employer for the loss of the players services with a transfer fee (Sutherland, 1986). Furthermore, under this new system players who were about to come off contract could also be “transfer-listed”, which basically amounts to a public announcement on the availability of the player and the fee which a new club must pay in order to acquire the player’s services. However, there were set limits on the number of players each season that could be listed (Gerrard, 2002; McArdle, 2000). Finally, those players which the club no longer wanted and had been listed now had the freedom to negotiate a new deal with a new club without being subject to a transfer fee or running the risk of not being released (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; McArdle, 2000). Transfer rules and regulations imposed after the Eastham versus Newcastle United court case in 1963 remained relatively unchanged over the next two and a half decades, until another subsequent court case in 1995.

Another major reform of the football transfer system occurred following the Bosman ruling by the European Court of Justice in 1995. In this instance, much like the case of Eastham versus Newcastle United decades before, Belgian football player Jean-Marc Bosman found himself in a situation where he rejected a new offer from his former club RFC Liege (Belgium 1<sup>st</sup> division) and requested to be transferred to US Dunkerque (French 2<sup>nd</sup> division), which was promptly refused. In December 1995, the European Court of Justice granted that the provision of clubs demanding a transfer for an out of contract player was a restraint of trade and a breach of the freedom of movement of labour legislation in Europe, as set out in the Treaty of Rome (Frick, 2007, 2009). The Bosman ruling established that the clubs’ property rights over a player’s services only existed during the period in which the player is contracted, and introduced the principle of true free agency in football worldwide by granting all players over the age of 24 who are either currently out of contract or within six months from contract expiry the right to negotiate a contract at a subsequent club without the payment of a transfer fee. However, transfer fees do remain for any player under the age of 24 as it represents compensation for the clubs’ player development training costs (Gerrard, 2002).

Another important change that resulted from the Bosman rulings was the abolition of the strict protectionist rules the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) installed to restrict the number of foreign born nationals a club could field during a competitive match in European football (Frick, 2007), which was known as the “three plus two rule” (clubs were allowed a maximum of three foreign born players, plus a further two who had resided without interruption in that country for a period of five years and had spent at least two years in their youth setup) (Frick, 2009). It was also found that this rule violated legislation surrounding the Treaty of Rome, especially that of creating a common labour market between members of the European Economic Community (EEC). The removal of this rule created a single football labour

market for the first time in European football, with European Union (EU) players able to freely migrate from club to club, and from country to country, without restriction. Furthermore, it also brought football into line with the general European business environment in regards to the migration of EU workers (Frick, 2007, 2009; Gerrard, 2002). However, restrictions have remained in place in most European leagues for players from outside the European Union (EU) (unless they have access to an EU passport) providing a protection measure to stop the flood of mediocre foreign migrants taking the places of home-grown talent (Frick, 2009). When work permits are granted to a non EU player it is done on the basis that they are an established member of their national representative team (Gerrard, 2002).

Finally, in respect to the Bosman ruling, even though a player coming off contract can now obtain a free transfer to another club without the requirement of a transfer fee, this does not automatically mean that out of contract players are cheaper to recruit than those still on valid contracts (which would involve a transfer fee). As Frick (2007) acknowledges, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that the financial outlay for sign-on bonuses when recruiting free agents is comparable to a transfer fee paid when recruiting a player still under contract with another club.

### **2.7.2 Labour Markets & Recruitment of Footballers**

This section looks at the labour markets which are available to professional football clubs during the processes of conducting player recruitment. The initial focus will be concerned with the recruitment channels that these clubs use when recruiting and developing players into the first team. It will then move to examine which channels are utilised the most in the four divisions of English League football and differences that occur between the levels.

In the business of professional football the net worth of the human resources helps determine not only the playing success but also the financial success of the club. Not surprisingly then clubs are consistently looking to modify their playing portfolios in an attempt to improve both playing and financial performance (Madura, 1982; Sutherland, 1986). The nature of professional football allows for human resources to be both developed internally and also be traded between clubs, often with a corresponding financial transaction attached, which can result in either a profit or financial loss for the selling club. As a result, Sutherland (1986) deems that there are two main sources which professional football clubs can recruit players from, either an external or internal labour market.

Recruiting from the “external football labour market” often heavily relies on the identification of young talent (which is unproven) and developing them through a club’s development program. During this process Sutherland (1986) has identified three distinct types of contracts a club can offer, with each acting as a mode of player registration with the sport’s governing body. Furthermore, he also insists that each contract can be defined as a port of entry into the internal labour market of professional football. The three different contracts are as follows:

1. *Schoolboy Forms* – player registration may be offered to boys who are at school on or after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. It represents the initial stage of the player recruitment and development process for a club.
2. *Apprentice Players* – these contracts may be offered to players between the ages of 15 to 17, who have left school and are involved in the club’s youth training scheme. This scheme allows players to be contracted to the club to play (youth or reserve team) and train on a full-time basis while also completing further education.
3. *Full-Time Professionals* – these contracts may be offered to any player on or after their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The other recruitment channel available to clubs is recruitment from what Sutherland labels as the “internal football labour market”, players who are already contracted full-time professionals. This method involves obtaining a player’s registration when it is either currently, or has previously been, held by another club. Furthermore, as previously discussed in the last section, this process has altered dramatically since the inception of professional football. In the current professional football landscape, clubs can obtain players’ registration via any one of the following four transfer methods (Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; Frick, 2009; Sutherland, 1986):

1. A club can recruit a player who is currently contracted to another club by obtaining their registration through the payment of a transfer fee; this is a method that requires consent from both parties.
2. A club can negotiate to obtain a player’s registration and services for a loan period (a set time frame) and once the loan period is completed the player returns to their parent club.
3. A club can recruit a free agent (whose contract has either expired or been terminated) over the age of 24 on a free transfer (without the need for a transfer fee).
4. A club can recruit a free agent under the age of 24, however in this case a transfer fee is applicable as it represents compensation for development and training. In the case of clubs not been able to agree on a negotiated fee, the fee is set by the governing bodies’ transfer tribunal.

Sutherland (1986) investigated which recruitment channel clubs tended to rely on more extensively during player recruitment throughout the four different tiers of English League Football (the top four divisions of the English football pyramid). Sutherland was able to determine that clubs in the top tier tended to utilise both the external and internal labour market recruitment channels. However, there was an overwhelming tendency for the transfer of players between clubs to involve a transfer fee, which suggests clubs would rather transfer players towards the end of their contracts and gain some financial revenue rather than let them run down their contract and leave for free. In contrast, the study's results suggested that lower division clubs tended to recruit primarily from the internal football labour market and in most instances these players had been released by their previous clubs so no transfer fee was involved. Moreover, Sutherland also believed that lower division clubs tended to shy away from recruiting players from the external football labour market as it is an investment laden with uncertainty, as it required the recruitment of unproven labour and there is no certainty surrounding the player's capabilities at the end of the development process. This view aligns with that of Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012), who found players developed via youth systems are an uncertain investment. On the other hand, clubs located in the top division have more financial resources at their disposal so they are able to gamble more on players recruited via this method, as they have the resources to withstand the frequent losses associated with player development.

### **2.7.3 The Role of the Player Agent**

In today's modern sporting world, player agents have become integral and influential stakeholders in the business of professional sport. Players aided by their agents have been able to transform their relatively short careers into very lucrative lifestyles by improving not only their bargaining powers but also attracting additional income through endorsement deals and other ancillary ventures (Mason & Slack, 2001).

Research into the player-agent relationships completed by Mason and Slack (2001) suggest that even though the relationship between a professional athlete and their agents is unique they exhibit many of the same characteristics consistent within the principal-agent framework, because the player acts as the principal and hires the agent to provide a service. The primary service that the agent provides involves contractual negotiations with clubs looking to gain the represented player's services. In addition to this, many agents now offer their player additional services that may include financial management, representation at litigation proceedings (commonly player tribunals), immigration matters, career planning for life outside of football, and leveraging financial or contractual benefits off their profile (Mason & Slack, 2001;

Williams, 2007). Furthermore, according to Mason and Slack (2003), players delegate this authority to their agents because they firmly believe that the agent has a greater specific knowledge and skill set when it comes to negotiating contracts.

Over the years sports fans have often accused and cited agents for a so-called loss of loyalty between players and their clubs. This is a notion that Williams (2007) instantly dismisses, as he maintains it is an agent's job first and foremost to look after the potential earnings of the player they are representing during their career. He insists that agent's look to assist their players in generating the most amount of money they can during their relatively short careers, while ensuring the player is in the right environment. He further insists that professional athletes must be viewed in the same light as any other business, as the club is the player's place of employment. If a player (the employee) is unhappy in their working environment or receives a better offer from another club (organisation) and subsequently moves, it should be viewed the same as job mobility among other professional business employees, because generally people would not have a problem with an accountant or lawyer moving for the same reasons.

#### **2.7.4 Impact of External Restrictions**

As reported by Cuskelly et al. (2006) many of the HRM changes in sports organisation are the result of policy changes instigated by governing bodies. This notion is particularly true when related to aspects of player recruitment in professional football, as this chapter has already shown during the discussion of the development of the transfer system. The purpose of this section is to examine recent policy changes implemented by football governing bodies and how they impact player recruitment.

In July 2001 the FIFA Executive Committee drafted new transfer regulations which came into force on the first day of September that year. These new regulations consisted of seven main clauses which included stability around contracts, limits to control player mobility, and protection of minors. The clause around contract stability set new regulations on the length of time a club could contract its players, ranging from a minimum of one season to a maximum of five. It also allowed clubs to add in protection periods which meant players could not terminate their contracts with a club unilaterally without just cause. The protection periods were set as the first three years for any player under 28 and two years thereafter. Furthermore, new transfer regulations were put in place to limit player transfers. This new rule limited player mobility in two ways. Firstly, it limited the transfer of players by only allowing them to be conducted during two specifically designated periods, which are referred to as

“transfer windows”. Secondly, FIFA also stipulated a new rule that limited a player’s registration to only two clubs in any given calendar year (FIFA, 2003; Gerrard, 2002).

#### **2.7.4.1 Salary Caps**

The main purpose for a salary cap is to limit the amount of financial resources a club can invest on playing talent by limiting the amount of money clubs can spend on player salaries (Dietl, Lang, & Rathke, 2009, 2011; Kesenne, 2000). The main justification for implementing this policy is that it helps make the best talent available for all the teams across a league by helping the distribution of talent between large and small clubs evenly, thus helping to preserve the league’s competitive balance (Bougheas & Downward, 2003; van der Burg & Prinz, 2005). It helps smaller clubs to keep their star players who would otherwise be attracted by higher salaries offered by larger clubs, along with preventing all clubs from over-investing in players. Most importantly, it stops clubs facing financial ruin after gambling success on a spiralling wage bill (Dietl et al., 2009).

Traditionally, the majority of professional football leagues worldwide, apart from the Major League Soccer (USA) and the A-League (Australia), have been conducted without a salary cap in place. However, this changed significantly when UEFA introduced its financial fair play (FFP) rules prior to the start of the 2011/2012 season. Unlike traditional salary caps, these financial fair play rules do not stipulate a maximum amount of expenditure a club can spend on player salaries, nor does it create parity between all teams in a league. The rule will nevertheless, have a similar effect because at its core it requires all clubs to at least break even in a financial capacity as an attempt to control the current phenomenon of clubs spending beyond their means. This can be regarded as a method to protect the long-term viability and sustainability of European club football. In addition, to ensure that clubs adhere to these requirements, UEFA will deny competition licenses to clubs whose expenses exceed their income (Lindholm, 2010; UEFA, 2010, 2012c). Since the inception of the FFP ruling, Malaga CF (Spain) was the first club to be excluded from UEFA competition when they received a one year ban in 2012, along with a fine of €300,000. Furthermore, 16 other clubs have had competition prize money withheld (UEFA, 2012a).

#### **2.7.4.2 Age Eligibility**

Under FIFA's new regulations, one of the most significant changes surrounded the international transfers of minors (Article 19 – protection of minors). To control and limit this practice, a new rule which prohibited all clubs from being able to recruit players under the age of 18 internationally unless the player's family moved to the club's region for non-football related reasons. The only exceptions to this rule are transfers which take place in the territory of the EU or European Economic Area (EEA), where players between the ages 16 – 18 can still be transferred between clubs in different European countries as long as part of the provision the club provides includes offering football education in line with the highest national standard of their home football association and guaranteed academic opportunities which allows players to pursue other careers should they cease playing professional football (FIFA, 2003). FIFA has subsequently since then slightly relaxed part of this regulation by allowing minor players who live within 50km from a border to sign for a club from the neighbouring nation as long as the club is not located 50km from that border, effectively allowing a minor player to sign for a foreign club as long as the club is within a 100km radius of their home (FIFA, 2003; Gerrard, 2002).

On a side note, football is not the only sport that restricts player movements with an age regulation, as both the NFL and NBA have age-related clauses. The NFL "age eligibility rule" stipulates that for a player to be eligible for the draft "at least three years must pass from when that player graduated high school" (McCann & Rosen, 2006, p. 732). The NBA regulation is not quite as strict and states that to be eligible for the draft the player must be "at least nineteen-years-old on December 31 of the year [of the] NBA draft and that at least one NBA season must have passed from when he graduated from high school" (McCann & Rosen, 2006, p. 733).

#### **2.7.4.3 Nationality & Eligibility**

Rules and regulations governing the global game have also placed restrictions surrounding player eligibility and participation in both domestic leagues and at international level. As established during the introductory chapter, the A-League has evoked such a rule to protect the right of Australian players to access a professional football career on home soil (Hassett, 2012), with the five visa player quota regulation (refer section 1.2). However, this is not the only league to employ such a measure. Major League Soccer (MLS) also has a similar quota regulation. Their regulations state that each franchise is allowed eight "international slots" and all other players must be either United States citizens, permanent residents, or holders of a special status visa (2012 *MLS Roster Rules*, 2012). The English Premier League (EPL), the

world's most popular football league (Brand, 2013), also has restrictions and immigration laws which aim to restrict the migration of players from non-EU countries plying their trade in England. The EPL's regulations state that for a player to be eligible for a work permit they must have "played 75 percent of the competitive international games for your country – which must be ranked by FIFA in the Top 70 – in the two years before your proposed move" or demonstrate that the player is of an "outstanding ability" (Blavo, n.d).

In reference to international football, historically it has been possible for a player to represent more than one national team as long as they held citizenship of that country. This rule allowed Ken Armstrong, a former Chelsea player and member of England's 1954 World Cup squad, to represent New Zealand after emigrating in 1957 (Dart, 2006). In 2004, in reaction to the growing trend towards naturalisation of foreign players into international football teams – particularly Qatar and Togo – FIFA tightened the regulations to prevent National Football Associations taking undue advantage of its rules on switching nationality. The new regulation stated that players must have at least one parent or grandparent born in that country, or must have resided in their new home country for at least two years (*Fifa rules on eligibility*, 2004). However, at the same time FIFA also invoked a new ruling that allowed any player who has dual nationality and has represented one country at Youth International Level, to represent the other country at Senior International Level, providing that the player applies for dispensation prior to his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (*Fifa rules on eligibility*, 2004).

The residency requirement was further strengthened in May 2008 when FIFA extended the residential requirements from two to five years to "reduce the number of instant citizens playing for their adopted countries" (Tan, 2008). The FIFA Congress implemented further changes again in 2009, when they removed the age limit for players who have represented a national association at youth level to change national associations. Thus, FIFA's current statute on the acquisition of a new nationality states:

Any Player ... [who wishes] to assume a new nationality and who has not played international football [in an official competition or for an Association]... shall be eligible to play for the new representative team only if he fulfils one of the following conditions: (a) He was born on the territory of the relevant Association; (b) His biological mother or biological father was born on the territory of the relevant Association; (c) His grandmother or grandfather was born on the territory of the relevant Association; (d) He has lived continuously for at least five years after reaching the age of 18 on the territory of the relevant Association. (FIFA, 2012, p. 65)

Furthermore, it was the last condition of this statute that allowed Wellington Phoenix captain Andrew Durante, an Australian by birth, the right to represent his adopted country New Zealand during the recent 2013 World Cup qualifying campaign, after living in New Zealand for five years and gaining citizenship (Gatt, 2013). Finally, as this section highlights the world of football is inundated with players completing board-crossing movements, as sporting athletes are valuable commodities bought, sold and transported all over the world (J Maguire, 1999). This will be covered in greater depth within the following section of this chapter.

## **2.8 PLAYER MIGRATION THEORY**

This section presents theoretical terms and frameworks that have been proposed to explain player migration patterns in football labour markets. These theories and concepts can be used as tools to understand how sports specific migration patterns have emerged and why today's modern football world has become more globalised. The following discussion will highlight typology models of sports labour migration, then examine the football specific world system before moving on to discuss other elements influencing football labour migration, including economic and historical factors.

### **2.8.1 Sports Labour Migration Typology Models**

Attention should first be drawn to works completed by Maguire (1996) who can be looked upon as a seminal author in the field of sports labour migration. Maguire holds the view that athlete migration within sport occurs across three different levels – within nations, between nations on the same continent, and between nations located in different continents and hemispheres. He also highlights how the different sports that people play can influence migration patterns and uses the sports of cricket and rugby league to show that player migration can often be categorised into seasonal patterns due to the differences in seasons in different hemispheres. This enables players of some sports to transfer between the hemispheres at season's end to carry on playing. Tennis and golf were also used as examples of sports where athletes are involved with a transitory form of migration, as these players are consistently shifting their workplace and place of residence as they compete on tour (Maguire, 1996). Furthermore, the establishment of the loan system in football also has allowed footballers the chance to become seasonal migrants as formalised links have been developed between a number of British and North American clubs (Taylor, 2006).

Maguire's research into sports labour migration has led him to develop a typology of sports labour migration model which is a theoretical framework he uses to explain the sports

migration phenomenon (Maguire, 1996, 2011a). As Figure 2.5 illustrates Maguire classifies sports migrants into one of the five following specific categories:



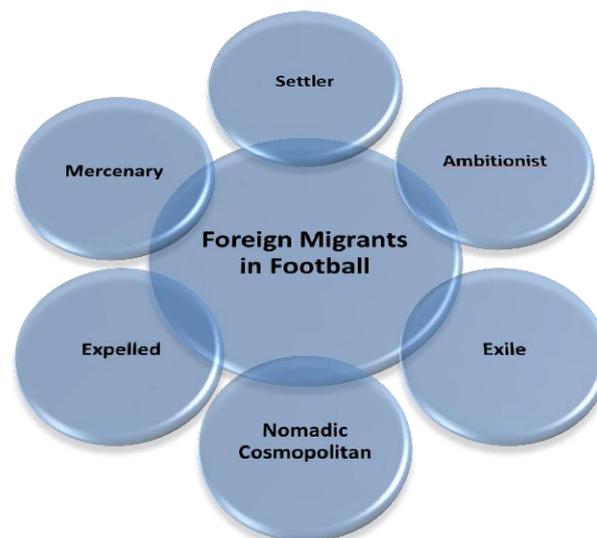
**Figure 2.4 – Maguire (1996, p. 339) typology of sports labour migration model**

1. The *Pioneers* – these sportspeople possess a passion and zeal for their sport and want to promote the virtues of it to others. They spread out over the globe seeking to convert others to share the same love of their game.
2. The *Settlers* – these people can be classed as migrants that take their sport with them and settle in a society where they ply their labour.
3. The *Mercenaries* – these are the players that are motivated by money and short term gains, often using agents to secure lucrative deals. These migrants have very little attachment to the place where they currently are residing and playing.
4. The *Nomads*- these players use sport careers as a vehicle to see the world; they enjoy being the stranger in a foreign country and the experience of different cultures.
5. The *Returnees* – this is where migrating players (in the categories above) return home to the land they are from as the lure of home soil proves too strong.

The category of the returnee needs to be further discussed because other studies have concerned themselves with player migration and players returning to their country of origin. According to de Vasconcellos Ribeiro and Dimeo (2009), players who have left their own country could have their possibilities of return restricted upon return due to either success or failure. Their research shows that players who are perceived to have failed are often subjected to humiliation upon return, while success can bring the trappings of celebrity. In either instance they make it clear that their former lives are no longer available and many find themselves isolated on return due to social changes that have occurred since their departure.

Similarly, another study into African footballers found that many players who did move overseas and failed to make the grade often “feel unable or reluctant to return home and face the ignominy that they feel their failure will bring within their local community” (Darby et al., 2007, p. 155).

Magee and Sugden (2002) suggest that Maguire’s (1996) typology of sports labour migration model is only a starting point for the assessment of sports labour migrants because it was developed using secondary data interpretation. Maguire refuted this claim in one of his subsequent works and insists that his research “includes primary data via interviews with players” (Maguire, 2004, p. 478). However, Magee and Sugden developed their own typology of football labour migration, which identifies a combination of categories that can overlap and are based on a central sphere. They felt this is important as their research showed that players can shift through different categories as their careers develop, as a player in their early 20s would have very different motivations than a player who is approaching the twilight of their career. The following figure is Magee and Sugden’s (2002) adapted version and an explanation of the new categories follows.



**Figure 2.5 – Magee and Sugden (2002, p. 430) adapted typology of football migrants**

1. *Ambitionist* – this has three elements. (1) A player who simply has the desire to play football professionally and will go anywhere where this dream can be filled. (2) A player moves to another professional league because they have a higher preference for playing there compared to elsewhere. (3) An ambitious player who has the desire to improve their careers by moving (directly or through a series of moves) to the best quality league they can.
2. *Exile* – this is a player who is forced to move leagues either for football related (can be offered a professional league at home) or political reasons (such as domestic threats to his playing career, his liberty or even his life).
3. *Expelled* – in effect these are players who have been forced to migrate to continue their professional football career. This can often be due to a combination of behavioural problems and media exposure that make it impossible for them to remain in their own home leagues.

Other studies support the inclusion of the “exile” category as political and economic instability has led to many instances of football labour migration throughout history. Maguire and Stead (1998) cited that bloody ethnic divisions which occurred in the Balkans in the 1990s is one such example where footballers have used their labour skill to escape conflict. Dietschy (2006) also provides his own two examples. The first is a Basque team on tour in South America which was exiled when their region was conquered by Nationalist troops in 1937 (during the Spanish Civil War), resulting in the majority of the players never returning home and continuing their football careers on South American soil. His second example is a 1956 incident when “240 Hungarian football players fled their country following the crushing of the Budapest insurrection by the Red Army” (Dietschy, 2006, p. 38).

The final typology for discussion is that proposed by Poli (2010) who takes his own approach by analysing players’ career pathways from a longitudinal viewpoint, while also investigating the role of transfer networks. This study develops upward career pathways (three ideal-type paths) along with a typology of spaces model, with each proposing different paths and steps that migrating players transfer through during their careers. This concept also helps explain the creation of value network chains where players can acquire additional worth via multiple transfers, as this approach views players as commodities which can be sold or traded to create either a profit or loss for the selling club. This approach also suggests that a number of different factors are involved in the transfer process, from club managers to player agents who all interact within the transfer network framework to develop value adding chains. The following table is a summary of Poli’s (2010) three ideal-typical upward career pathway model:

**Table 2.4 – Poli’s (2010) three ideal-typical upward career pathways model**

|                  | <b>Actor</b>                | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Example</b>  |
|------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Pathway 1</b> | Club Officials              | Large revenue clubs set up formal pathways with smaller feeder clubs   | Ajax Amsterdam purchasing two South African Premier league clubs merging them to create Ajax Cape Town.   |
| <b>Pathway 2</b> | Player Agents & Club Scouts | Both actors scan lower leagues in numerous countries along with international youth tournaments looking for the next ‘super star’. | Michael Essien’s career path from Liberty Professional FC (Ghana – SC Bastia (French div. 2) – Lyon (French Div 1) – Chelsea (EPL)                      |
| <b>Pathway 3</b> | Player Agents               | Player is subject to a numerous number of moves between clubs in different countries and at different levels (often on loan)       | The career of Henri Camara, who has played for 13 clubs in 13 different seasons and in multiple countries at multiple levels (including 4 loan spells). |

In the first two pathways, the steps (transfer) the players are subjected to provide them with an upward career projector until they are signed by one of European Football’s most dominant clubs, subsequently as the player is transferred to more high profile clubs their net worth increases. In contrast, in pathway three the first move abroad is upwards but subsequent moves thereafter are either sideways or sometimes even backwards, and often in these cases the player’s financial worth to a club as a commodity is close to zero.

According to Poli (2010) the structures that exist in the international trade of footballers also allow for the creation of the typology of spaces model, based on the clubs which players transfer through during their careers. Table 2.5 represents the five spaces a transferring player can pass through.

**Table 2.5 – Poli (2010) Football Migration Typology of Spaces Model**

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Platform Space</b>       | The first country a player performs in after leaving his home country   |
| <b>Stepping Stone Space</b> | A country from which a player gains access to a league in another country where both the playing standard and economic level is higher. |
| <b>Transit Space</b>        | A country in which a player passes through and leaves where the level of competition remains unchanged.                                 |
| <b>Relay Space</b>          | The country to which a player is loaned before returning to the country where he was previously playing.                                |
| <b>Destination Space</b>    | When a player moves to the wealthiest leagues and clubs in world football.  |

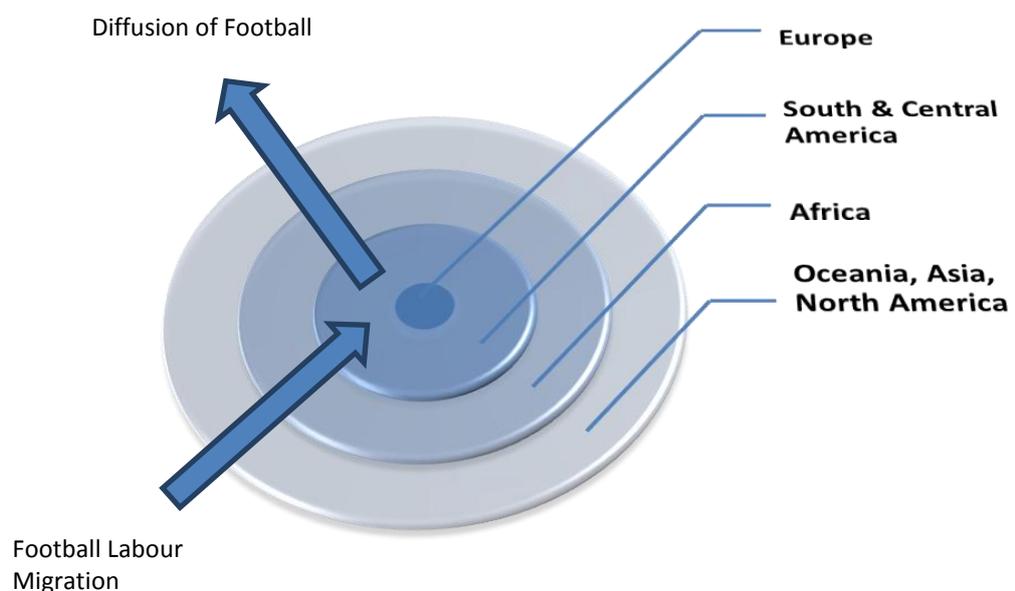
### 2.8.2 Football Specific World System Theory

World system theory was developed via the workings of Andre Gunder Frank (1969), who suggested that industrialised Western nations are at the "core" of a dominant global capitalist system which largely dictates the terms upon which world trade is conducted. As a consequence these core nations developed and prospered through the underdevelopment of those located on the periphery. Subsequently both Darby et al.(2007) and McGovern (2000) drew upon this theory as a framework to help explain player migration in world football, or as McGovern calls it the "brawn drain". Overall, both agree that world system theory encapsulates the nature of how many wealthy European Football Clubs acquire a great deal of their playing talent, because these clubs are financially stronger than their counterparts in the peripheral areas which include Africa, Asia and Oceania. These clubs then use this financial muscle to dictate how the trade of world football labour is going to be conducted. Furthermore, clubs located towards the periphery are often seen to be caught in a vicious circle where wealthy clubs, particularly from Europe, are able to offer significantly higher salaries than those that are available in local leagues. A "brawn drain" then ensues as clubs are forced to sell their best young players to survive, which further deskills and undermines football development in the periphery's leagues.

McGovern (2000) also suggests another two reasons why this world system has occurred. He stipulates that commodification and globalisation of sport are driven by organisations that

have the power to generate wealth at the expense of those clubs located on the periphery. Firstly, he shows how *live* satellite broadcasting of the major European leagues to the periphery is at the expense of local games as spectators are less enthusiastic about watching games that are perceived to be “less glamorous”. McGovern’s second reason is that regions and countries on the periphery are excluded from the central decision making process in the international governing body and are unable to effect change on the processes of domination. He also shows how this problem is not solely isolated to football circles and the same experience can be observed in baseball, especially in the case of the Dominican Republic and Major League Baseball.

Magee and Sugden (2002) also draw on world system theory to explain and connect the historical diffusion of football to the flow of migrant football labour. They too see European football at the core of both the global diffusion of football and football labour migration, as shown by the following model:



**Figure 2.6 – Magee & Sugden (2002 p. 428) Football World System Theory: The Global Diffusion of Football and Football Labour Migration**

Magee and Sugden’s (2002) model shows that the modern game has spread from Europe, at the core, outwards to the semi peripheries of South and Central America, followed by that of Africa and then onto the most external areas of Asia, Oceania and North America. Football labour migration is then shown to move in the opposite direction with football specific staff (players and coaches) movements being from the outer peripheral leagues towards leagues with greater financial resources at the core of the global game. However, they also

acknowledge that not all roads lead to the core and some players will only migrate within their own spheres; nevertheless they still follow an inwards pattern as player labour gravitates to the stronger, more affluent leagues of that region.

Finally, Darby et al. (2007) also argue that player migration to European leagues is not just a recent phenomenon by suggesting it extends back to the height of the colonial era. Their research shows that this has particularly been the case in both French and Portuguese football, as they insist that both of these nations have long relied on drawing African born players from their colonies to supply playing talent for both their domestic leagues and their international teams. Furthermore, they suggest that the collapse of colonial rule in Africa has had little impact on this pattern.

### **2.8.3 Economic, Historical and Social Determinates**

A large amount of McGovern's (2002) attention is focused on the English football industry and how the labour market impacts on it. He is particularly interested in forces that affect player migration, especially those related to economic and historical factors, along with other influences associated with social ties and recruitment networks. In relation to economic factors, McGovern believes it is important to remember that the English Football League system is not only the world's oldest established professional league, but also the largest with over 90 full-professional teams. In addition, he insists that English clubs have always been able to offer the prospect of full-time careers in football, better wages and better conditions than those available in migrant players' home leagues (McGovern, 2002). The demand that the English leagues have created has also played a role as TV revenue allowed for the creation of the Premier League in 1992, which rapidly increased the price of domestic players and encouraged leading clubs to start looking abroad for "foreign players that were generally less expensive" (McGovern, 2002, p. 31).

McGovern (2002) insists that Britain's political and colonial past also influences player migration pathways and is the major reason cited as to why Australian, Canadian, Irish, and South African players often gravitate towards the English game, as these countries all share common political systems and language with Britain. These cultural familiarities have all made it easier for migrants from these former colonies to move to an English club and from the club's perspective these factors reduce the risk that players would be unable to settle to the English way of life.

Moreover, social ties and recruitment networks were shown to explain why certain migrants choose to move to certain leagues and are employed by certain specific clubs, as McGovern's

research allowed him to conclude that a manager's national origin was often interlinked to the origins of the players they hired and from what leagues they came. One example of this is the evidence which demonstrated that "Scottish managers are almost twice as likely to sign Scottish players as their English counterparts" (McGovern, 2002, p. 32).

Demonstration effects in reference to player performance levels were also shown to have an impact on which regions clubs signed foreign players from, as McGovern (2002) stipulates that clubs were more willing to sign players from countries where they had previously experienced recruitment success, rather than test uncharted territories. Therefore, if a player signed from Australia had proved to be a success, then other Australian players were viewed as more attractive commodities. McGovern's stipulation is supported by the work of other researchers, as both Taylor (2006) and Maguire (2011a) and share the view that longstanding relationships can develop between clubs and countries based on previous player migration dealings, and that previous success leads to repeat transactions.

#### **2.8.4 Push and Pull Factors**

Players are now moving in more significant numbers than ever before with a number of different "push" and "pull" factors being credited for this development. Research shows that many players have been pushed away from their own homelands because of the existence of a poor economic state or even by the fact that the game remains classified as an amateur status sport. Subsequently, these players are pulled into professional football leagues located in other countries due to the promise of financial reward (Darby et al., 2007; Stead & Maguire, 2000).

The extent that some players (particularly African) are prepared to travel in the pursuit of professional contracts reveals the extent to which they perceive football as a tool for escaping poverty, not only for the player but also their extended family. This is a significant reason why their searches not only takes them to leagues located at the core of European football but also to other leagues located more towards the football wilderness in Asia, Australia and the Americas. The fact that they are prepared to travel to countries such as India, Thailand, or Vietnam for playing opportunities reveals the strengths of the push factors that encourage them to leave home (Darby & Solberg, 2010; Poli, 2010). Subsequently, the first major migration of British players was attributed to similar economic difficulties caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s. This predicament left a large number of professional footballers' job security in a precarious position and many more unemployed. The creation of professional

leagues in both the United States during the 1920s and France in 1930 acted as pull factors which enticed many players (Taylor, 2006).

However, not all players state that the financial opportunities are the only pull factor affecting their choice to seek contracts overseas, as many players cited in Maguire and Stead's (1998) study that it was also often based on a strong desire to test themselves at the highest level on a more consistent basis. On the contrary they also reported that many players also look to migrate to leagues of a lower standard, which often related to a player's age. Many players may look to migrate to leagues of a lesser standard as they enter the twilight years of their careers as they seek out new challenges in leagues which are at a more comfortable playing level, further helping to prolong their career. In addition these subsequent transfers can once again help a player become a leading player in the league, which can help rekindle memories of the "glory days" (Maguire, 1996).

Push and pull factors have also been shown to encourage players in certain circumstances to return to their country of origin, as according to Maguire and Stead (1996) numerous players have arrived in a new country to ply their trade and failed to adapt to the local customs. Subsequently, many find that being miles away from family and close friends can lead to vulnerability, which can then have a negative impact on on-field performances and lead to a downward spiral to the point where the player succumbs to the pull from back home.

#### **2.8.5 Other Impacting Factors**

A number of other factors have been attributed to influencing football labour migration according to a number of other researchers. Littlewood, Mullen, and Richardson (2011) argue that modern day managers are victims of an ever-declining tenure, a situation which has resulted in encouraging them to recruit "more finished players, with a skill base and experience that better matches the first team expectations" (Littlewood et al., 2011, p. 791). These researchers also report that managers "opt for foreign imports, because there is a greater chance for immediate improvement, rather than spending time and energy in tempting and nurturing promising young domestic players" (p. 792). These pressures in today's football world have led to an ever-declining managerial tenure for clubs' head coaches. Maguire (2011a) agrees wholeheartedly with this notion by stating that "the cost of failure for managers is so great that managers cannot afford the promise of longer term youth development, and instead go for ready-made, experienced foreign players who offer greater chance of instant success" (Maguire, 2011a, p. 1051)

Other research also provides evidence that the recruitment of foreign star players for many sports leagues is in an effort to lift their image, reputation and financial income, as these more gifted players not only bring excitement but also new playing ideas to their host country. Their presence can assist in delivering a better product to the market, resulting in increased revenue through not only memberships and attendances but also through increased media attention and sponsorship. Along with the financial side there is also the prospect that some players can act as a role model for local indigenous players (Maguire, 1996; Stead & Maguire, 1998).

Finally, stereotyping has also been shown to play a role in football player migration, with De Vasconcellos Ribeiro & Dimeo (2009) suggesting this is often the case when it comes to the recruitment of Brazilian players; they attribute the stereotypical view of the “talented Brazilian” to their international team’s performances on the world stage. This process leads to a number of lower level Brazilians being signed by clubs whose playing level is too high, and their physical abilities are unable to match. Furthermore, they also show how this view can lead to Brazilian players migrating to leagues where the style of player and wider cultural environment does not suit and the player has no other option than to return home.

## **2.9 RESEARCH GAP**

This literature review has presented three specific areas of research, specifically HRM practices, player recruitment systems in professional football, and player migration theory. Each of these three areas has received previous research attention, yet gaps for further research still exist. The area of HRM has received an extensive level of attention in relation to all aspects of the wider business context, which focuses on all seven stages of the HRM framework (refer Figure 2.2, section 2.2.1), yet in a professional sport organisation setting only methods of recruitment have been studied in any great detail, apart from Bradbury & Forsyth (2012) who apply HRM selection procedures to athlete selection procedure. Little attention has been given to the HRM processes these professional organisations use to socialise and then retain their valuable key employees.

Current player migration within football is heavily influenced by World System Theory, as wealthy European clubs located at the core of world football dominate the transfer market and acquire the best players. Thus, the majority of the previous research focuses on the inward flow of players who migrate from leagues located towards the periphery to those towards the core. Therefore, focusing on players relocating from clubs located at the core to leagues on the periphery, along with players relocating between two clubs both located on the periphery, presents a new area of focus.

Furthermore, current sports migration literature tends to focus on the reasons behind why these players migrate, as opposed to how these players are identified and who leads the recruitment process. Such research also tends to take the view that those players are nothing more than commodities which can be traded or sold at either a net profit or loss. This is a view that also negates the connection between player migration and football club's HRM practices, a connection that needs to be made given that a football club's success significantly relies on their ability to combine their playing resources into a collective group.

## **2.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an overview of HRM and sports labour migration theoretical terms and frameworks, with particular attention being given to their application and applicability to professional football. The literature commenced with a general overview of the HRM framework, before focusing on aspects related specifically to recruitment and retention practices, before shifting onto studies which focused on HRM practices within an Australian business context. Attention then moved onto HRM in professional sport, particularly around player development and recruitment systems, before concluding with player migration theory related to professional football. This review identified a gap in the inter-connection between player migration and HRM practices of football clubs. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate this identified gap by assessing A-League football franchises' HRM practices surrounding player recruitment and retention processes, in order to develop recommendations which will allow these franchises to develop more sustainable HRM procedures. The next chapter provides an outline of the research philosophy, approach and methods underpinning this research.

## CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concerns itself with aspects that have guided and directed this study, namely the research philosophy, its approach, and the methods employed. The initial discussion focuses on the researcher's own philosophical belief on how knowledge is created. The attention then shifts onto the research approach and how a mixed-method single case study was employed. The research design section explains the data collection procedures and outlines how it occurred in two distinct phases (quantitative and qualitative). This section also explains how respondents were selected for the completion of the semi-structured interviews. The data analysis procedures are then explained, this includes a section on how thematic analysis was applied. The chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of potential bias, limitations and delimitations that could be associated with this project.

### 3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The way in which knowledge is obtained is greatly influenced by the conceptual lens that a person views the world through and is significantly influenced by our own beliefs (Myers, 2009). This conceptual lens refers to ontology and epistemology positioning of the researcher, which in turn determines the methods and constructs utilised to construct research and too establish knowledge (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This study utilised an interpretivistic approach, also commonly known as constructionism (Glesne, 1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Myers, 2009), and is a task where a human interpreter looks to find meaning in qualitative data by focusing on meanings people attached to events occurring throughout their everyday lives, especially in relation to both the actions and descriptions of events, along with associated explanations (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Grant & Giddings, 2002). The underlining belief associated with this approach is that knowledge is created through interactions between the investigator and the respondent representing the object of investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From an ontological standpoint, this approach asserts that socially constructed phenomena and their associated meanings are created by social actors, from the product of social interaction (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Meaning that everyday experiences and ordinary life is used as the subject matter and meanings are constructed from social interactions negotiated in social practices, as it holds a prevailing belief that human actions are inseparable from meaning (Scott & Usher, 1999). Moreover, as the relationship between the researcher and the participant is inter-subjective the researcher

assumes the role of an active listener who interprets the data provided by the respondent. Finally, with this approach the inquirer assumes the voice of a “passionate participant” by actively engaging as an orchestrator and facilitator during the inquiry process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Myers (2009) presents three key concepts with reference to the epistemological consideration for interpretive research. Firstly, unlike their positivistic counterparts interpretivism does not rely on facts or empirical data to test theory, instead believing that data cannot be detached from theory as its correct meaning is determined by the context of the situation. Secondly, studies of this nature neglect the use of hypotheses to develop good theory, as a good theory under the interpretivism banner is one that helps the researcher to understand the meaning and intentions of the individuals being studied. Thirdly, in relation to the nature of the data unlike positivism where facts are neutral and speak for themselves, an interpretive approach will insist that facts are inscribed with certain meanings and are inseparable from the meaning prescribed by their social community.

An interpretive approach is also an ideal method for completing studies immersed in a sporting context according to Gratton & Jones (2010) due to the fact that sport is a social phenomenon, with participating actors being subjected to a number of external forces, feelings, and emotions. Thereby, concluding it is an area that is both too complex to be measured solely by numbers and also unsuitable to being understood in terms of causal relationships. As a result this study will use an interpretive approach to investigate HRM practices within the an A-League social context by involving key individuals involved in the player recruitment and retention as the subject matter, while constructing meanings and conclusions from the information supplied.

As every research approach has its own associated strengths and weaknesses it is important to discuss a quantity of those related to utilisation of an interpretive approach, highlighted in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 - Strengths and Weakness Associated with an Interpretive Research Approach**

|  |                         |  |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| S<br>t<br>r<br>e<br>n<br>g<br>t<br>h<br>s      | (Scott & Usher, 1999)   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Interpretive studies do not require closure, a task which can be impossible to complete in many studies investigating human interaction.</li> <li>2) researchers can take everyday experiences and ordinary life as its subject matter and investigate how meanings are constructed.</li> </ol>                                  |
|  | (Gratton & Jones, 2010) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Allows researchers to gain access to an insider perspective to allow for an understanding of the subject from within.</li> <li>2) allows for concepts around human interaction to emerge, identified and explain, which would be missed by a positivistic approach.</li> </ol>   |
| W<br>e<br>a<br>k<br>n<br>e<br>s<br>s<br>e<br>s | (Scott & Usher, 1999)   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No interpretation can ever be uniquely correct because this would presuppose that there is an interpretation that is authentic and original.</li> <li>2) From the position of a positivistic viewpoint it introduces an unacceptable level of subjectivity, thus they believe it destroys the objectivity of science.</li> </ol> |
|  | (Gratton & Jones, 2010) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The nature of interpreting people thoughts and feelings can lead to questions in regards to trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity.</li> <li>2) Findings are less likely to be generable in relation to other settings.</li> </ol>  |

It can be concluded from information provided above (Table 3.1) that one of the greatest strengths of an interpretive approach is that it allows a researcher to investigate a subject matter in everyday life by examining human interactions, while allowing the researcher to understand the subjects from within. In terms of weaknesses, because the researcher relies on drawing their own interpretation from the respondents' information it is very situational specific, therefore introducing a level of subjectivity into the findings.

### **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

This study uses an abductive or theory fitting research approach, a process which seeks the best explanation for data observed. Abduction can be seen as the middle ground between induction and deduction approaches and provides the researcher with a tool to describe and explain innovation and creativeness (Patokorpi & Ahvenainen, 2009). Furthermore, according to Scott and Usher (1999) it is an appropriate approach for interpretive research as it focuses on drawing out meanings social actors attribute to their everyday lives. Studies that utilise this method use the results of empirical findings to modify an original framework, developing a hypothetical form of non-monotonic reasoning that fits the best explanation to the given observation (Brena, 1998; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Nordh & Zanuttini, 2008). Thereby, it is a process where the researcher relates an observation to a theory by an interpretation of the phenomenon and applying it to a theoretical framework of reference (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium,

& Silverman, 2007). Finally, empirical investigations that employing an abduction-based research framework according to Patokorpi & Ahvenainen (2009) are a “proactive tool for connecting basic research to applied research, exploring and exploiting, in a new and innovative way”(p. 126).

### **3.3.1 Strategy and Method**

In terms of strategy, this study utilises a case study approach. The key rationale behind why this method was selected related to the nature of the objectives of this study, as the researcher is looking to uncover questions relating to “how” and “why” A-League HRM practices have evolved in a certain manner. Allowing the researcher to complete an in-depth investigation which retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real life managerial decision (Yin, 2009). A notion also supported by Myers (2009), as he also believes that case study research is ideal when the studies overall goal is concerned with seeking an understanding as to “how” and “why” particular business decisions are conducted in a certain manner or likewise why business processes operate in particular ways. Furthermore, as the main objective is to investigate A-League football franchises HRM processes in its entirety a single organisational case study approach was employed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This was deemed the most appropriate approach due to the nature of the investigation, as its aim is to investigate the applicability and application of HRM within the A-League in its entirety, as opposed to deriving findings which compare and contrast HRM processes between the individual A-League franchises. A situation where a multiple-case study approach would be more applicable (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To complete this case study, a mixed-method approach was employed, an approach which utilised both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research aim and objectives (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Gratton & Jones, 2010). Furthermore, according to Nau (1995), the aim for all researchers who utilise this method should be to develop a situation where the blending of qualitative and quantitative methods leads to the production of a final product which highlights the significant contributions of both approaches. This procedure of collecting, analysing, and mixing both forms of data within the same study also allows a researcher to create a more in-depth understanding of the research problem, as it provides them with a way of neutralising and cancelling out the biases associated with either approach, while allowing focus to remain on their relevant strengths (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Jones, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The quantitative method allows the researcher a tool for developing an overall “picture” of the subject or phenomenon under investigation, through statistical analysis. However, this approach offers no assistance in relation to

developing understanding surrounding the underlying reason for its particular existence, because the investigation is completed from “the outside” and fails to provide any analysis beyond a descriptive level (Jones, 1997). In contrast, qualitative methods particularly those involving interviews with related actors helps the researcher overcome this problem by providing them with a depth of knowledge in relation to a particular phenomenon. The depth which is achieved by “Verstehen”, a process which allows an understanding to be created from meaning presented from the informants point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Jones, 1997). Therefore, combining these two methods allows a situation to develop where the “qualitative data can support and explicate the meaning of the quantitative research” (Jayaratne, 1993, p. 117). Moreover, both Gratton and Jones (2010) and Jones (1997) argue that a mixed-method approach is appropriate for investigations conducted in a sporting context, as quantitative aspect can identify patterns of difference by completing comparative analysis between categories by allowing longitudinal data to be collected over consecutive seasons, while the qualitative aspect provides the understanding as to why these occurrences have transpired.

However, one has to be careful when utilising this approach. According to Creswell and Clark (2011) researchers need to ensure that the three following issues of priority, implementation, and integration are given appropriate consideration. Priority refers to which data strand, qualitative or quantitative is given more weight in regards to searching for the answers. Implementation refers to the sequence of order between the two approaches, whether the data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously or subsequently to each other. Finally, integration refers to the phases of the study when the two data strands are combined together. In relation to these three aspects this study was conducted in the following way. Priority for determining the research findings, data uncovered during the qualitative collection was given a more significant weighting as it depicted why key decision have evolved in such a manner. The quantitative data took a secondary role by uncovering current recruitment and retention patterns. The two phases of data collection were collected subsequently. The quantitative collection process was the initial focus, with the qualitative phase starting on its completion. In reference to data integration the strategy of connection involved using the results uncovered during the quantitative phases to guide and develop questions used during the qualitative phase. A process which according to Guba & Lincoln (1994) allows uncovered patterns to be described in a rich contextual manner.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was completed using a mixed-method approach where the data collection process occurred in two separate and distinct phases. The purpose of utilising this sequential exploration strategy was to use the quantitative data results to explore the player recruitment and retention phenomenon. Then use these results as a guideline for the development of the qualitative phases (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, this section is separated into two parts; the initial focus will be on discussing the research design of the quantitative phase, before turning attention to the qualitative phase and its methods.

#### **3.4.1 Quantitative Phase – Secondary Data Collection**

The initial focus of this study centred on the exploration and collection of secondary data in relation to identifying players who have appeared in the A-league from its inaugural season (2005/2006) through to the conclusion of season eight (2012/2013), analysing it to identify current patterns in relation to the recruitment and retention of both local and foreign players. The collection of this data centred on gathering information surrounding player profiles (age, nationality, playing position) and their transfer history (domestic or international). This process was completed via internet-based searches of football specific websites. Where possible information was assembled from official sources namely the official A-League website administered by FFA, along with those belonging and being administered by each individual franchise. However, due to the nature of this information on occasions it was also required to be collected from additional sources, mainly newsprint articles, magazines and other football specific websites. In these instances in order to ensure reliability this data was only included when it had been verified by an additional source. The purpose of this quantitative data collection phase was to collect descriptive data to identify patterns and trends associated with recruitment and retention of players involved within the A-League. This statistical information allowed conclusions to be drawn in relation to Objective Two to critically analyse player migration data of A-League franchises to uncover patterns associated with the recruitment and registration of both local and international players in relation to the following five main aspects:

- i. A-League player composition and patterns surrounding a player nationality and their home FIFA Confederation.
- ii. A-League player mobility and patterns associated with player migration channels to identify markets with repeat transactions.
- iii. Identification of relationships between player age and nationality.

- iv. Identification of relationship between number of clubs, seasons and nationality.
- v. Identification of relationship between playing position and nationality.

The results of this data gathering procedure were important because it provided the researcher with an understanding and background of the player recruitment processes employed by the franchises as a collective group. These results also allow for the construction of findings in relation to theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to player migration literature, as presented in section 2.10, thereby setting the context of the study. Furthermore, these results and trends also bridged the link between player migration theory and HRM, as the outcomes generated in this phase were utilised to shape the qualitative investigation, specifically in relation to procedures of how players are identified, who leads the recruitment processes and the processes the franchises employ to retain these key employees. Allowing for the development of more purposeful and insightful research questions during the qualitative phase (Yin, 2009).

### **3.4.2 Qualitative Phase**

The second phase involved conducting interviews with key informants and stakeholders involved in the recruitment and retention processes of A-League playing staff. This section provides a detailed explanation about how participants were identified and then recruited, before explaining and justifying the selected interview approach.

#### **3.4.2.1 Participant Criteria and Identification**

A purposive sampling approach was utilised to identify potential participants during this research project. An approach that strategically recruited to ensure that the individuals located in the sample would provide rich information in relation to the research questions being posed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Patton (2002) also acknowledges that purposive sampling is also commonly referred to as purposeful or judgment sampling, and he identified 16 different categories. This research project utilised two of these categories for participant identification and recruitment to a varying degree, namely stratified purposeful and snowball sampling. A description of both these techniques and why they were employed follows:

- i) Stratified purposeful sampling – this can be looked upon as samples in samples. The goal of this sampling approach is to capture variation between different subgroups of interest, to facilitate comparisons. This method was selected due to the nature of the industry, as it is relatively small with only 13 franchises

organisation (10 current, 3 defunct), along with a selected number active player agents. Therefore, this purposeful sampling technique was deemed most appropriate for targeting the key individuals involved in HRM processes of A-League players.

- ii) Snowball Sampling – the sampling technique employs a referral process to recruit additional participants, as already recruited participants are asked to recommend others who they believe to be information-rich. This method was selected again due to the nature of the industry, which revolves around peoples’ reputations. Snowball sampling represented a way the researcher could tangent of the reputation of the respondents to recruit others to participate.

A stratified purposeful sampling technique was particularly useful during the participant recruitment as it ensured that both subgroups involved in A-League recruitment and retention processes were represented, CEOs that represented the franchises perspective and the player agents who represented the players’ perspective. Subsets which were identified during the discourse analysis of recruitment practices in professional football (refer section 2.8). The key individuals of both of these subgroups were identified via the conduction of secondary data information searches in the public domain. Other potential respondents were identified via snowball sampling as recommended by previously recruited respondents at time of interview. This process was particularly useful as it resulted in a participant being recruited from a third subset, a representative from the players’ union. The ability to recruit different participants from different subsets allowed the researcher to facilitate comparisons (similarity and differences) of the information supplied during the reporting process.

#### **3.4.2.2 Participant Recruitment**

Initial contact with all potential participants was made via email, with each identified individual receiving an introduction letter acting as an invitation to participate (Appendix B). In relation to the current franchises’ CEOs, this letter was emailed to each franchise’s generic email address which was obtained from the “contact us” tab on each franchises individual “official” website. The researcher then completed a follow up phone call two days later to ensure that the invitation had been received. This process resulted in one participant been recruited (who later withdrew citing a lack of time). Franchises who failed to respond received a follow up phone call two weeks later, extending another opportunity to participate, and a process that resulted in the confirmation of another current CEO’s participation.

The process used to contact former CEOs was conducted in a similar fashion, as again these potential participants were emailed an introduction letter, which resulted in the confirmation of one participant. Once again potential participants yet to respond were followed up two weeks later. However, in this instance a follow up email was utilised and resulted in the confirmation of another former CEO. An introduction letter via email was used when contacting potential participants from the identified pool of registered Australian based player agents, whose email addresses were obtained via contact listings provided on both FIFA and FFA websites, a process that directly lead to the recruitment of four current player agents. The final respondent (identified via snowballing) was also recruited directly via email. On confirmation of participation all confirmed respondent were provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (Appendix C & D), with interviews being set at a time and date in the future which was most convenient in order to ensure all participants had time to consider their involvement. Approximately one week prior to interview the researcher confirmed the interview via email, while also dispatching a summary of the interview schedule (Appendix E).

#### **3.4.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews**

The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview approach, with each interview lasting between 30 – 90 minutes in duration. A semi-structured approach was selected according to Myer (2009) it brings together the best aspects of both a structured and unstructured approach. This approach allows the researcher to regulate the structure through the development of pre-formulated questions, while still allowing enough flexibility and improvisation for new questions to emerge out of the resulting conversation (Myers, 2009). Furthermore, it is an approach that allows each participants experiences and interpretations to be explored by the words in which they assign to them (Dickson, Arnold, & Chalip, 2005). To guard against intra-interview variability and maintain consistency across all the interviews a semi-structured interview schedule (refer Table E1, see Appendix) was developed which ensured that a similar set of questions were used each time (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Myers, 2009). Questions utilised during the resulting dialogue were open-ended in nature, as this approach ensures that the questions used do not suggest answers to the respondent, but also allows them to answer using their own words (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These questions were developed from knowledge obtained through the critical review of existing HRM and player migration literature, the results of the quantitative research phase; along with the researcher's own tacit knowledge.

The researcher completed all eight interviews via Skype due to geographical disparity. This method was selected ahead of telephone due to the fact that it is still a form of face-to-face interview that still allows for the completion of observations and the usage of visual aids during the interviews (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Permission was obtained from all respondents allowing the researcher to digitally record all interviews. After the completion of each interview to assure anonymity for ethical reasons each respondent was coded with a pseudonym to ensure privacy and minimise the risk of participants and their organisations being recognised during the data analysis or reporting phases of the study, see Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 – Respondents Assigned Pseudonym Names and Related Position**

|              | Pseudonym Name | Position                      |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Respondent 1 | Marcus         | Former Franchise CEO          |
| Respondent 2 | John           | Former Franchise CEO          |
| Respondent 3 | David          | Current Franchise CEO         |
| Respondent 4 | Matthew        | Player Agent                  |
| Respondent 5 | Simon          | Player Agent                  |
| Respondent 6 | Zachary        | Player Agent                  |
| Respondent 7 | Andrew         | Player Agent                  |
| Respondent 8 | Luke           | Players' Union Representative |

All interviews were transcribed verbatim within seven days upon completion personally by the researcher. To ensure accuracy on completion of each transcript the researcher read each transcript while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. Each interviewed participant was then provided with a copy of the transcribed interview to ensure that all comments were a true reflection of the respondent's opinion and no information had been taken out of context.

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

This section details the data analysis procedures utilised for each phase of the selected mixed-method approach. The initial focus centred on the quantitative phase, where secondary data was coded and analysed. The discussion then shifts on to the approach used to complete the qualitative phase.

#### **3.5.1 Quantitative Phase**

On completion of the secondary data collection process, the information relating to player profiles and transfers was coded and entered into SPSS data viewer using SPSS for Windows. This allowed for the conduction of descriptive statistical testing procedures in relation to univariate analysis, allowing for the exploration of player transfer patterns. SPSS software is the most appropriate software to use to complete this analysis for two significant reasons. Firstly, based around the amount of data that will be collected, as from the implementation of the league through to the end of season eight, 733 players have appeared in the A-league. Therefore, due to the size of the data SPSS software offered a logical approach to managing and concluding results for a data set of this significant size. Secondly, because SPSS software is widely regarded as the most commonly used computer software for the analysis of quantitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The results from this data analysis provided the findings in relation to Objective Two, which looks to uncover patterns of recruitment, registration, and retention of both local based and foreign players. As previously stated this is a mixed-method study where the implementation of the data collection and analysis occurred subsequently (refer section 3.3.1). Therefore, after the quantitative phases was completed the findings were utilised to assist with the line of enquire formulated for the qualitative phase of the investigation.

#### **3.5.2 Qualitative Phase**

Research projects where qualitative data is derived from interviews typically collect large amounts of unstructured textual material, and unlike quantitative data analyses there is no clear cut and straight forward mode of analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). One of the simplest ways, according to Myers (2009), to analyse qualitative data is to employ some form of coding technique, because as soon as you start coding a piece of text you have started analysing it. This section will describe thematic analysis, a commonly used method that analyses quantitative data by developing codes, and relating them to categories in the literature to develop themes (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A code is developed by fracturing apart sections of text

which the researcher interprets and labels with a related name. These codes are then reviewed for themes, which describes a pattern associated with the research question and represents a pattern of response in the data set (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011). The remainder of this section is subdivided into two segments, firstly presenting an overview of thematic analysis, before secondly explaining how Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage process was used to analyse the information supplied by the respondents.

### **3.5.2.1 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a well recognised and commonly used approach to conduct qualitative data analysis, as it provides the researcher with a rich detailed account of the respondents data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Unlike other qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory or critical discourse, thematic analysis does not have an identifiable approach, therefore it is an approach that does not have a single set common approach and been defined by a significant number of different authors in a number of different ways (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, for the purpose of this research project thematic analysis is defined as qualitative data analysis method that identifies, codes and categories data into themes by conducting searches across data locating repeated patterns of meaning, which when pieced together construct a comprehensive picture that describes the collective experience (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is an approach where the process employed to analyse the qualitative data is relatively straight forward and easy to conduct, therefore ideally suited to a researcher who is still familiarising themselves with qualitative analysis techniques.

Theme development in thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) can be identified via one of two primary methods, either via a bottom to top inductive approach or via a top down theoretical approach (deductive). With the inductive approach the coding approach is driven by the data, allowing the data to be coded without having to fit it into pre-existing coding frame. Alternatively, a theoretical coding process is generally driven by the researcher's theoretical framework, thus "is more explicitly analyst-driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Another decision the researcher must formulate around thematic analysis is at what level of depth the themes are to be identified and scrutinized, as the researcher has two alternatives by using either a semantic or latent approach. A semantic approach identifies themes within the surface meaning of the data by not looking beyond what has been said and that was the approach utilised in this project. Whereby, a latent approach goes beyond this and looks to examine underlying assumptions and conceptualizations that shape and inform

the semantic content (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, according to Braun and Clark (2006) a latent approach is closely associated with a constructionist paradigm.

### **3.5.2.2 Data Analysis Procedures**

The thematic data analysis procedure that the researcher employed followed the six distinct phases as described by Braun and Clark (2006). Each phase will now be introduced, along with an explanation of how the researcher completed this process in relation to the data analysis for this project.

Phase 1: Data familiarisation – this first step involves familiarising yourself with the material and included reading through each transcript multiple times (repeated readings). This familiarisation process was assisted by the researcher completing the transcription process himself. A process Braun and Clark (2006) insist is an excellent way to familiarise oneself with their data and allows for the development of a far more thorough understanding during the initial stages of analysis.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes – after familiarity has been built with the data the initial coding began by assigning remarks or observations to passages of text and helped the researcher to interpret sections of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011). The researcher completed this phase in two parts. Step one involved manual coding by assigning labels to passages of text which described the data. Step two then involved examining these labels to identify patterns and similarities (Birks & Mills, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a task which the researcher completed by colour coding.

Phase 3: Searching for themes – this stage begins once the initial codes have been completed and collaborated. This process involves “sorting the codes into potential themes, and collating all relevant coded extracts within the identified themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Here the researcher created a mind map to link the different codes and generate themes. This was completed by incorporating the different categories around a single few core categories, which represented the main theme of the research. These themes were identified by tracing key connections between categories back to a central point (Birks & Mills, 2011; Holten, 2007).

Phase 4: Reviewing themes – this phase begins once all themes have been relocated under the banner of an overarching theme. At this stage it became evident that there was not enough data to support certain themes and that this caused some to collapse. The overall goal of this process was to conclude with clear and identifiable distinctions between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To complete this reviewing phase the researcher engaged the secondary

supervisor to act as a cross-checker to complete investigation triangulation to ensure that there is trustworthiness in the developed themes (Decrop, 1999).

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes – this is the point where the themes are defined and refined to identify the essence of what each separate theme portrays. This is completed by assembling the data extracts for each theme and organising them into coherent and consistent accounts of the narrative. Each individual theme needed the “story” to be identified so that the overall story that the data is telling in relation to the research questions is constructed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study as the researcher was using a theoretical (deductive) approach the themes were defined and named in relation to pre-existing HRM frameworks that was identified during the literature review process.

Phase 6: Producing the report – this phase begins once the full set of themes had been developed and involves the final analysis and write up of the report. With the overriding goal of these phases to be able to “tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). In the context of this investigation the researcher has chosen to employ a narrative approach to create and tell the story behind the data. An approach which Myers (2009) argues “emphasises the voice of the person telling the story and focuses on the uniqueness of the story” (p. 212). Furthermore, a story is developed where the literature has been interwoven with the findings and one that stands with merit by developing a story line that allows the reader to comprehend the process, understanding the motives of the researcher (Aronson, 1994). A theory-guided approach was another alternative approach considered, but was later dismissed due to the fact that a narrative logic approach allows the data details to be presented in an order that best relates to the particulars of the story (Chenail, 1995).

### **3.6 POTENTIAL BIAS**

The main area that could have lead to potential bias relates to the number of non-responses that the researcher encountered. The researcher was only able to recruit three from a possible thirteen CEOs representing the different franchises involved. Similarly, the same was also true for the player agent’s subset as only four respondents were recruited from a possible sample of forty-four different individuals. The problem with a large number of non-response according to Bryman and Bell (2011) is that those “who agree to participate may differ in various ways from those who do not agree to participate” (p. 177). Therefore, the participants who were recruited may have volunteered to be involved because they held strong opinions on the area of investigation that differ considerably from those held by other (non-responsive) franchise

CEOs and player agents, differences that may have altered the findings in relation to the research questions.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As the data collection procedures employed during this investigation involved human participants, ethical approval was obtained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK), prior to the commencement of the qualitative research phase. In order to fulfil their guidelines a number of steps were taken to ensure compliance.

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, all interviewees received a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C). This sheet acted as both an invitation to participate in the research and as a risk reduction exercise. In terms of the invitation, it outlined the intent and purpose of the research project, along with the main objectives. It then advised each participant how they were identified and outlined the interview process. This document also advised the participants of the steps which had been taken to ensure that all discomforts and risks has been alleviated, how their privacy would be protected, points of contacts should they require more information (both for the researcher and project supervisors) and that further participation and involvement was completely voluntary.

All respondents that confirmed participation were required to complete a Consent Form (Appendix D) prior to the interview. This document ensured that all interviewees were advised of the interview procedure, and that the interviews were to be recorded then transcribed on completion. Furthermore, all participants had the option to indicate if they would like to receive a copy of the transcribed interview to ensure that it represented a true and fair reflection of the information they provided during the discussion. The document also stated that all participants had the right to withdraw themselves or their organisation from the study at any stage prior to the completion of the data collection, without being disadvantaged in anyway. Furthermore, in the event of such a withdrawal, all information including recorded audio and interview transcripts, or parts thereof, would be destroyed.

In an effort to protect the identity of each participant/organisation, and to ensure privacy for all participants and their organisation, all names were allocated with pseudonyms, a task which was completed prior to the commencement of the qualitative data collection phase. Thereby, ensuring participant/organisational privacy and anonymity throughout every stage of the data collection, data analysis, and reporting processes.

Finally, in compliance with AUTECH storage of information guidelines the researcher and associated supervisor were the only individuals provided with access to any information provided by the respondents. Again, post-findings, it will only be these same named individuals that will have future access. During the duration of the research all collected information was stored on the researcher's computer, under password. On completion this data was transferred and stored on the secondary Supervisor's computer, under password, with hard copies being locked in a secured filing cabinet in his office. In order to protect the identity of the respondents all communication and signed consent forms will be stored in a separate location and locked in a secure filing cabinet located in the primary supervisor's office, thus eliminating the possibility of being matched to the corresponding transcript.

### **3.8 LIMITATIONS**

One significant limitation placed on the study related to the nature of the business of the individuals involved. With regards to the CEOs and franchises, it was found that they have very little down time, due to the fact that during the season their priority is about the current campaign, before attention shifts onto the preparation for the next season at season end. A notion highlighted by the CEO who withdrew from the study prior to the interview who cited that "due to recent occurrence within the franchises I will be unable to find an appropriate time to schedule an interview" (personal communication, July 5, 2013). Furthermore, it was found that often the small amount of down time that they have available between seasons is often utilised as a holiday period. Moreover, the nature of a player agent's business structure may also have limited the number who was willing to participate in the study. There is a strong possibility that many of these potential participants may have been uncomfortable with sharing information about how they facilitate player transfers due to the fear of losing anonymity as to how their business operates.

Although the input from the CEOs was insightful and valuable, extending the study to involving coaching staff as another subset of respondents during the interview process would have provided further contextualisation of the case being investigated. This is because these are the staff members who interact with the playing staff on a daily basis and were often shown to be the employees that the franchises allocated responsibility surrounding player settlement and welfare. However, this approach was not possible due to time limitations, access to these employees and the nature of their employment role.

### 3.9 DELIMITATIONS

Delimitations are characteristics placed on the study by the researcher, and aspects in the researcher's control that limited the scope and defined the boundaries of this study (Simon, 2011). An initial delimitation right from the outset was the selection of a case study where there was a large geographical disparity between the researcher and organisations/individuals involved. This meant that even prior to embarking on the project the researcher was aware that this may influence who was willing to become involved. Furthermore, the researcher also understood that conducting the study in isolation meant that he was unable to immerse himself in the football community of investigation in order to develop and utilise personal network contacts. Also due to budgetary requirements, travel costs and time constraints the researcher was unable to travel to the participants' location to complete personal face-to-face interviews, the researcher's originally intended method of interview.

The type of case study method adopted by the researcher affects the emphasis of the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The utilisation of a multiple case study approach, which examines the HRM practices found within all of the past and present A-league franchises, would have enabled the researcher to compare and contrast in terms of their effect upon performance (both on and off-field). Likewise, a longitudinal approach would have allowed more time for the collection of data and assessment of how these individual franchises have evolved their HRM procedures since the Leagues inception (in 2005). Ultimately, however, the limitations noted in section 3.8, as well as the constraints noted in the previous paragraph, prevented the researcher from employing either of these options, with the focus of the study shifting away from the clubs and towards the competition in which they operate.

The findings presented in the following chapter represent the researcher's interpretation of the information provided by the respondents, therefore generalisation is potentially limited (Myers, 2009). This investigation focuses on HRM processes employed by franchises confined within the social context of the A-league. Consequently, the resulting outcomes may only be applicable to this setting. According to Glesne (1999), for example, the findings in research are often specifically related to the socially constructed environment from where they reside. Thus, this research project finding may not be applicable to other professional sports franchises located within the Australian sporting landscape or other professional football franchises located in different leagues in different locations.

### **3.10 SUMMARY**

The purpose of this chapter was to frame this study in terms of its research paradigm, approach, and design along with the modes of analysis. In summary, this project employed an interpretivistic mixed-method approach set in the social context of the A-league to investigate the applicability and application of HRM principles of the participating franchises. As a mixed-method approach was employed the data collection and analysis phases happened subsequently, with the results produced from the qualitative phases been used to develop more purposeful and insightful research questions in the qualitative phase. The researcher then completed eight semi-structured interviews with three different subsets. This information was then transcribed and coded utilising thematic analysis to construct themes and a conclusion in relation to A-league franchises current HRM process surrounding player recruitment and retention. Findings that have been presented via a narrative approach in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research project was completed using a mixed-method approach utilising a sequential exploration data collection strategy; thereby the data was collected and analysed in two separate phases. The first phase involved collecting and analysing secondary data in relation to player profiles and transfer activity within the A-League since it was first established in 2005. Critical analysis of A-League player migration data uncovered patterns concerning the recruitment and registration of both local and international players, which provided conclusions for Objective Two (section 4.2). Furthermore, the results generated during this phase set the platform and were used to shape the qualitative investigation.

The second, qualitative phase involved completing eight semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in A-League player recruitment and retention processes. This data was then transcribed and examined using thematic analysis, to generate codes and themes. This process provided a rich detailed account of the respondent's data which was used to complete Objective three, to both access and assess past and present A-League franchises HRM practices. A narrative approach was used to present these findings in order to tell the story behind the data, emphasising the voices of the respondents. Furthermore, the findings were interwoven with relevant literature to ensure that the story line maintained academic merit as it developed (section 4.3 – 4.7).

### **4.2 A-LEAGUE PLAYER RECRUITMENT PATTERNS**

This section presents the results of the quantitative phase of the investigation and uncovers current patterns surrounding player recruitment and retention of both local and international A-League players. These secondary data results illustrated current patterns of recruitment and retention and were used to develop subsequent questions utilised during the interviews.

#### **4.2.1 A-LEAGUE PLAYER COMPOSITION**

Since the inception of the A-League in 2005, a total of 733 players from 47 different countries have been recruited by the various franchise. Since the A-League has a strict “quota” system surrounding the status of players, only allowing five visa players per squad, (refer section 1.2), it is no surprise that 514 players are deemed as local players (Australian citizens, holders of refugee or special protection visas, or New Zealand/Australian citizens for a New Zealand domiciled franchise) and 211 as visa players. The remaining eight players, represented as

“other”, are a special category as they are New Zealand-born players who were classified as local players while playing for a New Zealand domiciled franchise, but changed classification and became a foreign or “visa” player upon signing for a franchise located on Australian soil.

**Table 4.1 – A-League Players’ Country of Origin**

|                | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Australia      | 483       | 65.9    |
| United Kingdom | 47        | 6.5     |
| New Zealand    | 40        | 5.5     |
| Brazil         | 37        | 5       |
| Netherlands    | 18        | 2.5     |
| Other          | 108       | 14.7    |
| Overall        | 733       | 100     |

Further investigation into the backgrounds of the players (refer Table 4.1) revealed that Australia was the most represented nation, with 483 of the 733 players; Britain was second with 47 players, closely followed by New Zealand with 40 players; Brazilians comprised the fourth highest number of players with 37, while the 18 Dutch players represented the fifth highest nation portrayed in the data. The remaining 108 players that have participated in the league constituted the miscellaneous “Other” group, which is comprised of players from the remaining 39 nationalities. (Note: for a full break down of nationalities refer to Table A1, see appendices.)

**Table 4.2 – A-League Players’ Confederation of Origin**

|          | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| AFC      | 511       | 69.7    |
| UEFA     | 104       | 14.2    |
| CONMEBOL | 52        | 7.1     |
| OFC      | 42        | 5.7     |
| CONCACAF | 13        | 1.8     |
| CAF      | 11        | 1.5     |
| Overall  | 733       | 100     |

Further investigation of the origins of players who have appeared in the A-League uncovered several migration patterns in relation to connecting player recruitment to their home FIFA Confederation (umbrella organisations for the national football associations on each continent). Results in regards to players and their home confederations (refer Table 4.2) showed that 511 players’ countries of origin are from those located inside the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) (Football Federation Australia’s home confederation); 104 players are

from Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA); 52 players are from Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL); 42 players call Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) home; another 13 players are originally from nations located within the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), with the remaining 11 players from countries from Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF).

#### 4.2.2 A-League Player Recruitment Channels

**Table 4.3 – A-League Player Recruitment Channels Season 2005/06 – 2012/13**

|                  | Players Retained | Transfer btw A-League Clubs | Channel In (1) | Channel In (2)    |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Season 2005/2006 | n/a              | n/a                         | State - 75     | UEFA - 47         |
| 2006/2007        | 107              | 15                          | State - 35     | UEFA - 22         |
| 2007/2008        | 91               | 27                          | State - 26     | UEFA - 24         |
| 2008/2009        | 115              | 21                          | State - 26     | UEFA - 20         |
| 2009/2010        | 115              | 37                          | UEFA - 45      | State - 32        |
| 2010/2011        | 158              | 36                          | UEFA - 34      | State - 18        |
| 2011/2012        | 139              | 50                          | UEFA - 30      | Youth League - 13 |
| 2012/2013        | 136              | 44                          | UEFA - 31      | Youth League - 21 |

In respect to A-League player mobility, Table 4.3 presents the main player migration channels that franchises have utilised for player recruitment since the League’s inception through to the end of season 2012/2013. It highlights for each season the number of players that have been retained across the League and the number of players that transfer between A-League franchises, along with the two most heavily employed recruitment channels. It is clear from these results that over the last eight seasons the two most heavily utilised recruitment channels to recruit players into the A-League are either recruiting players previously employed by UEFA based clubs, or the promotion of players through the Australian football pyramid system. Furthermore, in the initial six seasons, promotion through the Australian football pyramid system was predominately from clubs that make up the National State League structure; however this has been surpassed by the promotion of players from National Youth League (NYL) sides over the course of the two most recent seasons. Overall, this data seems to confirm the views expressed by Maguire (1996) that athlete migration in sport occurs between three different levels: (1) between different levels within the same nation; (2) between nations located on the same continent; and (3) between nations located in different

continents and hemispheres. (Note: a full break down of player transfers in and out per season refer to Tables A2 – A9, see appendices.)

#### 4.2.3 A-League Averages – Players, Clubs and Seasons

The following table presents mean results in relation to player ages on league entry, the number of franchises represented and number of seasons employed within the league. Information that relates to average contract length, how long the players are being retained by the franchises, along with differences between age and reputation of the players being recruited, as older players will have more experience than their younger counterparts which will increase their levels of supply and demand.

**Table 4.4 –A-League Players’ Mean Age on Entry**

| Players’ Status             | Mean  | #   |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----|
| Local                       | 22.73 | 514 |
| Foreign                     | 27.69 | 211 |
| Other                       | 22.5  | 8   |
| Players’ Home Confederation | Mean  | #   |
| AFC                         | 22.95 | 511 |
| CAF                         | 26.27 | 11  |
| CONCACAF                    | 25.46 | 13  |
| CONMEBOL                    | 26.71 | 52  |
| OFC                         | 22.9  | 42  |
| UEFA                        | 28.9  | 104 |
| Overall                     | 24.15 | 733 |

The results presented in Table 4.4 indicate that there is a significant difference between the ages of entry when local players, with an average age of 22.73 years on entry, are compared against their foreign counterparts who have an average entry age of 27.69 years. Further investigation uncovered patterns in relations to player’s age of entrance and region of origin (FIFA Confederations), revealing that players from countries located inside the AFC and OFC were on average the youngest players to enter the league, with a mean average of 22.95 years old and 22.9 years. Players entering from Africa and the Americas (North and South) were found to be more towards their mid twenties, with an average age of 26.87 years old, 25.46 years old and 26.71 years old respectively. Players from Europe (UEFA) were shown to be the

oldest on entry with an average age of 28.9 years old, a result which suggests that these players may be tending to migrate to the A-League in the latter stages of their careers, as it has been shown that football players reach their peak during their mid twenties (Snow, 2009). A player's age on league entry also establishes their reputation and the level of supply and demand for their services, a resultant of the accumulation of industry-specific experience over time, because players amassing more industry-specific experience adding more value to a team (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012). Moreover, these researchers also state that players in the later stages of their careers who remain in demand should be seen as a true measure of their quality.

**Table 4.5 – A-League Players' Mean Number of Clubs and Seasons**

| Players' Status             | Clubs |     | Seasons |     |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----|---------|-----|
|                             | Mean  | #   | Mean    | #   |
| Local                       | 1.47  | 514 | 2.93    | 514 |
| Foreign                     | 1.15  | 211 | 1.69    | 211 |
| Other                       | 2.5   | 8   | 4.88    | 8   |
| Players' Home Confederation | Mean  | #   | Mean    | #   |
| AFC                         | 1.46  | 511 | 2.91    | 511 |
| CAF                         | 1.45  | 11  | 1.64    | 11  |
| CONCACAF                    | 1.08  | 13  | 1.77    | 13  |
| CONMEBOL                    | 1.12  | 52  | 1.73    | 52  |
| OFC                         | 1.45  | 42  | 2.5     | 42  |
| UEFA                        | 1.16  | 104 | 1.7     | 104 |
| Overall                     | 1.39  | 733 | 2.59    | 733 |

Similar analysis relating to player status, nationality and the average number of clubs and seasons again suggested that there are significant differences between locals and visa holders. On average, results show that local status players are generally involved with one or two franchises (mean 1.47) and frequent the League for around three seasons (mean 2.93). In comparison the average foreign player usually plays for one club (mean 1.15) and features in the League for just over one and a half seasons (mean 1.69). Further investigation of each category searching for patterns based on the players' country of origin revealed that the average player from the AFC and OFC played for a greater number of franchises, and for more seasons, in the A-league than any other group. On average players from the AFC represented 1.46 franchises and were involved in the league for 2.91 seasons, while players from the OFC

represented 1.45 franchises and were involved for 2.5 seasons. In comparison players from Africa and Europe were shown to frequent the league for the least amount of time, as results indicate that on average players from CAF and UEFA were only involved for 1.64 and 1.7 seasons respectively.

#### 4.2.4 Marquee Players

Since the A-League’s inception, the different franchises have utilised the marquee option (where some players’ salary payments can sit outside the salary cap – refer to section 1.2) to a varying degree. Some franchises have had a marquee player almost constantly, while others have used them sparingly, if at all (refer Table A11, see appendices). Data in regards to marquee players was analysed to uncover patterns surrounding the same three aspects discussed previously in section 4.2.3 (average age, number of clubs and seasons). Other patterns surrounding the players’ nationalities and playing positions were also investigated.

Results indicate that the average marquee player enters the A- League after their 31<sup>st</sup> birthday; plays for one or two franchises, and spend just over a season and a half in the League (refer Table A10, see appendices). Again these results indicate that marquee players tend to be the oldest players entering the league, once more suggesting that they are heading towards the latter stages of their careers. However, other subsequent comparisons revealed that on average these players represented the similar number of franchises as a local player and tend to frequent the League for a similar number of seasons as their locally based counterparts (refer Table A10, see appendices).

**Table 4.6 – Marquee Players and Playing Position**

|                 | Playing Position |          |          |         | Total |
|-----------------|------------------|----------|----------|---------|-------|
|                 | Goal Keeper      | Defender | Midfield | Forward |       |
| Marquee Players | 0                | 3        | 11       | 13      | 27    |

Results from Table 4.6 denote that when A-League franchises recruit marquee players they predominately recruit players who occupy offensive positions (midfield or forwards). In reference to nationality of these 27 players, 13 are deemed to be local players; that is, players who are either citizens of Australia or, in the case of the New Zealand based franchises, New Zealand citizens. Local players also include any player holding a refugee or special protection visa issued by the Australian government (or New Zealand where applicable). The remaining 14

marquee players are deemed to be foreign visa imports under the A-League’s player quota regulations (refer section 1.2). Further analysis of these foreign signings revealed that six of these players share a South American background (CONMEBOL), while another six came from countries located in Europe (UEFA).

#### 4.2.5 Foreign Players

The following table presents results in relation to a player’s playing position and their FIFA confederation of origin.

**Table 4.7 – Player Status, Home Confederation and Playing Position of A-League Players**

|                  |              | Players’ Home Confederation |     |          |          |     |      | Total |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-----|----------|----------|-----|------|-------|
|                  |              | AFC                         | CAF | CONCACAF | CONMEBOL | OFC | UEFA |       |
| Player Status    | Local        | 483                         | 0   | 0        | 0        | 31  | 0    | 514   |
|                  | Foreign      | 27                          | 11  | 13       | 52       | 4   | 104  | 211   |
|                  | Other        | 1                           | 0   | 0        | 0        | 7   | 0    | 8     |
| Total            |              | 511                         | 11  | 12       | 52       | 42  | 104  | 733   |
| Playing Position | Goal Keepers | 65                          | 0   | 0        | 0        | 5   | 2    | 72    |
|                  | Defenders    | 139                         | 4   | 0        | 7        | 14  | 29   | 193   |
|                  | Midfielders  | 191                         | 3   | 7        | 25       | 11  | 35   | 272   |
|                  | Forwards     | 116                         | 4   | 6        | 20       | 12  | 38   | 196   |
| Total            |              | 511                         | 11  | 12       | 52       | 42  | 104  | 733   |

Results in relation to the acquisition of foreign visa players (non-marquee) appear to indicate a similar pattern of recruitment in comparison to that of their marquee counterparts, as once again it seems that a substantial amount of these players originated from either European (UEFA, 104) or South American (CONMEBOL, 52) Football Confederations (refer Table 4.7). These are the same two continents that Magee and Sugden (2002) name as being the two most influential in the global diffusion of world football.

Further analysis was conducted in order to uncover patterns associated with players’ nationality (home FIFA Confederation) and their playing positions. In reference to players recruited from Europe, there appears to be no set association between nationality and position as it was revealed that there is a relatively even spread of defenders (29), midfielders

(35) and forwards (38). However, this is certainly not the case for players with a South American background, as it appears that the majority of players recruited from these markets are attacking-minded players in offensive positions (25 midfielders and 20 forwards but only 7 defenders).

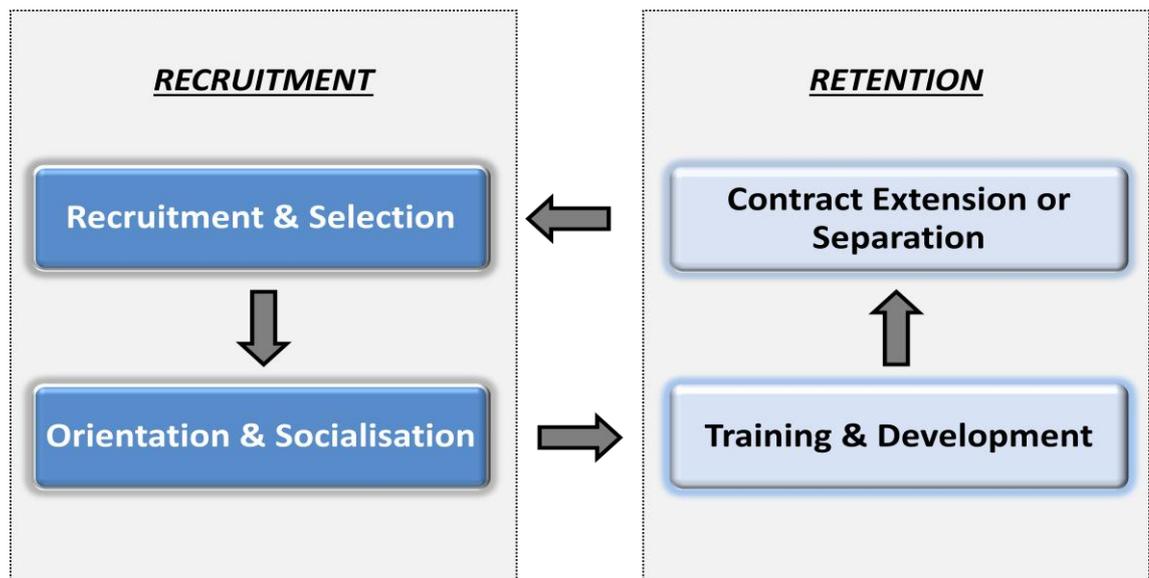
### **4.3 A-LEAGUE SPECIFIC HRM MODEL**

This research project utilised an abductive research approach. Therefore, information supplied by the eight respondents was used to modify Hoyer et al's (2012) traditional HRM framework (refer section 2.1.1) to produce a model which best explains the HRM practices A-League football franchises use to recruit and then retain members of their playing department. Moreover, as a theoretical (deductive) coding approach was utilised, the A-League football HRM model was developed by categorising this information into a series of pre-determined themes.

Overall, it was found that A-League HRM processes mainly focused on the four following aspects:

- i. Recruitment and Selection
- ii. Orientation and Socialisation
- iii. Training and Development
- iv. Contract Extension and Separation

These four aspects can be categorised further into two distinct groups, those in relation to recruitment and those relating to retention (as demonstrated in Figure 4.1). The Recruitment and Selection stage can be coupled together with Orientation and Socialisation to be categorised as "Recruitment", due to the fact that these are the processes A-League franchises use to identify, recruit and then socialise new players into their football organisations. Previous research completed by Bradbury and Forsyth (2012) also influenced the formation of this category, as their research offered a rare, possibly unique, comparison of the standard HRM process and the sports recruitment process. The two remaining themes have been labelled "Retention" as they represent the franchises main areas of focus in relation to developing and retaining their key football employees.



**Figure 4.1 - The A-League Specific Human Resource Model**

The balance of this chapter will now focus on each individual aspect of this identified “A-League specific” HRM framework, emphasising the voices of the respondents to present the particulars of their stories.

#### **4.4 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION**

The recruitment and selection method an A-league franchise employs is of significant importance, as the calibre of players a sporting team has at its disposal directly affects their performance and their ability to beat other competing teams. In turn higher success rates attract more spectators, fans and revenue to reinvest in new playing talent (Olson & Schwab, 2000).

The recruiting club’s position in world football also plays a determining role on how the recruitment processes unfolds. Both McGovern (2000) and Darby et al (2007) agree that clubs located at the core of the football world are able to flex their financial muscle and dictate how the trade of football labour is conducted, as the wealthiest clubs can essentially buy their way to success (McGovern, 2000). This concept infers that wealthy football clubs with deep pockets often utilise player recruitment initiatives that simply revolve around the opening of their cheque books; the Chelsea Football Club in the English Premier League is a prime example, particular following the Roman Abramovich’s takeover of the club. David, one of this study’s respondents, seems to agree with this concept, judging by his comment that “anyone with a cheque book can recruit a player” (personal communication, July 29, 2013).

However, this assumption does not seem to bear any relation to the actual situation in the A-league, as not only is each franchise's financial strength severely limited by the league's competitive balance measures (the salary cap), but also from its position on the periphery of world football. This notion is supported by David, a current CEO, who asserted that "the nature of the competition and the environment it operates within challenges all franchises to complete deals that satisfy the needs of all parties involved" (personal communication, July 29, 2013). John, a former CEO of another franchise, also advised that "player recruitment was not strictly focused on performance qualities of a player", insisting it is also critical to "recruit players who are capable of facilitating quality relationships within the community to generate support" (personal communication, July 26, 2013). Nevertheless, the overriding obligation provided by all three participating CEOs was to recruit the highest quality of player available given the budgetary requirements. Therefore the focus of this section is to investigate the recruitment and selection procedures A-League franchises employ when identifying, recruiting, and selecting new talent during player portfolio restructuring. The initial discussion will centre on recruitment decisions relating to player status. A subsequent discussion will then focus on identifying a number of frequently used recruitment channels. This section will then conclude with a final discussion centred on methods of selection.

#### **4.4.1 The A-League Recruitment Decision – Local, Foreign or Marquee Players**

One of the first decisions that an A-league franchise must make is regarding the type of player (local, foreign, or marquee) they are looking to recruit, especially given the League's visa player regulations (refer section 1.2). This section will discuss each of these different player statuses and information surrounding recruitment decisions.

##### **4.4.1.1 Recruitment of Local Players**

The regulations surrounding the League naturally leads to players classified as "local" being the most commonly recruited (refer Table 4.4; 514 of the 733 players were locals), but after speaking to the three CEOs it appears that local players can be divided into two distinct categories, based on the regional nature of Australia's population disbursement. The first category can be classified as "local-locals" and refers to those players who are representing franchises located in their home city or state (or a New Zealand domiciled club for New Zealand players). The second category consists of players who are classified as "out of town-locals", referring to local players who have migrated across city or state borders to represent a franchise located outside their home territories (or Australians moving across the Tasman).

Discussions with each CEO revealed that the different franchises each approach local player recruitment from different angles. Marcus, the inaugural CEO of a foundation franchise, reported that after receiving their license to participate in the League their first recruitment initiative involved engaging in conversations with national team players. Scouting workshops conducted across local leagues then quickly followed. Their player recruitment strategy for that initial season focused heavily on having a real local flavour by either enticing current Internationals (national team) players abroad back home with the lure of professional football in their own backyard, or promoting players located within the local competitions. Thereafter, attention shifted onto recruiting players to fill the various positions that remained vacant from other Australian based football markets, before opening it up to searches further afield. In addition he also stated that during his time involved at the franchise their future vision strongly centred on providing “locally based players with a pathway into professional football” (personal communication, July 18, 2013).

Another respondent outlined a similar method of recruitment, with their initial player search also focused on acquiring local talent; however they utilised a different approach. Their first recruitment task consisted of “developing a hit-list” (personal communication, July 26, 2013) of local players who were coming off contract at other franchises; these players were then contacted to initiate recruitment discussions. Also during the same period this new franchise quickly established links with local state league clubs to facilitate discussions and identify local players who had the potential to step up to compete at the higher level. Again this franchise had a clear philosophy about recruiting local regional talent as it had being identified as a way this new franchise could foster local community engagement.

The third CEO, David, confirmed that his franchise took a different approach when recruiting local players from its own region. He acknowledged that they had their own player development system to foster the development of local talent but they did not solely rely on it. His franchise looked to recruit locally, especially in relation to the required under-20 player allocation contracts, but insisted “that the state named on a player’s birth certificate did not give them any preferential treatment” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). He then reported that their overall recruitment strategy revolved first and foremost around constructing a player portfolio of “the highest order” (personal communication, July 29, 2013) without any real consideration to players backgrounds. Overall, this franchise utilised a more strategic approach when approaching local players which involved tapping into the networks of their vastly experienced football operations manager.

#### 4.4.1.2 Recruitment of Foreign Players

The overall results in relation to the acquisition of foreign players (non-marquee) seemingly indicates that player recruitment systems for foreign imports focus on players whose country of origin can be traced back to nations located in either European (UEFA) or South American (CONMEBOL) Football Confederations (refer Table 4.2). A number of underlying reasons have been presented by the respondents as to why this has occurred, which provides the main point of discussion for this segment.

One of the first responses presented by the participants centred on the influence of people involved at the management level of the game, most notably members of the franchises' coaching staff, and how their own backgrounds influenced the markets they utilised for player recruitment. One player agent believed that a leading reason why so many British based players had been recruited was due to the fact "that a prominent number of the English coaches were involved in the league during the early years" (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013). This notion was supported by former CEO Marcus, who reported that one of the first things his franchise did was to send their assistant coach over to the United Kingdom, as "he was from there and had a whole array of contacts throughout the British Football Leagues" (personal communication, July 18, 2013). Furthermore, the response provided by another CEO provides a further explanation of how a coach's nationality influences the players on a franchise's books:

It's going to depend on who is coaching and where the recruiting manager is looking, and it also depends on how the club wants to play (style)...We had a Dutch manager and had a number of Dutch players, so it does depend on where your coach comes from. I dare say we will have a Spanish influence now. (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013)

Another influential player agent also agreed with the sentiment that a coach's nationality influences the players they signed, but in regards to the Dutch influence he also offered the following perspective of his own, that recently "the FFA technical direction and its Dutch influence... has lead to Dutch players, along with Patrick Zwanswijk's (a Dutch player who featured in the A-League for three years before retiring at the end of the 2012-13 season) success" (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

This link between a coach's nationality and player recruitment is also supported by past academic research, such as McGovern (2002) who concluded that a manager's national origin was often interlinked with the leagues and countries from where he recruited new players. His

results showed that within the realms of English football leagues a Scottish manager was almost twice as likely to recruit Scottish players more than his English counterpart.

Another school of thought was presented by two particular agents as to why the League enticed a large number of British players, suggesting that it was due to cultural links and traditions that were shared between the two regions. One agent, Matthew, related it back to the fact “that Australia traditionally has been an Anglo-Saxon country...as well as the popularity of English football, especially the English Premier League” (personal communication, July 31, 2013). Zachary, another player agent, shared a similar opinion that the A-League has become quite attractive to players from the United Kingdom because of the “similarities in culture” (personal communication, August 2, 2013). In his view players have found it easier to settle in Australia with a shared language and culture rather than other locations like China. Once again this perception is supported by McGovern (2002) as he has deemed that Britain’s political and colonial past plays an influential role on player migration pathways between leagues in the United Kingdom and those in Australia. As the countries share similar “political jurisdiction and language” (p.32), it is easier for players to migrate between the two, while also reducing many of the risks associated with player settlement.

Andrew, another agent who has experience in recruiting players from South American markets, believed that the performances of previously recruited players, especially of Brazilians, also played a significant role. He represented a particular player in the final stages of the old National Soccer League (NSL) and the initial years of the A-League who was awarded player of the year season 2001/2002, and who then polled in the top five for the same award for a number of consecutive seasons. Andrew believes that this player’s performances, coupled with performances of another Brazilian pioneer (Agenor Muniz) who played for Adelaide City during the early 1980s, had caused people to stand up and take notice, which led to other Brazilian players being recruited in subsequent seasons. This assertion aligns well with Maguire’s (1996) “pioneers” and Magee and Sugden’s (2002) “ambitionist” categories in their typology of sports labour migration.

Aspects related to specific locations and player attributes was another consensus provided by many of the respondents, as comments provided by both the CEOs and the player agents indicated that the franchises generally look to recruit experience proven players to fulfil one of two main duties; either to provide them with natural attacking flair (also helping to attract fans), or to develop defensive stability. Therefore, it was no great surprise to the respondents that the markets of Europe and South America were the two most utilised channels to recruit foreign imports. In regards to South American players, both CEOs and player agents alike

reported that these players are well renowned for their creative attacking ability. This is a reason why many A-League franchises will turn to this market, especially Brazil, when looking to recruit this type of player. Similarly, comments again provided by one CEO and player agent also showed that franchises tend to rely on experienced, solid defenders. When these players cannot be sourced from local clubs, markets located in Europe are the franchises' first port of call, with both naming English, Italian and Dutch leagues as those recognised for possessing the strong, hard working defenders.

This same CEO further revealed that at times foreign players are also recruited to help develop and foster community engagement, a responsibility not solely placed on the shoulders of local players. He outlined that during his tenure with an A-League franchise they had specifically targeted recruiting a Chinese player because it was recognised a "large Chinese community was located within the local population" (personal communication, July 18, 2013). Their idea was by recruiting a player with shared cultural heritage it would help the franchises engage with this section of society, translating into "fans from this community entering the venue on match day" (personal communication, July 18, 2013).

Overall, the comments provided by the interview participants in relation to the recruitment of foreign players align agreeably with previous academic research completed in relation to player migration in football. The comments indicate that A-League franchises are more willing to recruit visa players from countries where they have previous relationships or have experienced previous success. Therefore, if a franchise signs a player from Brazil or the Netherlands who has a positive impact on the League, then other players from that location have a tendency to be viewed as more attractive commodities. This viewpoint often leads to recruitment relationships developing between the franchises and particular countries leading to repeat transactions (Maguire, 2011a; M. Taylor, 2006).

#### **4.4.1.3 Recruitment of Marquee Players**

Since the League's inception, in an effort to assist the franchise's ability to attract so-called "big name" signings, each franchise has been allowed to sign designated marquee players whose salary is excluded from the cap. The rationale for the A-League allowing for the recruitment of these players, according to all the respondents, has always been to increase the profile of the game in Australia, in turn attracting more spectators into the stadiums on match day. This concept is supported by previous research, with both Maguire (1996) and Stead and Maguire (1998) arguing that many foreign star players are recruited in order to lift the league's image, reputation, and its financial income through an increase in match day and sponsorship revenue, along with media attention.

Results uncovered during the quantitative part of the study revealed that most A-League franchises predominately recruit players who occupy offensive positions (midfielders and forwards) as their marquee signings (refer Table 4.6). The participants were asked during the interview phase to provide their own responses and rationale as to why they believe that this trend has developed. John, a former CEO, believed that from his experiences that “it was the exciting attacking players that the fans wanted to come and watch, as opposed to defensively minded players” (personal communication, July 26, 2013). This perception was further emphasised by Marcus, another former CEO, who went a step further in replying that from his perspective “there was no such thing as a defensive marquee player, as they just do not exist” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). Andrew, a player agent, also agreed that the demand has always been for the attacking, entertaining style of players. However, he also insisted that “if someone has marketability then there will always be an interest no matter what their position” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). This notion may have some truth behind it, as two of the three defensive marquees were Australian national team players, both with more than a decade’s experience playing in European Football leagues, and had played an integral part of Australia 2006 FIFA World Cup Finals campaign.

Marcus further insisted that a franchise should only spend significant amounts of money on recruiting a marquee player if they are going to satisfy at least one of the two following scenarios: firstly, that “the player is actually going to make a tremendous contribution to the performance to the team on match day” (personal communication, July 18, 2013); or secondly that “their involvement will entice spectators to enter the stadium on match day or buy merchandise” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). A Sentiment also shared by David, who also agreed that a number of recent acquisitions (marquee players) had satisfied either one or both of these scenarios, increasing the profile of the league. However, despite this he still “had a philosophical issue with them...not based on their standard of play but around equalisation and ensuring a competitive balanced remained” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). Furthermore he also commented:

A division one and division two mentality was beginning to emerge due to the fact that some franchises were in a position where they could virtually could recruit a marquee signing year in year out... for other franchises the recruitment of these types of players is just unfeasible because of financial limitations.  
(David, personal communication, July 29, 2013)

He then further stipulated that the franchises that do not have high profile International marquee players are increasingly being put under pressure by supporter groups to rectify the

situation, explaining how when “their fans look around the league and see a Melbourne franchise with one, a Sydney franchise with one, they ask the question where is ours, why cannot we have one?” (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013). The situation is further complicated by the fact that even though his franchise actually had an Australian marquee player at the time, a perception has developed in the league where fans do not see them as “true marquee” (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013) signings because they are locally based players.

#### **4.4.2 Limitation Factors Associated With Player Recruitment**

Information provided by both CEOs and player agents alike indicated that the financial limitations imposed on the League by both its operation systems and position in world football, along with difficult player transfer markets, all acted as restraining mechanisms that effectively limited the players which A-League franchises can target for recruitment.

The fundamental decision to employ a salary cap to control franchises’ spending is an almost unique tactic in the football world. One particular player agent cited that from his knowledge “the A-League and Major League Soccer in the United States are the only two leagues in world football” (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013) to apply such a measure. This agent then went on to stipulate that from experience he believed that the cap only served to act as a stumbling block during contract negotiations due to the fact “that Australia is perceived to be a moderately wealthy country and many foreign players fail to understand why significantly larger and more lucrative financial packages cannot be negotiated” (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013). Furthermore, he went on to outline that often the only way this limitation can be resolved is to work really hard to sell the concept of the League to the player (i.e. getting them to buy into the vision), a task which he insists is not easy and effectively limits the franchises’ ability to recruit premium quality players in significant numbers.

Another main driver which several respondents suggested was to blame for severely restricting all A-league franchises’ ability to recruit was the League’s positioning in world football. In relation to this impediment, Andrew proposed that when A-League franchises were recruiting a foreign player they looked to identify someone that would have “marketability and can put bums on seats” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). However, he insisted that the trouble with this ploy was the Australian franchises were “never going to match European clubs on salary for a player under 30 unless they are on the outer” (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013). This is a perspective which is consistent with football’s specific world system theory that demonstrates how clubs located at the core of world football

are able to offer significantly higher salaries than clubs located in countries towards the periphery (Darby et al., 2007; McGovern, 2002).

John also agreed that budgetary implications were a main driver restricting the ability of A-League franchises to compete for the signature of foreign players, even though marquee salary payments can sit outside the cap. He stated that “the money you can pay them is only a pittance compared to what they can potentially earn overseas” (personal communication, July 26, 2013) and that through dealings with other franchises’ CEOs and Chairmen he was aware that many franchises “were bleeding \$2-3 million per season and that’s just unsustainable for owners” (John, personal communication, July 26, 2013). John then went a step further by proposing that differences in social factors also limited the ability of the A-League’s own franchises to compete against each other, by insisting that it would be much easier to “sell the lifestyle of Sydney” (personal communication, July 26, 2013) to a foreign player in comparison to some of the League’s more regional locations. Furthermore, he went on to say that although the former England international that his franchise was able to recruit in their first season was on “a pretty good deal” he was still “surprised” that the striker had agreed to sign with the club because “Townsville is a small community, and he and his wife were used to the highlife in London” (John, personal communication, July 26, 2013).

The final constraining factor that two specific player agents identified as impinging on the ability of A-League franchises to recruit talented foreigners revolved around certain issues encountered while dealing with particularly difficult markets, especially some of those located in South America. One agent even went as far as labelling Argentina and Uruguay as problem markets and from his experience a number of the Australian franchises had grown “tired of dealing with them due to the shenanigans that go on with South American agents and clubs” (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013). This stance was further supported by comments provided by another agent, referring to an instance which transpired while he was trying to complete a deal between an Argentinean player and A-league franchise prior to the start of the 2013/2014 season:

I was working on a player, which we pretty much had over the line with an A-League club two weeks ago, an Argentinean who did some pretty stupid thing after agreeing to a deal... I think he was put under a lot of pressure from his agent and current club to accept another offer in Greece even though he had agreed to come across. (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013)

This comment provides further evidence of the A-League's relative position in world football; it is doubtful that this would happen the other way around, where a player would make a verbal agreement with a Greek club and then sign with an A-League franchise.

#### **4.4.3 A-League Player Mobility and Migration Channels**

One of the first tasks completed by this study was an investigation into A-League player mobility to identify the main migration channels utilised by various franchises within the League during player recruitment processes, from its inaugural season in 2005/2006 through to the end of the 2012/2013 season. Overall results suggest that the two most heavily utilised channels appear to be recruiting players from European based clubs and the promotion of local players through the Australian football pyramid system (state league systems season 1-6, promotion from NYL sides season 7-8) (refer Table 4.3). These findings align with Maguire's (1996) view that athletic migration in sport occurs at three different stages: (1) between different levels within the same nation; (2) between nations located on the same continent; and (3) between nations located in different continents and hemispheres. Moreover, the next two segments express the opinion of the respondents as to why they feel these two channels have emerged as the most prominent.

##### **4.4.3.1 Recruitment from European Based Clubs**

In relation to the recruitment of players from European based clubs, the clear overall perception provided by majority of the respondents was that often many of the players who have spent the majority of their prime years frequenting the leagues of Europe search and migrate to lower standard leagues in a bid to extend their careers. This is a point which former CEO John illustrated by commenting that "from my experience many foreign players are nearing the ends of their careers and are only looking to extend them by one or two seasons...that was certainly the case when we signed Player X (a notable former European international)" (personal communication, July 26, 2013). This comment also supports previously present evidence showing that the foreign players are involved in an average of only one and a half seasons (refer to Table 4.5).

John's comments are further supported by remarks provided by another two respondents. Marcus also specifies that many European-based footballers view the A-League as an opportunity to migrate to a league with a "reduced playing standard, without the loss of ego from dropping down the divisions of their own league systems" (personal communication, July 18, 2013). Player agent Andrew also agrees with this notion, as he too indicated his belief that many players migrated to the A-League because they can drop down a playing level without

the associated loss of status value, while still being a major player in the League. Andrew cited Del Piero's impact on the A-League in the 2012-13 season as a recent example. Furthermore, he went on to suggest another two theories relating to the recruitment of European players at the twilight of their careers. The first was an idea that once a player enters their 30s their earning potential in Europe begins to wane and decrease to a point where they "start thinking I would like a different experience...not earning as much in Europe and they will start looking at other markets including Australia" (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013). His second theory was that the recent acquisition of a few specific high-calibre "big name" players "has helped attracted other players", in his personal opinion (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013).

The general perception that players towards the twilight end of their careers look to migrate to leagues of a lesser standard is also supported by previously completed academic research, particularly that of Maguire (1996). This same researcher also believes that such a move allows many of these players the chance of being a leading player in the league once again, "helping to rekindle memories of their glory days" (Maguire, 1996, p. 348).

#### **4.4.3.2 Promotion through the Australian Football Pyramid**

The recruitment and promotion of players through the Australian Football Pyramid has been one of the two most prominently used recruitment channels since the inception of the A-League. It is a process which initially focused on players located in the individual state league structures but then shifted onto NYL setups in more recent seasons (refer Table 4.3). This shift, according to two of the CEOs interviewed, demonstrates the success of the FFA's long term plans to establish the NYL as a natural development pathway allowing young local players to directly enter the A-League. One of the player agents interviewed supports this view, but he also adds a number of his own perspectives. Firstly, he insists that "many A-League coaches have realised that promoting players from NYL teams is a better option for injury replacement players than state league counterparts" (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013), because the NYL season runs in conjunction with the A-League (October – March). Therefore, these players can walk in match-fit as opposed to state league players who are out of season, as the state league season runs from March to April. Secondly, he asserted that it is a lot harder for older players to adapt to the intensity of the A-League when compared to their younger equivalents. Andrew also asserted that the franchises seemed more willing to invest time and energy into NYL players "as an investment or commodity as they have more time to work, develop and mould these players to how they want them" (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013).

However, another player agent held a contrasting view and was slightly more sceptical about the impact of the NYL, as from his perspective he would want to “wait a couple more years before judging the success of the NYL as a development pathway” (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013). Overall, he was of the opinion that the standard of the new youth league was not that great, apart from a couple of teams, and that there was only a handful of outstanding players, further suggesting that there were “better players hanging around the state leagues than coming through the NYL” (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

Again the perspective presented in this segment aligns with previous research conducted on player recruitment. The decisions that franchises have to make about developing or obtaining emerging local talent corresponds fittingly with the two choices Sutherland (1986) declared that football clubs face when deciding to recruit new employees: that is, to either recruit from external labour markets (state leagues) or develop them internally (NYL setups). Subsequently, the comments surrounding investment and development of youth players as commodities align with sentiments expressed by Lechner and Gudmundsson (2012) who believe that when players graduate through clubs’ youth development structures they become organisational specific resources, due to the fact that club specific playing structures and tactics are ingrained throughout their development. Also, these players can be integrated into the club’s first team set up at no cost or can be transferred to other clubs to generate additional revenue streams.

#### **4.4.4 A-League Player Identification and Recruitment Methods**

Previous research shows that professional sporting organisations share very similar HR characteristics to those on display in a wider business context (Madura, 1982; Olson & Schwab, 2000; Wright et al., 1995), so the same overriding objectives should apply during periods of employee recruitment. Therefore, A-League football franchises should guarantee that effective player recruitment processes are employed by identifying a large pool of potential recruits, because according to Buse (2009) it is the only way effective personnel selection can be accomplished. Therefore, this section focuses on isolating the methods A-League franchises use to identify and recruit new recruits.

##### **4.4.4.1 Players Agents**

It became apparent from the discussion with the player agents that the role which they fulfil is dependent on the role they are enlisted to perform. On some occasions they are purely employed in an HR consultancy role with the specific task of finding an out-of-contract player a new home. This was the way Andrew had structured his business, as he stated he “had moved

away from trying to represent players and having players on his books”, further declaring that current business operating structure purely involved him “brokering deals” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). On other occasions they develop longer term relationships with their clients by providing a full complement of player management services. This was the way Simon’s business was structured as he offered a full array of services (creating additional commercial opportunities, ongoing career development and arranging access to other specialised service e.g. financial planners). This is why Simon prefers the term “player manager” as opposed to player agent, because he manages their careers, rather than just “brokering a deal” (personal communication, August 1, 2013). Another core aspect of the player agents’ business surrounded the importance of establishing network relationships with partner agents/agencies in other core markets of the football industry. A large amount of their business is developed via these contacts, especially in regards to foreign imports.

Another line of inquiry gathered information to determine whether it is the franchise or the agent which assumes the lead role during player recruitment transactions where both parties are involved. From the resulting discussion with the three CEOs and the four player agents, the unanimous consensus was that it could be led by either party. On some occasions the franchises were seen to be proactive in initiating the first approach, while on others it was definitely driven by the player agents. This assertion is eloquently summed up by the comments provided by John, who stated that when they were recruiting players for their inaugural season there “were definitely times when we went out directly targeted particular player whom we wanted” (personal communication, July 26, 2013) but in others occasions “players were also recruited via agents knocking on our door to promote players whom they represented” (personal communication, July 26, 2013). Subsequently, Andrew also presented his own thoughts as to why either could assume the lead role. He stated that it was because “the agents are always looking to do business and the franchises are always on the lookout for new players” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). Moreover, further comments provided by these same two respondents seem to imply that a player’s status value does not change the situation; even when high profile foreign players are recruited either party can be responsible for leading the approach. As former CEO John stated, “certainly Player X (a former European International) was approached by us... our head coach had a previous relationship with him and his agent from his own playing days” (personal communication, July 26, 2013). Oppositely, Andrew revealed that he received “a call last year to inform me that Inzaghi (a former Italian International) was available as he was coming off contract with A.C. Milan and was looking for an experience overseas, so I approached all the clubs” (personal communication, August 14, 2013).

Even though the overall evidence presented stipulates that either party can assume the lead role, when the player agents were pressed in stating whether one party led the process more often than the other from their own experience, all the agents habitually agreed that it was more predominately agent-led. One particular agent stated that from his perspective “it was a 70/30 split favouring the agents” (personal communication, July 31, 2013), which often hinged on the amount of time a franchise had to do its own homework. The indication is that the franchises became more proactive in approaching the agents when time is limited, especially during the final phases of pre-season training and during the short January registration period (transfer window), two occasions where time is at a premium.

Further information provided by the respondents also outlined that because each A-League franchise operates in its own distinct manner there was no single common approach utilised when the process is franchise driven, as the process appears to be very situational. However, two examples that were provided by the player agents do give some situational context of how the process evolves when franchises take the lead. The first situation revolves around franchises that are looking to recruit players with certain pedigrees and specific requirements. This process, as explained by a couple of the agents, usually began when franchises contacted agents with whom they had developed on-going relationships, to provide them with a specific brief about the type of player they were looking to recruit. The agents would then go off and conduct their own search and present the franchises with their player recommendations. The second situation appeared to materialise itself when a franchise was looking to off-load a player that was surplus to requirements. As one prominent high profile agent revealed:

Sometimes I get approached by clubs who say we have a player on our books who won't feature prominently in the future and we would like him to move on. With his permission [the player] we are speaking to one or two player agents who might be able to assist and move that player onto another market. (Simon, personal communication, August 1, 2013)

Again it also appears to be very situation-specific when the process is agent led, as once more no one single common approach was identified. At times situations would transpire where an agent would obtain information about a player's availability through their own network of contacts (as outlined previously by Andrew regarding the availability of the former A.C. Milan player). The agent would then start actively promoting this player's credentials to all the franchises. However, it was generally only a process associated with high profile foreigners. On other occasions agents utilised contacts and relationships they had formed with employees located at specific franchises, or by word of mouth, to ascertain any playing positions that

specific franchises were having trouble filling with suitable recruits. The player agents would conduct their own searches and recommend to the franchise players whom they felt would solve their recruitment problem. Overall, every agent interviewed preferred to operate via a targeted approach rather than by sending out a large number of unsolicited applications in the form of “highlights” DVDs and playing resumes. The implication is that this approach was ineffective, as it only served to bombard the franchises with a number of unsuitable options. Subsequently, the agents also believed that this approach had the potential to alienate themselves from the franchises through a reduction in credibility.

Irrespective of who initiated the approach, the processes employed by the agent to conduct their search remained the same. After acquiring the player requirements, the first procedure utilised by majority of the agents was to try and match the requirements with a player they already had on their books. If this process did not unearth suitable candidates (or if, as one of the agents outlined, his business structure did not involve having contractual agreements and players on his books, due to loyalty issues), the next step involved contacting their partnership agencies located in other foreign markets to conduct searches on players located in their databases. Once suitable candidates had been identified the agent would do their own due diligence on that player’s background by watching match footage, speaking to the player directly and on occasion gaining personal references. Once they were assured that the player they were proposing was the right player they then created a dossier containing their player biography and match footage, which was presented to the franchise to review. If that player then captured the franchise’s interest they would then be contacted (via the agent) and discussion would begin, until the player was either offered a contract or a trial, or interest dissolved. Furthermore, all the agents made it abundantly clear that when providing the franchises with player options they favoured quality over quantity, as the agents would only present options to the franchises if they sincerely believed they had uncovered a player who satisfied all aspects of the player requirements set by the franchise.

Finally, the information provided by the respondents revealed that the main points of contact that the agent liaised with at the franchise varied between the franchises. This is partly because each franchise employs different staffing systems, and is partly determined by the strength of the network relationship between the two parties and the status of the player being proposed. Further information supplied by the agents indicated that on some occasions this responsibility was firmly allocated to staff members located in the football department of each franchise (head coach or football operations manager), while on other occasions it was placed at the feet of the CEO or Chairman. One agent even further insisted that at times the

franchise owners themselves would become involved, especially in situations involving marquee players.

#### **4.4.4.2 Scouting Networks**

The evidence presented by the participants suggests that scouting networks employed by A-League franchises are considerably less formalised and structured in comparison with procedures employed by clubs in higher profile leagues abroad. What's more, it also appears that the level of formality, the size and the reliance placed on these networks also significantly differs between each A-League franchise. The general consensus was that all franchises continually monitor the happenings of state league football, especially the Victorian Premier League, a league which one particular agent labels as the "highest level of competition outside the A-League" (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013), which explains why there are always people from the different franchises running their eyes over the players involved in these games. The most common approach franchises utilise in scouting these leagues revolves around the clubs sending out employees to watch games and track players, with the football operation managers and coaching staff members usually being tasked with this responsibility. Moreover, it was also reported that the two or three more prominent franchises were able to view more matches due to the fact that they had significantly larger football departments. The information provided by the participating CEOs and player agents appears to suggest that the majority of the franchises have not invested in establishing formal scouting networks in overseas based markets in a paid capacity, preferring instead to rely on recommendations provided by trusted associates.

Furthermore, it appears that technology is increasingly playing a greater role in identifying potential recruits, as two A-League franchises were acknowledged as being subscribers to a web-based scouting platform known as "Wyscout". This scouting platform allows football clubs (including some of the biggest clubs in world football), national associations and player agencies to review matches, track and share information regarding players from all parts of the globe. In addition, this platform also conducts conferences in different locations at different points of the year (in relation to seasons) to facilitate business by creating an international meeting place for football directors, player agencies and scouts.

#### **4.4.4.3 Coach Networks**

Another common theme emerging from the discussions with the A-League franchises was the heavy reliance placed on the informal social relationship networks of their coaching staff as a recruitment channel. Numerous examples were presented where these networks had been

tapped into to facilitate player recruitment. Furthermore, a previously provided example has already highlighted how a relationship connection between a head coach and a player was responsible for the recruitment of a marquee player (Player X) at one of the specific franchises (refer section 4.4.4.1) and it appears that a number of other players have also been recruited in a similar fashion. In the very same discussion John revealed that his franchise recruited another visa player in a similar fashion. However, this time the only difference was that the relationship was between the assistant coach and the player, as they were former colleagues from the coach's own playing days in Europe.

A number of the foreign coaches in the A-League have been shown to utilise network relationships within their home countries to identify, target and recruit players (refer section 4.4.1.2). Additional information provided by two of the CEOs indicates that these foreign managers also utilised their own personal contacts in their homeland to develop informal scouting networks to facilitate player recommendations. Both CEOs presented examples of how members of their coaching staff were continually liaising with their own direct contacts back in Britain to gain advice about certain players. These network contacts consisted of people with whom they had built relationships through their involvement in the game and consisted of previous colleagues (players or coaches) or other related individuals whom they had forged relationships with while employed at previous clubs. Furthermore, John also inferred that the network relationships developed by coaches transferred with them when they changed employers, and their particular coach had utilised network contacts developed at a previous A-League franchise to recruit players during their inaugural season. These findings present a similar picture to Elliott & Maguire (2008) who deemed that network contacts of foreign ice hockey coaches are responsible for facilitating player recruitment, particularly those migrating across the Atlantic from North America to the United Kingdom. Another similarity also emerges between these two studies, that in both cases a large percentage of the coaches originate from countries located at the core of their sporting world and have subsequently migrated to leagues located on the periphery, from where they then proceeded to recruit a number of their own countrymen (Darby et al., 2007; McGovern, 2000).

#### **4.4.4.4 Player Networks**

Player networks are another recruitment channel used by different franchises to identify and recruit players, a process which involves tapping into the social networks of the players who are already under contract at the respective franchises. Additionally, this player recruitment strategy should be looked upon in the same light as any other employee referral scheme operating in the wider business environment (Haesli & Boxall, 2005; Maxwell, 2004).

The discussion with each CEO revealed to what extent each of the franchises they represented had utilised this recruitment channel. Marcus revealed that it was a well used practice, especially when recruiting the playing squad for their inaugural season. On this occasion the process revolved around their inaugural captain, a prominent local player who had spent a number of seasons playing in England. This franchise then utilised the network connections this player had developed during his time aboard to recruit other players, all of whom had been previous team mates at a various stages of his career. This CEO also revealed that many of the players recruited via this method had also “ditched their agents prior to signing” (Marcus, personal communication, July 18, 2013). This presents another similarity to Elliott and Maguire’s (2008) study, which also indicated that players recruited via this method often negate the use of their agents.

John indicated that although from his experience the players are never short “in offering their advice” (personal communication, July 26, 2013) on the type of players their franchise should be signing, it was not a recruitment channel that they had considered utilising. Therefore, his franchise had “never really made it a point to ask players to tell us who they thought we should buy” (personal communication, July 26, 2013). David also reported a similar response, as he held the perspective that “it has happened for as long as sport has been played” (personal communication, July 29, 2013), but during his three year involvement with the franchise it was not a channel they had utilised significantly. Moreover, two player agents also expressed their own view in relation to this matter. Matthew believed through his own experience that “it was an avenue frequently used by A-League franchises when recruiting players for their NYL squads” (personal communication, July 31, 2013) and reported that “first and second year players in the senior team will often suggest players to the youth team coaches” (personal communication, July 31, 2013). However, Andrew had a completely different view point and insisted that “in some cases they [player agents] will get their players to do the work for them and promote players to their current club” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). He went on to outline a recent specific transfer which he knew for certain had transpired via this method.

#### **4.4.4.5 Club Networks**

Just as has been the case with players’ and coaches’ relationship networks, the network relationships that A-League franchises have developed with other clubs, both at home and abroad, represent another recruitment channel that has been utilised to a varying degree. Information presented by the CEOs and players agents reveals that since the inception of the League a number of franchises have seen it necessary to develop formalised arrangements and

create affiliated club relationships with clubs at state league level, as well as other professional clubs located outside Australia. While others seemed quite content to rely solely on more informal arrangements, if any at all. Furthermore, the information presented suggested that the formalised arrangements the A-League franchises have developed appear to occur in the following three ways: (1) sister-club agreements; (2) as a result of ownership; and (3) via investment. Subsequent information provided by two player agents also appears to suggest that the development of two A-League – State league relationships has been the result of their former A-League players being appointed to coaching positions at clubs playing in the state leagues. In the first instance a Victorian-based player agent stated that a relationship only developed between Melbourne Victory and Richmond Soccer Club after the appointment of a former Victory player to this state league club’s coaching staff (Marcus, personal communication, July 18, 2013). Likewise, an agent located in Western Australia also believed a similar process had led to the relationship formation between Inglewood (state league) and Perth Glory (A-League), as a former Glory player had moved into Inglewood’s coaching ranks following his retirement (Zachary, personal communication, August 2, 2013).

Once again the discussions with the three CEOs revealed that within each franchise there were significant differences not only in the formality and types of relationships developed, but also the levels of links with other football clubs. Marcus outlined how his franchise had developed “a very formalised link with [English Club A] who at the time were playing in the Premier League and had one of the strongest development programmes around” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). He went on to establish that the relationship was developed for one specific reason, “around player exchanges, giving a pathway and creating the perception...that there was a channel to the better clubs in Europe” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). John explained how, on receiving confirmation of entry to the League, they almost immediately “[underwent] a couple of road trips and formed relationships” (personal communication, July 26, 2013) with state league clubs in their region. The aim was to develop formal feeder club relationships, in order to have “their coaching staff feeding information about players who could potentially make the step up” (personal communication, July 26, 2013). In contrast, David was of the belief that his franchise “by definition must support all the clubs equally as they are all part of the South Australian Football Association” (personal communication, July 29, 2013), therefore developing formal links was not appropriate. Furthermore, this CEO also stated that at the present time his franchise did not have any formal links with any overseas based club, but felt they had established a number of informal associations with other clubs in Asia as a result of numerous appearances in the Asian Champions League.

The final club-based network that many of the franchises utilise for player recruitment is based around developing links with the government-funded sporting institute, as a number of players have been recruited from both the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and local state level counterparts (e.g. Victoria Institute of Sport). The system of A-League franchises recruiting from these institutes can be looked upon as their own graduate advancement programs, the same process as employed by multi-national companies when recruiting new employees directly from university programmes (Haesli & Boxall, 2005).

#### **4.4.5 Selection Procedure**

The recruitment and selection process is a two-fold approach. First, a pool of potential recruits needs to be identified. Then reliable selection methods need to be utilised to ensure that the best candidates are employed, or in the case of this study the right players are signed. Therefore, this section focuses on uncovering the main selection procedures that the CEOs and player agents have identified during their discussions.

##### **4.4.5.1 Completing Due Diligence**

The completion of appropriate levels of due diligence when recruiting foreigners was a strong theme identified in all the resulting discussions with the CEOs and player agents, as all parties agreed that they both should complete their own research on all potential players prior to signing. This step is seen as a vital part of the recruitment process by everyone concerned. These parties also agreed that the ideal scenario involved a representative from the recruiting franchise travelling to a match venue to view the player *live* in action. Subsequently, it was outlined by a current CEO that a representative from his franchise had recently completed a trip to Europe “to ensure that they were 100% confident in the players...we have seen them play” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). When situations arose where attending live matches was not possible, the franchises requested recorded match footage from the agent, normally 2 – 3 full games. Another general consensus provided by these respondents was that where possible the recruiting franchises should also invite any potential foreign recruit over to Australia prior to signing, so they could get a feel for the franchise’s football environment and a feel for the region in which they would potentially be living. This is an endeavour the franchises utilise to help remove potential problem areas and prevent obstacles from developing that may impair the player’s performance moving forward.

#### 4.4.5.2 Player Trials and Medicals

After speaking with key individuals involved in A-League player recruitment, it appears that the selection process to which players are subjected prior to signing heavily depends on the player's previous background and their level of experience. The overall consensus suggested that the majority of local young players are subjected to trial proceedings. A player agent who specialises in representing young players proposed that, from his experience, "95 percent of all young players are trialled prior to signing" (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

In situations where players are required to trial, the players typically spend one to two weeks training with the club, but it very much depends on the stage of the season. All the player agents presented a shared opinion, that as the transfer window draws to a close the franchises are quicker at about formulating decisions around trialists futures. In relation Matthew stated:

I currently have some players in trial or supposed trial at different franchises and they have been there since the start of pre-season ... you try to get an answer out of the club and it is oh well we are still looking at them. At the same time though I am not going to drag them away until I have another opportunity for them. (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013)

The selection process for more experienced local players tended to operate in an entirely different manner. Discussions revealed that, in general, these players were of a proven quality, either through previous involvement in the League, a proven track record in higher level leagues abroad or involvement with national teams at different levels. In most cases players who fitted in to this category were straight signings after the completion of a medical mainly because the franchises already had previous knowledge of the player, their background and level of performance. Having a player complete a medical prior to signing was another key determinant during the selection process according to two of the respondents, and was a well utilised procedure for all players irrespective of player status or age. One respondent, a CEO, then took it a step further by insisting that completing this process was a

"risk limitation exercise" (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013) and a safeguarding mechanism surrounding resource investment because completing contractual terms with any player who has serious long term issues with their health and fitness is always going to be to the detriment of the franchise.

It appears that for foreign players entering the League for the first time, the selection process can evolve in one of two distinct manners, which not only relates to their previous playing experience but also to their cultural heritage. In the first instance marquee signings and other

high profile players migrating from leagues at the core of the football world (Darby et al., 2007; McGovern, 2000) are straight signings upon the completion of a medical. Again the process is completed in this manner because these high profile players all have a proven track record of performing in the top echelons of world football. However, the process seems to be significantly different for first time foreigners entering the A-League from leagues located in South America and Asia. It is not uncommon for these players to be invited to the franchise prior to the finalisation of contractual terms, not on trial per se as the franchises generally already have an idea of performance level via reviewing, but as a method to ensure the player will fit into the franchise culturally. This is a process which David maintained ensures that both parties are totally informed about the decision, and as much “as humanly possible we want to take all those potential excuses or walking sticks away and remove the obstacles or little road blocks as we can” (personal communication, July 29, 2013), that may hinder player settlement post migration.

Throughout the interview phase none of the respondents revealed details of what a standard A-League franchise’s medical procedure contains. Additional research shows that they generally involve a review of the player’s medical file (which will contain information about previous operations and recurrent injuries), an examination of all muscles and joints including a range of motion testing, muscle strength tests, and examinations of the player’s body fat, lung capacity, and blood pressure, along with an electrocardiogram (ECG) (Physioroom.com, n.d).

#### **4.4.5.3 Contract Negotiations**

This section focuses on aspects related to contract negotiations between players and A-League franchises. This discussion is broken down into three specific areas, with the first focusing on average contract length, the second identifying the individuals involved for each respective party, and the third on the levels of negotiation involved in relation to player status. However, before looking at these three specific areas it is important to acknowledge that the A-League Collective Bargaining Agreement regulates the terms and conditions that these contracts must contain (refer section 1.2).

In relation to average contract length (refer Table 4.5), the general consensus provided by the participating franchise CEOs and player agents was that franchises normally offered players contracts of somewhere between one to three seasons in duration. Young locally based players who are entering the league for the first time are typically the players who are offered the shortest deals, normally one season. Similarly, it also seems that newly acquired foreign

imports are also offered relatively short term contracts; information presented by the player agents indicated that these visa players are normally offered a “one plus one” deal (one season contract plus the option of another season). This can be supposed to be standard practice because the recruiting franchises do not want to commit themselves and offer longer term contracts to the foreign players. This is most likely due to a lack of certainty over how a newly recruited visa holding player is going to adjust, settle and perform in a new environment. In contrast, players who are already established in the A-League (both local and foreign) tend to be offered the longer term deals, commonly covering two to three seasons.

Subsequently, the discussions involving the three CEOs also revealed that each franchise employed a different procedure and allocated responsibility for contract negotiations to a different individual. Marcus outlined a process where he worked very closely with the football manager during the initial stages of the recruitment and selection process, but he alone handled all contract negotiation proceedings, further stating that it was one of the major responsibilities of his employment role. The process John’s franchise employed involved the following:

Initial parameters were provided to the coach and football manager in term of status and figures, this is the top and this is the bottom figure... but myself [sic] and the chairman made the final decision on figures and I was the signatory to the contract. (personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Finally, David revealed that his franchise operated in a completely different manner, as the responsibility for all football specific employment contracts was located in the business portfolio of the football operations manager with the CEO himself only getting involved when support was requested. Additional information provided by the player agents also supports the notion that the different franchises employ different procedures, allocating the responsibility to different people. This is best summed up by an assertion presented by Simon, a player agent who has negotiated in excess of 50 A-League player contracts, “that it really does depend on which franchise you are negotiating with” (personal communication, August 1, 2013). At some franchises he negotiates with the football operations manager or head coach, while at other franchises he negotiates directly with the CEOs. What’s more, Simon went on to reveal that marquee signings often followed a completely different process altogether; on most occasions it required negotiation proceedings to be conducted with the franchise’s Chairman or owners because the final decision in this situation firmly rested at their feet.

Overall, the level of negotiations involved during contract proceedings was shown to be directly related to a player’s level of experience, which one particular agent identified as a

“player’s level of supply and demand” (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013). Again the consensus was that contract negotiation for young inexperienced players was very basic, simple and straight forward with them generally accepting the first initial offer. This seems to be due, in the main, to the fact that new players entering the league are unproven products who are trying to break into the market place, and are therefore not in a position to make demands. Furthermore, it was revealed by Matthew that the franchises normally offered these players a salary package “slightly above the base contract” (personal communication, July 31, 2013). Again from the agent’s perspective there was an agreement that the real negotiations happened with players at the top end, especially when high profile, talented foreigners are involved. These were the situations where negotiations tended to last several weeks and generally the majority of the franchises would offer around \$200,000 per annum. The agents would then endeavour to negotiate additional payments and bonuses depending on the player’s level of experience and the demand for his playing services.

#### **4.5 ORIENTATION AND SOCIALISATION**

This section delves into the practices that A-League franchises use to assist their new recruits settle and adapt to their new environment, to ensure they become “productive organisational members” (Nankervis et al., 2005). A-League franchises should concern themselves with these practices because research suggests that, when completed successfully, such activities not only ensure performances on match day but can also significantly aid player retention processes (Mathis & Jackson, 1999).

##### **4.5.1 Player Settlement Procedures**

This segment focuses on the various orientation and socialisation practices used by A-League football franchises to help integrate new recruits and their families (when applicable) into their new environments, both in football and the local community. Once again the general consensus provided by this study’s participants reveals that there are significant differences in the practices employed by the different franchises. It was acknowledged that some franchises took this matter very seriously and had staff specifically assigned to assist with these functions, while other franchises were seen to provide new players with little or no support at all. This conclusion is supported by Luke from the players’ union, when he maintained that “some clubs are better at it than others, but there are clubs we know where players are left to their own devices” (Luke, personal communication, August 21, 2013). Furthermore, Luke went on to reveal that they (the players’ union) were all too aware of occasions where “all a new player

received was an introduction to their new colleagues, a tour of the facilities and their pay set up” (personal communication, August 21, 2013).

Overall, the majority of the respondents acknowledged that the attitude and practices they were employing were improving, but all still felt they had significant work to do before they caught up to the practices and level of support provided by professional clubs in other foreign leagues. This is most notable when compared with the situation in Europe, where over the course of the last five years it has become common practice for clubs to either outsource or employ specific staff to assist with player relocation.

Again player status and reputation has shown to play a significant role on impacting the level of assistance a new player and their family (where applicable) received from the franchise on arrival. Information provided by all the respondents suggested that marquee players and other high profile signing were the ones who received the most support, while young inexperienced players received the least. Additional discussions with two of the player agents further revealed that it was not uncommon for marquee players to receive packages that contained long-term accommodation and vehicles, along with assistance with school applications if required. Support provided to other foreign imports and experienced local players comprised the next level, as these players were typically provided with temporary short-term accommodation while foreign players also received assistance with visas for family members. Young local players were shown to receive the least assistance; one agent was particularly scathing about the level of support they were generally offered, indicating that from his experience many of the franchises seemed “to talk a good game but all too often failed to deliver... with many youth team players being left to their own devices to find additional employment and accommodation” (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

Further investigation examined the additional levels of support that franchises offer to foreign nationals who migrate from cultures and regions outside the English speaking world. Once more, results revealed that different franchises employ different practices and some were more proactive than others. Marcus outlined how one of the first steps his franchise employed to help a young Chinese player settle on arrival was to “take him around all the Chinese clubs and introduce him to the local Chinese society...who took him under their wing” (personal communication, July 18, 2013). David felt that because his franchise tended to recruit foreign players with similar backgrounds new arrivals settled more easily, due to a shared common culture, stating that “like attracts alike” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). However, Matthew held a contrasting opinion and felt that many foreign imports were left to fight for themselves, citing the following:

I cannot judge every single example and I cannot talk about every single club, but from what I have seen they do not help them integrate into society...so you have a lot of Argentinean or Latin American players who have made their own networks...people from the Spanish, Argentinean or Chilean community have started speaking Spanish or Portuguese and they become friends purely because of that. (personal communication, July 31, 2013)

Less concern was also shown towards foreigners who were relocating between A-League franchises, as generally most respondents felt that the transient nature of the League with players continually transferring between franchises assisted them with their settlement. This may be because in most cases these players already had pre-existing relationships with many of the players on arrival. This perception also seems to apply to local players relocating from one franchise to another.

The support non-English speaking players received in order to help develop their language skills was another area where practices engaged by the franchises varied widely across the League; once more, information presented by the CEOs revealed that each of their franchises utilise different approaches. One franchise did provide these players with English lessons, though another felt it was a case by case scenario and something you had to weigh up at the time of signing, acknowledging that it can become problematic. It had not been an issue raised at the remaining franchise because during this CEO's tenure no non-English speaking player had been recruited, however he was of the opinion that the franchises should assist with language acquisition if the situation arose. The findings presented here by the CEOs are also consistent with the view expressed by a representative from the players' union, who stated that he was aware of "franchises that were proactive in facilitating lessons and other franchises that have refused" (Luke, personal communication, August 21, 2013). Additional information presented by a couple of the player agents further revealed that although some franchises did not actually provide players with English lessons they did try to overcome language difficulties by making translators available to certain players during training sessions to help communicate messages. However, the following comment provide by one player agent suggests that there are still situations occurring where players receive no support: "I can tell you that (Player Z) received nothing during his time at [club name], the kid really struggles with English, but no effort was ever made to assist him with his language skills" (Matthew, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

This statement was also supported by the players' union representative as he revealed that they were aware of situations where "player requests for help had been refused by the

franchises as there are no legislative obligation from them to oblige” (Luke, personal communication, August 21, 2013). Nevertheless, Luke also stated that players who do find themselves in this situation can “approach the players union to obtain funding...because 100 percent of the players are members...as members they have access to \$4000 for personal development” (personal communication, August 21, 2013), to complete specific courses on their own accord.

#### **4.5.2 Responsibility for Player Settlement and Welfare**

This section investigates player settlement and welfare procedures to determine the level of support contributed by the three different stakeholders (the franchises, player agents, and the players union), to conclude who has assumed overall responsibility in this area. The general findings give the impression that even though they all acknowledge the contribution made by each group, their respective views on where the ultimate responsibility lies differ somewhat from each other. Each CEO attributed this responsibility solely to the franchises themselves, with key members of the football department (usually either the football director or head coach) assuming responsibility for player settlement and welfare. Interestingly, each CEO also acknowledged that at certain times instances did develop where the player agents needed to become involved. The player agents themselves shared a similar opinion, believing that the franchises themselves needed to assume overall responsibility as they are the employer. However, all of the player agents did acknowledge that because they represented the player contractually they also had a level of responsibility for their welfare. Overall, the player agents insisted that it was a collaborative approach, a process which required them to continually liaise with the franchises in an effort to either avoid or overcome developing issues. In this way the agents acted as a safeguard or support person that the players could turn to for assistance, although the level of responsibility for specific players depended on the nature of the relationship and the level of representation they had agreed on with the player. This was mainly dependent on whether the agents had been recruited purely to complete contract negotiation procedures or whether they had a long-term player management agreement in place. Additionally, player settlement and welfare was also acknowledged by the agents as an area in which the players’ union was increasingly taking a more active role, as they had recently been responsible for the negotiation of additional funding for player relocations and other related programs in the latest collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

Luke from the players’ union also believed a collective approach was required, because “player welfare is one of the core things we stand for...but we are not working day in day out with the players” (personal communication, August 21, 2013), unlike the franchises and the player

agents. It was his opinion that the players' union needed to assume a larger portion of the responsibility. Overall, he was of the opinion that these responsibilities should sit broadly across the following three organisations:

- i. The Franchises – “as the employer they have a vested interest to make sure that player’s welfare has been taken care of, the best that they can [sic]” (personal communication, August 21, 2013).
- ii. The Player Union – “that is what we are here for, to support the players” (personal communication, August 21, 2013).
- iii. The FFA – The governing body controls and operates the league so “they must have a duty of care when it comes to the regulations” (personal communication, August 21, 2013).

Furthermore, as a players' union they were all too aware “that there are a number of gaps” (Luke, personal communication, August 21, 2013) with player settlement and other aspects associated with player welfare. These were areas earmarked for attention and development in the not too distant future, as the FFA were currently in the process of transferring a number of key responsibilities to the players' union. Once this process had been completed one of the first measures they were looking to establish was a wide range of workshop programmes, including a formal induction camp for all new players which would be loosely modelled on that of the Australian Football League’s (AFL) player association. It was hoped that this induction camp would be ready for implementation prior to the 2014-2015 season.

#### **4.6 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

This study also uncovered significant information regarding the training and development procedures that A-League franchises invest in their players. The purpose of this analysis is to clarify the stance the franchises hold in relation to providing ongoing personal development opportunities for their players. This area was included for investigation because career progression and continuous development have been identified as the two most important antecedents allowing for the development of loyal, committed and motivated staff members in any organisation. Addressing this area is important as it provides the satisfaction of personal fulfilment, while simultaneously diminishing feelings of necessity to explore other options in order to achieve such individual accomplishments (Maund, 2001; Noe et al., 2010). According to the respondents' opinions, it appears that training development for players involved in the A-League seems to occur at two different levels; the first level focuses on football development

and career progression, while personal development is the center of attention at the second level.

#### **4.6.1 Career Progression – Football Development**

This first category can essentially be looked upon as the training ground activities that each franchise imposes on their players to develop their technical and tactical attributes, along with other fitness related components. The methods each franchise employs to facilitate these processes revolve around appointing role-specific coaching staff, establishing player development pathways, and the structure of internal football systems.

Information presented by the respondents (both CEOs and agents) outlined that on the football front one of the common practices employed by franchises is to recruit a number of role-specific staff under the banner of the football department, who work with the players on a daily basis. This includes dedicated goal-keeping coaches and strength and conditioning coaches, along with a full range of medical specialists, including club doctors and physiotherapists. Furthermore, it was also revealed by one CEO that at times they will also supplement additional positions as needed; for instance, his franchise also brought “a sports psychologist on board a certain stages during the season” (Marcus, personal communication, July 18, 2013).

The establishment of the NYL has also allowed the A-League franchises to develop their own career progression channels/player development pathways. According to the FFA national technical director of the time, this was the main reason for the NYL’s inception (FFA, 2008). The development of this reserve team system not only ensures that the franchises are investing in developing their own internal resources, but it also allows player transfers between the two sides to meet short-run staffing needs (Olson & Schwab, 2000). Furthermore, the players developed from these systems can be classified as organisational specific resources because they have had the tactics and playing style of their particular franchises embedded during their development (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012). David explains that this is why his franchise’s “NYL team will train and play in exactly the same manner as the first team” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). Previously presented information also revealed how some franchises have also established relationships with overseas based clubs as an effort to facilitate other player development pathways (refer section 4.4.4.5).

Player agents also naturally play a leading role in the career progression of their clients because a large facet of their business revolves around providing players with career advice, while continually reviewing the players current situation and looking out for new opportunities

to exploit. This is especially the case when players' performance levels attract interest from clubs located in higher quality leagues. Furthermore, one particular agent attributed this as being the particular reason for why he preferred to negotiate straight fixed-term contracts with a buy-out clause; as he stated, "from day one everybody involved, the player, the current club, the agent, and any other interested clubs know exactly what the terms of the deal are" (Simon, personal communication, August 1, 2013). This agent also outlined that because there is such a long off-season in the A-League it allows him the opportunity to send young players he represents over to Europe for a month to train with high-profile clubs over there. This is something that he has organised for players on numerous occasions, with the most recent example involved him sending a former age-group Youth International in 2012 to a prestigious German club for a month long training stint.

#### **4.6.2 Personal Development**

This segment concerns itself with the personal development opportunities players have access to outside of their football commitments, which they can use to develop skills in an effort to prepare them for a life after football. Overall, even though it was acknowledged by all the participants that systems and programs catering for this need do exist, the general consensus still suggested that more could and should be done. Moreover, a current CEO outlined from his personal experience (coming from an AFL background) that he knew that it was a "far bigger priority in other sporting codes than in the A-League...they are in a privileged position with lots of spare time and should undertake formal studies to get themselves ready for a career after sport" (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013). This comment was echoed by a number of the other respondents.

##### **4.6.2.1 Franchises' Current Practices**

Information revealed that a number of the franchises have taken this responsibility upon their own shoulders by developing their own links with educational providers, as it was revealed that five franchises (four current and one defunct) had developed formal connections with specific universities or other training providers. Additionally, three of these franchises actually had their training facilities located on the grounds of university campuses, thereby allowing the players of these franchises both ease of access and ample opportunity to complete formal education alongside their football commitments. Another former franchise CEO outlined that even though they had not developed formal links with universities they would still assist their players by making "direct contacts through our local network with people from the university...to put them in touch with the right people, and organise meetings with certain people to give advice or at least push the player in the right direction" (John, personal

communication, July 26, 2013). Furthermore, this CEO also outlined another occasion where they had assisted two players in-house by providing them with development opportunities to gain experience and assist with post-career employment opportunities. Additionally, it was revealed that one of the players who had been assisted via this method has since attained a senior management position at another franchise. Yet another franchise that player agents felt was particularly proactive with player personal development utilised a completely different system altogether. This franchise had also not developed formal links with educational providers, preferring instead to continually provide players with information and a workshop opportunity which encouraged the players to start planning for their futures by identifying future career opportunities they could transition into quickly after their playing career.

#### **4.6.2.2 The Role of the Player Agent**

As was the case with player welfare, agents again felt a level of responsibility to their players with ongoing personal development opportunities away from football, as they all indicated they were prepared to get involved to assist and provide career advice when they witnessed deficiencies. However, once again the level of support they provided their players was determined by the nature of their relationship; the responsibility to provide a long-term career management service is quite different from being merely recruited to complete contract negotiation proceedings. Additionally, two player agents whose business structures encompass the whole player management sphere summarised just how proactive they are about developing their clients as people as opposed to just footballers.

Matthew elaborated on how he utilised pre-existing contacts with associates at a Victorian based university to assist players whom he represents in gaining entry into their elite development program, which the university specifically offers to high performing athletes. Furthermore, it was also revealed that he is currently in discussions with another educational provider looking to develop educational packages that he could brand under the banner of his agency to “differentiate myself from other agents” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). In comparison, the player development system Simon employed was structured in a completely different manner. His method revolved around actively working with his players to identify areas of interest where they could peruse potential careers upon retirement. Once the player had identified a particular area of interest he would then cultivate development opportunities in those fields to ensure an easy transition. If a player had identified coaching as a future career then he would arrange for that player to complete their relevant coaching qualifications, or if it was a career in the media he would arrange media appearances and on-air production training. Nevertheless, even though these two agents have been particularly

proactive they still share a similar view to the other remaining agents, who all agreed that in reality it should be a collective approach between all three parties (the franchises, the player agents, and the players' union) because from their perspectives each had a role to play. Furthermore, all agents acknowledged it was an area where the players' union was becoming increasingly active.

#### **4.6.2.3 The Role of the Players' Union**

Assisting players with personal development opportunities is an area where the players' union is currently quite proactive, having implemented a number of programmes and taking responsibility for negotiating specific clauses into the latest A-League CBA specifying that all franchises must allow players significant amount of time each week to to engage in study or other vocational learning (FFA, 2011). Furthermore, it was noted by Luke from the players' union that this was an area earmarked for extensive development, that they were "undertaking an independent view to examine their current programs, to ensure going forward that there are better practices and better programs" (personal communication, August 21, 2013). In the future, players' development would be one of the primary responsibilities of their organisation, mainly due to the fact that the "clubs priorities are in regards to the players performance on the field" (personal communication, August 21, 2013). He then outlined the practices they currently use to assist players with ongoing development and education:

1. Player Education Fund – A program that encourages current and recently departed players (players still remain eligible inside the first two years from league departure) to prepare for a life after football by providing players access to educational assistance grants to cover enrolment fees and course related costs (\$4000 AUD).
2. Team of Advisors – Advisors are allocated to each franchise to work with players on an ongoing basis to deliver specific workshops, encourage players to enrol in educational course, and ensure those that partake in such courses are able to manage their work loads.
3. Elite Athlete Friendly University System – As a member of the players' union all current A-League players are guaranteed flexibility around their studies by ensuring they are not penalised by their educational providers if sporting commitments interrupt course work or examination proceedings.

#### **4.7 CONTRACT EXTENSION OR SEPARATION**

This study's final area of examination focuses on the process employed in relation to a current player's future career direction. Due to the nature of the information uncovered by this study, this section has been divided up into three main segments. The first investigates contractual obligations that often determine whether a player departs or remains with their current franchise on the expiry of their contract. The second segment scrutinises the current player retention process by examining franchises' player retention procedures and how they are influenced by player performance levels and who holds the balance of power in determining if a player remains or departs, the player or the club. The third area concerns itself with the supporting mechanisms which are offered to departing players.

##### **4.7.1 Contractual Obligations**

In respect to the A-League, it appears from the information provided by respondents that the final outcome of the decision to retain or release a player is often heavily determined by the terms and conditions of the original contract, particularly whether it contains retention clauses or is purely a fixed-term contract. In a situation where a retention clause has been negotiated the determining factor to triggering an automatic contract extension hinges on a player achieving predetermined performance indicators during the final year of their current deal, often based around games played or goals scored.

Therefore, if the player achieved the set performance criteria "normally 15 games or 10 goals" (Andrew, personal communication, August 14, 2013) during the final season a contract renewal for an additional number of seasons is automatically triggered. The popularity of contract negotiation involving this method received mixed reviews during subsequent discussions with franchise CEOs and player agents, as some felt it was an integral part of the contract negotiation process, while others maintained that they preferred simple fixed-term deals.

Discussions with the participating CEOs revealed that the different franchises appeared to utilise retention clauses to a varying degree. Marcus revealed that during his time in charge it was a facet they used often, stating that "we always took options and negotiated them into the majority of our contracts" (personal communication, July 18, 2013). While David acknowledged his franchises did utilise them to a certain extent, he added that by his reckoning they would have had "just as many players on standard fix-term arrangements" (personal communication, July 29, 2013). In contrast John stated that his franchise "had a few of these, but would not have had many from memory...most of ours were pretty much cut and

dry...as a new franchise we wanted things as simple and clear cut as possible” (personal communication, July 26, 2013).

The agents’ attitude towards the utilisation of these retention clauses also reflected a similar stance. Firstly, Matthew insisted that the inclusion of such provisions provided the player with a method to “prove to the club you are playing and you are useful to the team” (personal communication, July 31, 2013). Andrew noted that he often does negotiate them, but “sometimes the player just wants to leave it at two years and that is it” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). Lastly, Simon explained that his preference was to negotiate straight fixed-term deals, because “ from day one all parties, the player, his current club, the agents and any potentially interested clubs understand the exact nature of the original deal” (personal communication, August 1, 2013). Moreover, he also cited from his own personal involvement within the League that he was aware of situations occurring in the past where “coaches had stopped playing the player in the 14<sup>th</sup> game so he did not access the 15<sup>th</sup> game and another year” (personal communication, August 1, 2013).

#### **4.7.2 Player Retention Process**

Contracts aside, this section looks to scrutinise the decision making procedures implemented by the different franchises and player agents when deciding a players’ future career direction, either to continue to maintain their relationship or sever all ties. As a consequence of the nature of information uncovered during this portion of the interviews, this section has been divided into three areas. The first focuses on franchises’ player review systems, the second is related to player performance and future opportunities, and the third examines how the retention process are affected by contractual regulations and balance of power, whether the player or the franchise is in a dominant position during contract discussion.

##### **4.7.2.1 Franchises’ Review Systems**

It was clearly evident from discussions with the CEOs that the player review systems implemented by the franchises to formulate decisions around the future of their playing staff not only operate via different methods, they also incorporate different levels of formality. This conclusion becomes obvious after constructing a comparison between each participating franchises’ operating procedure.

In respect to levels of formality, it was seemingly apparent after the discussion with John that while he was involved with his A-League franchise they really did not have any formal review structures in place to assist with this decision making procedure, stating that it was “nothing more than ‘let’s huddle and talk about it’ ” (personal communication, July 26, 2013). This took

the form of a conversation between the head coach and the CEO about the players they wanted to retain and those they would allow to depart, which took place at the end of the season. Results that align with Bradbury & Forsyth (2012) research as they concluded that many sports organisation do not implement formal HRM procedures during squad selection proceedings. Furthermore, John also revealed that during their first season on a couple of occasions the head coach “would walk in and say we should lock this guy up for another couple of years” (personal communication, July 26, 2013), due to recent performances.

In comparison, the operating procedures as outlined by the two remaining CEOs were extensively more formalised and structured. In the first instance Marcus described a process where his franchise formed a “retention committee” (personal communication, July 18, 2013), consisting of the Chairman, CEO, Head Coach and other representatives from the football department when required (e.g. fitness coach or members from the medical team). This group would meet periodically to discuss aspects relating to player performance to help determine which players were going to be offered new deals. However, even with this committee’s existence this CEO still maintained that a tremendous amount of the power still remained with the head coach, “because you’re never going to say to your football manager you can’t get rid of him, at the end of the day he is responsible for results he just won’t pick him, if you force a player on him” (Marcus, personal communication, July 18, 2013). David then described a process where responsibility had been delegated to their football director in association with their head coach, who similarly at times liaised with other members of the football department. This method revolved around continually scanning the franchise’s playing resources to ensure that those on their current roster were not only performing but more importantly were going to continue to play a significant role in relation to the football department’s future direction. He then went on to reveal that they began “formally addressing our situation probably around round 10 when we have a look at things and see where we’re at” (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013). This was the time when the performance of the players about to come off contract would be seriously scrutinised in order to formulate a decision surrounding player retention; namely, whether the player would be offered a contract extension or was to be released.

#### **4.7.2.2 Performance Related Factors and Future Opportunities**

The match day performances a player produces while under contract with an A-League franchise not only significantly determines the likelihood of a player being retained by his current franchise, but also plays a fundamental role in determining which players remain employed within the A-League. This is because current performance levels effectively increase

or decrease a player's stock value, along with the levels of outside interest for specific players. Therefore, this segment examines how a player's current performance levels influence their future career direction.

Information presented by the CEOs and the player agents identified a small number of common scenarios that determined a player's future career options, all of which are primarily dependent upon specific situations relating back to the player's recent performance levels. The first scenario existed when both the player and his franchise were highly content with their relationship, and generally resulted in the player being retained by the franchise. Under these circumstances the relationship is strong because each party is happy with the output being provided by the other, meaning that the player is content with all the factors associated with the current playing environment and the franchise is content with the financial outlay and the player's contribution on the pitch. This leads to a situation developing fairly rapidly where all parties are keen to maintain the status quo, a course of action that naturally encourages the commencement of discussions surrounding contract extension proceedings. Additionally, current trends also indicate that when the desire to remain between the parties is strong, subsequent deals are being completed ahead of time and often prior to the player entering the final year of their current deal.

The situation and general outcome appears to be remarkably different when a player's current performance level leads to situations developing which disturbs the relationship contentment between a player and their current franchise, and usually results in the player relocating. Understandably, player performances at both ends of the performance spectrum have been shown to play a significant role in unsettling these relationships. A player's current form is greatly associated to the level of demand for their services; the more demand a player can generate the greater number of options they will have moving forward, and vice versa. Therefore, top performing players are always going to have greater options available in terms of moving forward in comparison to their underperforming colleagues. Such opportunities may even allow the highest performing player to complete upward movement in their career trajectory by being recruited by a more high profile club in a more dominant league (Poli, 2010). Conversely, players whose performance consistently fails to make the grade may find themselves in a situation where these performances seriously impinge on their future career options, not only with the current franchise but also others located in the A-League; a process that may even result in the withdrawal of their services from the League. Furthermore, it appears that because there is uncertainty surrounding these scenarios a player's future career direction normally does not become abundantly clear until the end of the season, when the contractual period expires.

#### 4.7.2.3 Contractual Regulations and Balance of Power

Information provided by particular respondents also further exemplifies how contractual regulations and balance of power, dominant position during contract discussion, also has a significant influence in shaping the player retention process, as these factors not only ensure that the interests of both parties receive adequate protection but also stipulate who controls the proceedings.

Contractual regulations and provisos governing player transfers were cited by two respondents as reasons why the future career direction of many players is not decided sooner. In the first instance, according to David, “the club can’t do too much about a player’s contract, even if a player is playing poorly, other than letting them run down to expiry” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). Conversely, these same regulations protect the franchises from losing players to other leagues and clubs during times of high performance. As Andrew stipulated, as player agents they “cannot approach other clubs outside six months from contract expiration” (personal communication, August 14, 2013).

Equally, information presented by the participants also showed that the party which holds the balance of power is responsible for deciding whether a player remains or relocates. This process is once again heavily related to a player’s current performance levels and the level of relationship contentment. First of all in a situation where the relationship is strong between both parties and they both exhibit a strong desire to continue the relationship, the balance of power is found to be equally shared between the two parties. This, according to Simon, creates a situation where a “new deal between the two parties is agreed relatively quickly” (personal communication, August 1, 2013). However, it appears that the situation is completely different when disparity exists between the player’s performance and the franchise’s financial outlay, a discrepancy that can arise from consistent displays at either end of the performance spectrum. It appears from the comments provided from one CEO that the player agents become very active when players are consistently exhibiting quality performances; as David states “the agents become very, very active and they exhaust all the options for the player before the player even thinks whether he wants to sign or re-sign” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). Andrew agreed with this notion when he stated that “as an agent you take advantage of being able to speak to other clubs to generate additional interest in the player” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). Therefore, in this situation the balance of power is firmly located at the feet of the players and their agents because even if the franchises want to retain a player there is no certainty that he will remain.

The opposite was also found to be true in relation to poorly performing players. These performances reduce the player's level of demand, effectively limiting their options moving forward because as Matthew stated "re-signing is all about supply and demand" (personal communication, July 31, 2013). He went on to relate that from his experience a lot of players "won't find out they are being released until the end of the season, which this year would have been mid April" (personal communication, July 31, 2013), that is why he will start looking for other options prior to the season's end so a situation does not develop where the player's future is left in limbo. Finally, in these situations the balance of power is firmly with the franchises because even if the player wants to remain there is no certainty that the franchise will offer him a new contract.

#### **4.7.3 Support Mechanisms for Departing Players**

This final section looks to examine the supporting mechanisms provided to departing players on separation from their current franchise, either through being released or via the announcement of their retirement. This analysis will be developed in a two part scenario, with the first focusing on the support provided to out-of-contract players to find future employment opportunities, and on who is responsible for setting the parameters on these searches. The second part will focus on specifics related to player retirement, to determine who leads the support process and assumes responsibility when a player decides to call time on their football career.

##### **4.7.3.1 Free Agency – The Search for Future Employment**

This section examines the level of support provided to players in finding new employment opportunities once they have been released by their current A-League franchise, and where the responsibility lies for assisting them through this process. As David assures, whenever a situation arises where a current player is not offered a new contract there is always enormous disappointment from the player's perspective, even more so for young players who are unable to secure an additional contract at an alternate franchise. Additionally, David also inferred that even though he hoped that players who have been released would continue to enjoy the game locally it was not the franchise's responsibility to assist the player with their future, unless they had been a long serving player. He outlined a situation that was currently developing where one such player would not be offered a new contract, but due to the length of time he had been involved with the franchise the club would liaise with him to try and keep him involved in some capacity moving forward.

Once a player has been released it appears to become the responsibility of the player agent to assist them in finding new football specific employment opportunities, searches not only contained to local market places but also others based abroad. It was found that when it comes to setting the parameters for these new searches (which leagues, which countries, and what level), the majority of the player agents seemingly utilise a process of liaising with their clients to discuss their relevant options moving forward, based on their recent performances and level of experience. As stipulated by Matthew, "I am quite honest with young players who have only played a handful of games that their chance of being re-signed by another A-League franchise is relatively slim, because it is a rotating system" (personal communication, July 31, 2013). He went on to describe the system as being one which allows established players to rotate around, but once a player is on the outer it is extremely difficult to reclaim a place within the system, especially for younger players with limited experience. This is due to the fact that there are only ten franchises and only ten coach's opinions that count. This is further complicated by the fact that "generally the same coaches also rotate around so they don't give you a fresh perspective" (personal communication, July 31, 2013). Therefore Matthew's advice to these players on being released often is that they are better off looking for future opportunities in other leagues within Australia or overseas.

Another subsequent discussion with the representative from the players' union also revealed that in the past they had had a subdivision known as the "player management agency", which was effectively an internal agency that offered player representation services. However, they had not been offering these services for the past two years because firstly, the individual responsible had departed the organisation and secondly, that moving forward this service would not align with the players' union's future strategic direction and re-establishing it now could also be considered a conflict of interest. Even though the players' union has now disbanded these services it does not mean that it has stopped providing assistance to out-of-contract players; rather that the union now operates in a more ad hoc approach than it had before. Their main form of assistance now involves helping out-of-contract players involved distributing their football resumes and highlights reels around different football organisations in both Australia and other markets located in Asia (AFC). The union plans to offer more formal proceedings in the future, with two options currently under discussion. The first looks to mimic a current practice utilised by many European Player Unions which involves the organisation and conduction of free agent tournaments, involving games that would provide out-of-contract players the opportunity to showcase their skills and abilities to other potential employers. The second focused on the development of transition workshops which would provide recently released players with advice related to shifting into a new career.

#### 4.7.3.2 Retirement and Transition

The overall impression developed from the perspective of the franchises indicated that, on the retirement of a long serving player who still had plenty to offer and contribute to the franchise moving forward, a case was made for keeping them involved. In relation to this, several examples were outlined where different franchises had acted in such a manner by actively assisting retiring players into various coaching and administration position within their franchises. However, it appears that on many other occasions the relationship between the franchise and the player simply ended once the player hung up their boots, with David citing it was indicative of the “transient nature of the game” (personal communication, July 29, 2013). David detailed that with his franchise many of their players had migrated to the club from either inter-state or from overseas, and on retirement they simply packed up their belongings and returned home.

Once again the level of support a player agent provides is directly determined by the nature of the relationship between the two parties and whether a full management plan is in place. The two following responses provided by two very experienced player agents who operate at different ends of the spectrum indicate the different levels of responsibility. In the first instance Simon preferred to develop extensive long term management relationships with his clients and therefore looked to create additional opportunities for them after their playing career had come to an end. It has already been shown how this agent prepares the players he represents for a life after football (refer section 4.6.2.2), but he also asserted that his business does not stop when the player stops playing and indicated that many of his player-agent relationships have continued on well beyond their playing years. In fact, he is still representing players who had been retired for more than five years at the time of discussion. In contrast the second agent perspective provided by Andrew, whose business operated via brokering deals with agency partners as opposed to out-and-out player representation, cited that from his perspective all the parties in conjunction (franchise, player agent, player union) had a role to play but “ultimately it’s with the player...they have to start thinking about their future before they finish their playing career” (personal communication, August 14, 2013). Subsequently, as the two remaining agents were both relatively new to the market they naturally had not been directly involved with player retirements. However, both of these individuals vowed that as player agents they had a certain level of responsibility towards their clients at times of retirement and career transition. Both of these agents also indicated, however, that the players’ union was the organisation who should shoulder the majority of the burden.

This was a notion that the representative from the players' union also agreed with, again citing it as "a core reason for their existence" (personal communication, August 21, 2013). He pointed out that this was another area that had been identified for considerable future development to ensure that in the future it would be a key element of the union's services. The development plan they had for this area again focused on developing more formalised programmes than the ones that were currently on offer, because "at the moment it is more *ad hoc* and on a needs basis" (Luke, personal communication, August 21, 2013). Moving forward they envisaged having a support system in place similar to that of the AFL, who have a full-time person solely focusing on retirees and establishing functioning retiree networks. The development of a retiree transition camp was the first form of support that the union is currently trying to establish. Finally, Luke also acknowledged that the franchises should also continue to offer future employment opportunities to long serving "good servant" players, further outlining that currently there were some very proactive franchises which were developing future opportunities for former players, while other franchises seemed to be neglecting this area.

#### **4.8 SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented the findings related to both the quantitative (section 4.2) and qualitative (sections 4.3-4.7) phases of this research investigation. The chapter commenced with the presentation of the results of the secondary data analysis relating to player profiles and transfer records, to uncover current patterns of recruitment. This information was used to formulate questions and guide the qualitative inquiry. The next five sections then identified and discussed the key themes drawn from the information provided by the respondents during the eight semi-structured interviews, supported by related literature. The next chapter will provide further discussion of the themes identified here by presenting a detailed conclusion of each of the four themes, before offering possible directions for future research.

## CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the applicability and application of HRM within the sporting internationalisation of A-League Football Franchises. This was done via developing an understanding surrounding current A-League player migration patterns, followed by the assessment of information in relation to the franchises' HRM practices. An abductive mix-method single organisational case study approach was employed, which investigated the A-League in its entirety as opposed to treating each franchise as a separate case. This mix-method approach was deemed to be the most appropriate avenue of investigation, given the nature of the study. According to Gratton and Jones (2010) sports studies utilising this approach allow for the completion of significantly more detailed and complex analysis of the associated phenomenon (refer to section 3.3.1). The study's objectives were:

Objective 1: To implement relevant discourse analysis techniques, which assist in the critical review of existing HRM and athletic labour migration literature, with particular attention being given to their application and applicability to professional football.

Objective 2: To collect and critically analyse secondary player migration data of A-League franchises to uncover current patterns concerned with (a) the recruitment and registration of both international and local players, and (b) the retention (employment) and review (post-employment) of both groups of players.

Objective 3: To access and assess the past and present HRM practices implemented by A-League franchises through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders involved in A-League player recruitment and retention process.

Objective 4: To construct conclusions with regards to HRM and International staff recruitment (football specific) of A-League franchises, which will allow recommendations to be generated on how current and future expansion franchises can develop more sustainable HRM, player recruitment and player retention strategies.

As a result of the objectives and the selected approach, the data collection method and relating analysis occurred in two consecutive but distinct phases. The study's initial priority involved the collection and analysis of secondary data associated with A-league player migration. Related information was collected on all 733 players who have appeared in the league during the first eight seasons (2005/06 – 2012/13), with results uncovering current patterns associated with A-league player transfers. These results then helped to set the direction of inquiry and formulate questions used during the qualitative phases of the

investigation. A process that involved completing semi-structured interviews with eight key informants to assess past and present HRM practices implemented in the A-league (refer to section 3.4.2). The focus of this chapter is to extract the key conclusions in order to develop strategic recommendations that will allow current and any future A-League franchises an opportunity to develop more sustainable HRM strategies, especially player recruitment and retention.

## **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS**

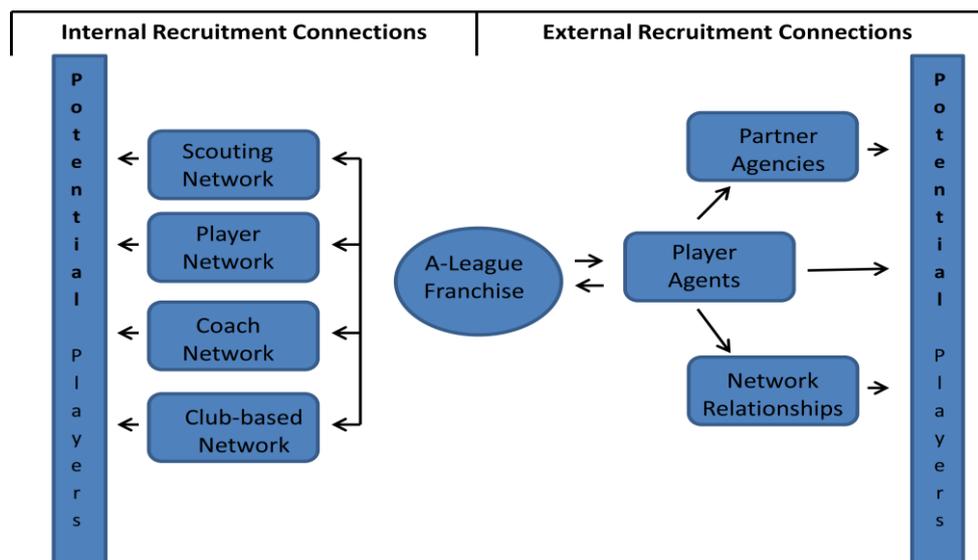
The purpose of this study was to identify the HRM process that A-League franchises use to recruit and retain players. Subsequent information provided by key informants revealed the following findings in relation to the four following specific areas.

### **5.2.1 Recruitment and Selection**

It became clear from the discussions with the participating CEOs and player agents that both the league's positioning in world football (towards the periphery) and the competitive balance measures that are implemented (salary caps and visa player quota) serve as factors of limitation that impinge on the type, the quality and the age of players that A-League franchises can recruit. Nevertheless, the overriding aim of the participating CEOs was to recruit the highest quality players available, given their budgetary requirements. This was done to optimise their franchise's prospect of winning, which is imperative when operating in a result based industry. Another important aspect identified by the CEOs was that on occasions players are not just recruited solely for their talent alone, as they also target players who have marketability and can engage with the local community to facilitate quality relationships with fans to generate support. The first decision franchises face during the recruitment process is the type of player they are looking to recruit, with three different statuses of players being identified: local, foreign and marquee signings. Marquee players were shown to be the players utilised the most to attract and engage with the fans, and to lift the image of the league. However, financial differences between the competing franchises operating budgets has lead to a situation developing where some franchises are able to equip themselves with such signings season after season, while for others it is just not an option. A situation compounded by the notion provided by one CEO who insisted that "fans do not view Australian marquee players as true marquee signings" (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013).

It was subsequently found that players migrating into the league from European based clubs, along with players being promoted through the Australian football pyramid were the two most

heavily used recruitment channels during the A-league’s first eight seasons. Information provided by the respondents in regards to the recruitment methods franchises use to recruit players led to the development of the following A-league recruitment framework (Figure 5.1). This depicts the overall process and identifies who controls what aspects of the player recruitment process. The diagram illustrates the recruitment connections which are held internally and controlled by the franchises, as the franchise decides instances when these channels are utilised to recruit players. Overall, all franchises rely on these methods to a varying degree. The opposite side of the diagram relates to recruitment aspects associated with player agents and their associated network connections. Information presented indicates that when players are recruited via this method, either the franchises or the player agent can assume the lead role. In all cases no matter who initiated the approach, all participating agents agreed that a target approach was the best tactic available, allowing promotion of players to the franchises who were generally believed to satisfy their specific player needs.



**Figure 5.1– A-League Football Franchise Recruitment System Framework**

The participating CEOs and agents insisted that completing due diligence proceedings surrounding potential recruits was an important part of the selection process, especially when they were recruiting foreign players. The ideal situation involved the franchise sending out a representative to review player performances in a *live* match setting. This is to ensure the players match the prerequisites of the franchise. When a situation developed where the franchises were unable to view live matches this process was completed by requesting recorded match footage from the player’s agent. It was further apparent that the next step in

the selection process hinged on the player's reputation and past career experience. Proven players were generally completed as straight signings, while young players or those whose background was relatively unknown were subject to player trial proceedings. Irrespective of a player's previous career path all new signings were subjected to the completion of a medical, a process which the franchises use as a risk limitation exercise and safeguarding mechanism surrounding resource investment. A player's reputation (level of experience and previous career path) was also shown to influence the level of negotiation during the recruitment process, with player agents insisting that real negotiation only involves the high profile players, in particular those with marquee status. While young players generally accepted the first offer because as unproven talent they are in no position to make demands.

Finally, in respect to contract negotiations, it appears from information presented by the player agents that each franchise employs different staffing structures and allocate this responsibility to different individuals. For some it is allocated to the CEO. For others it is either the head coach or football operations manager. These agents also implied that the status of the player being presented also often changed proceedings significantly, as negotiations involving marquee players were often conducted with the franchise's chairman or at times the owners.

### **5.2.2 Orientation and socialisation**

It appears that the methods and procedures that different franchises utilise to help their new recruits adjust, adapt, and settle into a new football environment vary greatly between the different franchises. Some franchises take this process rather seriously, while others show this to be an area of neglect. While other situations have been exposed showing that some new recruits on occasions have been left to their own devices.

The overall view presented by the respondents indicates that it is an area that is evolving, although there is still much work to do until A-League franchises catch up to the offerings of their European counterparts. The support and assistance a player receives from a franchise once again can be related back to the player's reputation. It was shown that the big name signings, especially marquee status players, received the most support. Often these recruits were provided with long-term accommodation, vehicles, and assistance for their families. Young local players, particularly those recruited into franchises' youth programmes, were shown to be provided with the least assistance and were often left on their own to find accommodation and additional employment. The support provided to foreign recruits was also shown to vary greatly between the franchises. Information presented by the respondents suggested that some franchises took a proactive approach introducing these new players to

members of their local expatriate community and provided non-English speaking player with English lessons. On other occasions particular franchises were shown to have provided very little or no assistance. The representative from the players' union stated that they were aware of situations where a player's request for English language assistance had been denied, as there is no legislative obligation for the franchise to provide this level of assistance.

All the player agents interviewed shared the view that because the franchises were the employers they should assume overall responsibility in relation to these processes. The player agents also stated they would get involved when they noticed levels of inadequacy, and therefore believed it to be a collaborative approach. The level of support provided by player agents was directly associated to the level of formality and the type of relationship existing between the agent and the player concerned. The agents who had long-term player management agreements in place were shown to be more active than their counterparts which were purely recruited to complete contract negotiation proceedings. The representative from the players union also agreed that it was a collective approach, as player welfare was a core pillar for their existence; therefore they needed to assume a certain level of responsibility and was an area they had earmarked for significant future development.

### **5.2.3 Training and Development**

It became very apparent that there are two sides to training and development procedures for A-League football players, one of which focused on their future football development and another focusing on personal development/future career options upon retirement. In relation to the first aspect, the participating CEOs all outlined how they employed a team of specialised staff members to assist the players with their own ongoing football development, their technical and tactical abilities along with the fitness components of the game. They also saw the development of the NYL as an internal player development pathway that they could use to meet short-run staffing needs and why one CEO stipulated that moving forward their NYL side will train and play in the same tactical manner as the first team. Player agents were also shown to play a leading role in their player's future career progression because they were continually looking for opportunities to attract interest from clubs located in higher quality leagues, with one particular agent even organising opportunities for players he represented to travel to Europe to train with high profile glamour clubs during the A-League off-season.

Personal development is another area where there is a certain amount of variance between the offerings of the different franchises. Some franchises have been particularly proactive and developed formal links with specific universities, while others have conducted their own in house development programs. Worryingly, some franchises have also been identified as

offering very little. The player agents were shown to willingly get involved in this aspect of their client's lives, but again the level of responsibility was heavily determined by the type of relationship between the two parties. Two specific agents, whose preferred approach encompassed the whole player management sphere, outlined how they utilise their own contacts to help their players develop additional skills which will assist them with career options post playing career. Again this was another area that the players' union was shown to be very proactive in, as they had developed a number of programs and had been responsible for negotiating a number of related components into the latest CBA. This was also an area the players' union had earmarked for future development to become one of their primary responsibilities. The view of the players' union was that franchises first and foremost priorities are always ongoing to be in relation to on-field performance matters.

#### **5.2.4 Contract Extension or Separation**

Whether or not a current player is offered a new contract was found to be determined by a few key determinants. The first determinant related back to the terms and conditions negotiated in the original contract, especially surrounding retention clauses. These clauses work by stipulating key performance index that players must achieve during the final 12 months of their contract (often around games played or goals scored) to automatically receive a new contract for an additional number of seasons. The popularity of these types of contracts received mixed reviews from the respondents. Some of the CEOs and agents revealed they looked to negotiate this clause into the majority of their contracts while others stated they generally preferred simple fixed term arrangements.

It was also deemed, from the information supplied by the participating CEOs that the review processes each franchise employed when deciding which players would remain and which would depart varies on levels of formality, along with the allocation of responsibility. One CEO talked about a group consisting of himself, the chairman, the head coach, and other coaching department members when required, who would meet regularly to discuss player performances to generate decisions about which players would be offered new deals. In contrast, at another franchise the method resembled little more than a conversation between the CEO and the head coach towards the end of the season to identify the players they were going to keep and the players they would let go. Overall player performances, the balance of power and also relationship contentment between the parties can be viewed as the three antecedents to player retention. Top performing players will have greater levels of demand and more potential options moving forward in comparison to their underperforming colleagues.

Once a player is released it is the responsibility of the player agents to assist the player with finding future football employment. The parameters for this new search are set by the agents in conjunction with a discussion with the related player. Given that the A-League is such a limited market, with currently only ten franchises and ten coaches' opinions that count, it is a relatively closed shop for players who find themselves on the outer. Therefore, in these scenarios the agents generally feel the players are better off looking at other leagues in Australia or additional overseas markets for future employment.

In regards to player retirement it appears that the franchises are not particularly active in assisting their former players through the transition period into the general workforce unless they have been a very loyal and long serving franchise stalwart. The transient nature of the game was one reason presented as to why this has occurred, with one CEO citing that because players come from far and wide on retirement "most of them just pack up their things and return home" (David, personal communication, July 29, 2013). However, as mentioned some of the franchises appear to feel a level of responsibility towards long serving players as the respondents reported numerous examples where franchises had helped such players transfer into non-playing employment located in other departments within their current A-League franchises.

Yet again the involvement of the player agent and level of responsibility felt by the player agent during this transition period related back to the nature of the relationship, as two agents whose business operated at different ends of the relationship spectrum revealed. The first agent who offered his clients a full management package actively assisted his players in identifying future potential career options they could transition into post career, while they were still playing. This agent then utilised his contacts and ensured each player completed any relevant training and ensured they gained experience so their transition was smooth. On the other hand the agent whose business was solely based around brokering deals held the opinion that it was the players own responsibility to think about their own future prior to career end. Finally, the players' union also believed they had a responsibility towards offering both free agents and retirees a level of support that was more substantial than the current ad hoc offerings. The players' union representative also outlined several potential programs that were currently up for discussion.

### 5.3 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

It can be concluded from the information provided by the respondents that there is no common approach to HR recruitment and retention in the A-League. Each franchise employs its own specific procedures which relate to their different staffing structures and allocation of responsibility. These results suggest that the HRM procedures employed by A-League franchises mirror those of organisations in the wider Australian business context, where the majority of the emphasis is placed on recruitment procedures to attract talent as opposed to focusing on internal mechanisms which encourages employee retention (Sheehan et al., 2006). During the recruitment phases the franchises were shown to operate now in a similar fashion to organisations in the wider business context. The recruitment of playing staff in A-League football franchises can be completed via both internal and external recruitment methods that at times may or may not rely on the involvement of a recruitment specialist (player agent).

Franchises have not always operated in this manner, as statistical analysis completed by the researcher showed that during the first three seasons A-League franchises solely relied on external sources (refer Tables A2 – A9, see Appendix). Scouting networks, coach networks, player networks and club networks, along with the involvement of player agents were the main methods identified. However, again the exact reliance the three participating franchises placed in each of these methods was an aspect which appeared to vary greatly between the franchises. The introduction of the NYL in season 2008/2009 changed recruitment practices as it created an opportunity for franchises to develop players internally. Subsequently, results demonstrate that player promotion from these youth sides has become a well utilised recruitment method since the youth leagues formation (refer Table 4.3).

In relation to the other three areas of the HRM framework investigated (orientation & socialisation, training & development, contract extension or separation) the results again showed that each franchise employs their own methods, with variances in levels of formality and responsibility. Utilising the categories and labels provided by Wiesner and McDonald (2001), the practices of some franchises are in line with a “bright prospect” scenario, having adopted formal aspects of the HRM framework. While other franchises are aligned with a “bleak house” scenario, suggesting limited involvement. Overall, the general feeling from the respondents was that while these were areas that A-League franchises were getting better at there was more that could and should be done. The general feeling was that there was much work to do if the A-League wanted to catch up to the practices employed by both other sporting codes based in Australia (especially AFL) and football leagues located in Europe. Moreover, A-League franchises should concern themselves with practices associated with

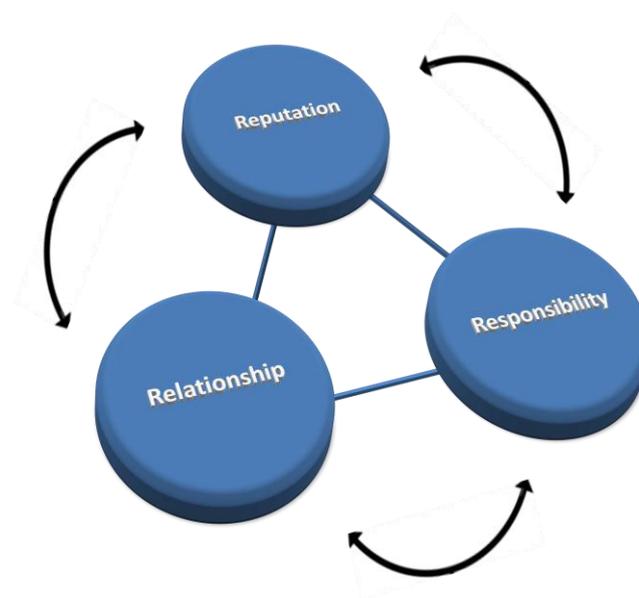
orientation and socialisation, along with training and development because previous research suggests that when these practices are completed successfully it aids employee performance and organisational trust and commitment. Induction programs foster familiarity, thereby allowing new employees to settle more swiftly, thus ensuring that performance and productivity quickly entail (Foot & Hook, 2011; Mathis & Jackson, 1999). Moreover, when used successfully both orientation and socialisation, along with training and development procedures also help to heighten organisational trust and commitment between both parties, which helps reduce conflict and feelings of uncertainty developing amongst current staff, thereby reducing current players feelings of necessity to explore additional opportunities at other clubs (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2009; Noe et al., 2010).

The role that player agents occupy in the framework was also investigated. During the recruitment process it appears that the franchises and player agents generally collaborate together when the franchises are looking to recruit either a high profile foreign signing who has specialised skill sets or a player for a specific position where the franchises' own search process has failed to identify a suitable recruit. A process in line with why organisations in the wider business context enlist the help of recruitment specialists (Lewis et al., 2007). The role and level of responsibility these agents then fulfil once these players have been recruited was shown to be heavily dependent of the type of relationship that existed between the player and his agent. Agents who develop long term player management relationships with their clients were shown to be more active in each of the three related areas. They accepted more responsibility to help their players adjust to new football environments, engage in future career development opportunities and in addition to provide support during career transition upon retirement.

It was also revealed that the players' union are determined to play a leading role in the three later categories of the A-League HR framework in the future and this is the reason why they are currently completing a review of their current offerings. At the present time this organisation offers very formal and well thought-out offers under the banner of training and development, while their offerings in terms of supporting players during settlement and career transition (free agency or retirement) are very ad hoc. However, a number of plans were outlined to rectify this situation moving forward.

Finally, as Figure 5.2 indicates the A-league recruitment and retention processes are heavily determined by aspects associated with relationships, responsibilities and reputations. It has been shown that external relationships held by individuals within franchises are often used as a way of identifying potential recruits, as are the relationships player agents have developed

with partnership agencies. These player agent relationships have been responsible for attracting a number of big name players with big reputations to the A-League. The relationship between a player agent and their client also plays an important role in determining the level of responsibility and support the agents offer the players in relation to player settlement, future career development and during the time of career transition. Offerings that can be seen to develop the player agents own reputation and differentiate themselves from their competitors. Different staffing structures of the franchises mean that different franchises allocate responsibility to different individuals to complete contract negotiation proceedings. However, the reputation of the player in some cases also influences who represents the franchises and is responsible for final sign off of the negotiated terms. A player's reputation heavily determines the way the selection proceedings unfold and whether the players are straight signings or are subject to trials. Furthermore, a player's reputation also influences the level of negotiation during contract discussions and the amount of support they receive on arrival. Finally, it appears that the relationship that the players' union is building with the FFA and the franchises is going to translate into the players' union taking on more responsibility in regards to player welfare, which is only going to enhance that organisation's reputation.



**Figure 5.2 – Three Main Determinates that Influence A-League Recruitment and Retention Processes**

## 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendation section has been separated into two parts. The first sets out recommendations for future practices for the A-League, while the second focuses on offering potential directions for future research.

### 5.4.1 Recommendations for the A-League

A key objective of the study is to construct a series of recommendations that will allow all current and future expansion A-League franchises to develop more sustainable HRM strategies, especially around player recruitment and retention procedures. Four key recommendations are generated, one in relation to each aspect of the “A-League specific” HRM model (refer Figure 4.1).

1. *Recruitment and Selection:* A-League football franchises’ playing rosters should be comprised of both internally developed and externally acquired playing resources, as research shows that teams constructed inline with this method can generate advantages through group diversity after a short blend-in period. Since the internally developed players have graduated through the franchises’ youth system they are organisation specific and have strong bonds to the organisation. Externally acquired resources are developed by other clubs and have knowledge about other playing tactics and playing styles, experiences that help develop team diversity, open-mindedness, flexibility and creativeness thereby enhancing the teams competitiveness and adaptability (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2012) (refer section 2.7.3). When recruiting from external markets the franchises should develop long-term relationships with trusted player agents who can assist in recruiting players with a reasonable reputation, as it is this reputation that engages with the fans and attracts spectators to the stadium on match day.
2. *Orientation and Socialisation:* On entry to the league all new players, both local and foreign, should be provided with a formal induction program tailored to their specific needs. The players’ union should be given the responsibility by the FFA to implement this induction camp, as outlined by the players’ union respondent and based upon the AFL players’ union current offering, as soon as possible (refer to section 4.5.2). Furthermore, all non-English speaking players should be provided with English lesson on arrival. Overall, both of these practices should help speed up the assimilation process and help all new recruits to settle into their new environments, particularly foreigners. Furthermore, all players should be shown to receive that same

amount of support from the youngest players in the league through to those with the biggest reputations.

3. *Training and Development:* The general consensus in this area indicates that more should be done. Therefore, all players occupying the three compulsory under 20 player allocation position on each franchise roster should be required to be enrolled in educational courses while contracted. This will ensure these players will have alternative career options in the event they are released from the league. The players' union, in conjunction with the franchises, should assume responsibility for ensuring this takes place. Implementing this practice should increase the A-League's reputation and standing in the Australian sports community as an organisation that is proactive about providing players with future career development opportunities.

4. *Contract Extensions and Separation:* The players' union, as it has identified, should develop more formalised programs and shift away from the current ad hoc offering to players in transition (free agency or retirees). The players' union should be encouraged to develop "free agent" player tournaments which non-contracted players can use to showcase their skills to potential employers. Since the A-League is such a small market running this tournament in conjunction with other player unions in the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) would allow these players greater exposure to potential employers. A process which is implemented by International Federation of Professional Footballers (FIFpro) European division consisting of 24 member unions (UEFA, 2012b). In relation to retirees a formal system should be implemented which develops relationships with these players and guides them through the first two to three years post career, supporting them during the transition period and assisting them with future career development opportunities.

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

The first two recommendations offered for future research allows the proposed HRM framework to be applied to firstly, another study in the same context (football), but with a different case-study (not A-League), then secondly, a different context (not football) in the same sporting industry (Australia). The third recommendation looks to apply the research context (HRM framework) and apply it to a different aspect of the sports industry (e.g. Sports Media).

1. Same context (football), different case-study (not A-league) – A comparative study involving other football leagues, for example, Major League Soccer (MSL) franchises located in North America. The study would test this football specific model to determine if it relates to other football franchises in another market. The MLS is deemed most appropriate for testing the model as it shares a number of similar operating procedures. It is a closed league system with a tightly enforced salary cap with marquee player proviso, while also regulating the recruitment of foreign players via a quota system. A longitudinal approach would also allow conclusions to be generated on how participating franchises' HRM systems have evolved over time since the league's inception.
2. Same industry (sport), different context (not football) – A comparative study involving other sporting codes and competitions, for example, Australian National Basketball League (ANBL) franchises to deem if this model appropriately describes the HRM practices of another franchise sporting system in the Australian sport market. Again this particular league was chosen as it shares many similarities. The ANBL is located on the periphery of the basketball world; it has a similar number of franchises to the A-League, including a team domiciled in New Zealand, as well as utilising a salary cap and player quota system.
3. Difference industry (e.g. Sports Media), same context (HRM, recruitment) – This study proposes investigating the HRM recruitment systems retirees are subject to post career, when transitioning into sports media roles. To assess whether the three identified determinants of relationships, responsibilities (agents and franchises), and reputations (outspoken players, star performers, sportsmanship) influence the recruitment process.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Additional Findings Tables**

**Table A1 – A-League Players Country of Origin (Full List)**

| <b>Country</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Country</b>      | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Australia        | 483              | 65.9           | Portugal            | 2                | 0.3            |
| New Zealand      | 40               | 5.5            | Ghana               | 2                | 0.3            |
| Brazil           | 37               | 5              | Spain               | 2                | 0.3            |
| England          | 30               | 4.1            | Solomon Islands     | 2                | 0.3            |
| Netherlands      | 18               | 2.5            | Thailand            | 2                | 0.3            |
| Scotland         | 13               | 1.8            | Wales               | 2                | 0.3            |
| Argentina        | 10               | 1.4            | Austria             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Japan            | 8                | 1.1            | Albania             | 1                | 0.1            |
| China            | 7                | 1              | Bahrain             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Croatia          | 7                | 1              | Colombia            | 1                | 0.1            |
| South Korea      | 7                | 1              | Denmark             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Costa Rica       | 5                | 0.7            | Ecuador             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Ireland          | 5                | 0.7            | Finland             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Italy            | 5                | 0.7            | France              | 1                | 0.1            |
| Switzerland      | 5                | 0.7            | Iraq                | 1                | 0.1            |
| German           | 4                | 0.5            | Liberia             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Belgium          | 3                | 0.4            | Slovakia            | 1                | 0.1            |
| Cote d'ivoire    | 3                | 0.4            | Togo                | 1                | 0.1            |
| Uruguay          | 3                | 0.4            | Trinidad and Tobago | 1                | 0.1            |
| USA              | 3                | 0.4            | Uganda              | 1                | 0.1            |
| Canada           | 2                | 0.3            | Ukraine             | 1                | 0.1            |
| Eritrea          | 2                | 0.3            | Serbia              | 1                | 0.1            |
| Northern Ireland | 2                | 0.3            | Slovenia            | 1                | 0.1            |
| Panama           | 2                | 0.3            |                     |                  |                |
|                  |                  |                | <b>Total</b>        | <b>733</b>       | <b>100</b>     |

**Table A2 – A-League Player Transfers in Season 2005/2006**

| <b>Season 2005/06</b>  | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Transfer in - State    | 75               | 39.7           |
| Transfer in - NSL      | 41               | 21.7           |
| Transfer in - AFC      | 14               | 7.4            |
| Transfer in - CAF      | 2                | 1.1            |
| Transfer in - CONMEBOL | 4                | 2.1            |
| Transfer in - OFC      | 4                | 2.1            |
| Transfer in - UEFA     | 47               | 24.9           |
| State IS               | 1                | 0.5            |
| AIS                    | 1                | 0.5            |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>189</b>       | <b>100</b>     |

**Table A3 -- A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2006/2007**

| Season 2006/07                | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Transfer in - State           | 35        | 13      |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 4         | 1.5     |
| Transfer in - CAF             | 1         | 0.4     |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 3         | 1.1     |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 3         | 1.1     |
| Transfer in - OFC             | 5         | 1.9     |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 22        | 8.1     |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 7         | 2.6     |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 2         | 0.7     |
| Transfer out - State          | 23        | 8.5     |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 3         | 1.1     |
| Transfer out - CONCACAF       | 1         | 0.4     |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 1         | 0.4     |
| Transfer out - OFC            | 4         | 1.5     |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 27        | 10      |
| Retired                       | 3         | 1.1     |
| Transition - Coaching Staff   | 1         | 0.4     |
| Free Agent                    | 3         | 1.1     |
| Retained                      | 107       | 39.6    |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 15        | 5.6     |
| Total                         | 270       | 100     |

**Table A4 – A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2007/2008**

| Season 2008/09                | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Transfer in - State           | 26        | 9.7     |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 2         | 0.7     |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 3         | 1.1     |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 4         | 1.5     |
| Transfer in - OFC             | 1         | 0.4     |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 20        | 7.5     |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 8         | 3       |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 2         | 0.7     |
| Promoted - Youth League       | 5         | 1.9     |
| Transfer in - Youth League    | 1         | 0.4     |
| Transfer out - State          | 25        | 9.3     |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 6         | 2.2     |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 7         | 2.6     |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 1         | 0.4     |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 9         | 3.4     |
| Retired                       | 5         | 1.9     |
| Transition - Coaching Staff   | 1         | 0.4     |
| Free Agent                    | 5         | 1.9     |
| Retained                      | 116       | 43.3    |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 21        | 7.8     |
| Total                         | 268       | 100     |

**Table A5 – A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2008/2009**

| <b>Season 2008/09</b>         | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Transfer in - State           | 26               | 9.7            |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 2                | 0.7            |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 3                | 1.1            |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 4                | 1.5            |
| Transfer in - OFC             | 1                | 0.4            |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 20               | 7.5            |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 8                | 3              |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 2                | 0.7            |
| Promoted - Youth League       | 5                | 1.9            |
| Transfer in - Youth League    | 1                | 0.4            |
| Transfer out - State          | 25               | 9.3            |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 6                | 2.2            |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 7                | 2.6            |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 1                | 0.4            |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 9                | 3.4            |
| Retired                       | 5                | 1.9            |
| Transition - Coaching Staff   | 1                | 0.4            |
| Free Agent                    | 5                | 1.9            |
| Retained                      | 116              | 43.3           |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 21               | 7.8            |
| Total                         | 268              | 100            |

**Table A6 – A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2009/2010**

| <b>Season 2009/10</b>         | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Transfer in - State           | 32               | 9.7            |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 6                | 1.8            |
| Transfer in - CAF             | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 3                | 0.9            |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 6                | 1.8            |
| Transfer in - OFC             | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 43               | 13.1           |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 2                | 0.6            |
| Promoted - Youth League       | 21               | 6.4            |
| Transfer in - Youth League    | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer out - State          | 25               | 7.6            |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 9                | 2.7            |
| Transfer out - CONCACAF       | 3                | 0.9            |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 9                | 2.7            |
| Retired                       | 8                | 2.4            |
| Free Agent                    | 3                | 0.9            |
| Retained                      | 115              | 35             |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 37               | 11.2           |
| Total                         | 329              | 100            |

**Table A7 -- A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2010/2011**

| <b>Season 2010/11</b>         | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Transfer in - State           | 18               | 5              |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 6                | 1.7            |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 5                | 1.4            |
| Transfer in - OFC             | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 34               | 9.4            |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 10               | 2.8            |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 1                | 0.3            |
| Promoted - Youth League       | 9                | 2.5            |
| Transfer in - Youth League    | 3                | 0.8            |
| Transfer out - State          | 27               | 7.5            |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 16               | 4.4            |
| Transfer out - CONCACAF       | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer out - OFC            | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 19               | 5.2            |
| Retired                       | 4                | 1.1            |
| Free Agent                    | 8                | 2.2            |
| Retained                      | 158              | 43.6           |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 36               | 9.9            |
| Total                         | 362              | 100            |

**Table A8 -- A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2011/2012**

| <b>Season 2011/12</b>         | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Transfer in - State           | 13               | 3.6            |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 7                | 2              |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 30               | 8.4            |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 7                | 2              |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 3                | 0.8            |
| Promoted - Youth League       | 13               | 3.6            |
| Transfer out - State          | 36               | 10.1           |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 16               | 4.5            |
| Transfer out - CONCACAF       | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 3                | 0.8            |
| Transfer out - OFC            | 2                | 0.6            |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 16               | 4.5            |
| Retired                       | 5                | 1.4            |
| Transition - Coaching Staff   | 3                | 0.8            |
| Free Agent                    | 9                | 2.5            |
| Retained                      | 139              | 38.8           |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 50               | 14             |
| Total                         | 358              | 100            |

**Table A9 -- A-League Player Transfers In and Out Season 2012/2013**

| <b>Season 2012/13</b>         | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Transfer in - State           | 14               | 3.8            |
| Transfer in - AFC             | 13               | 3.6            |
| Transfer in - CONCACAF        | 4                | 1.1            |
| Transfer in - COMEBOL         | 4                | 1.1            |
| Transfer in - OFC             | 7                | 1.9            |
| Transfer in - UEFA            | 31               | 8.5            |
| Transfer in - AIS             | 6                | 1.6            |
| Transfer in - State IS        | 4                | 1.1            |
| Promoted - Youth League       | 18               | 4.9            |
| Transfer in - Youth League    | 3                | 0.8            |
| Transfer out - State          | 23               | 6.3            |
| Transfer out - AFC            | 19               | 5.2            |
| Transfer out - CONCACAF       | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer out - COMEBOL        | 1                | 0.3            |
| Transfer out - UEFA           | 16               | 4.4            |
| Retired                       | 6                | 1.6            |
| Transition - Coaching Staff   | 1                | 0.3            |
| Free Agent                    | 14               | 3.8            |
| Retained                      | 136              | 37.3           |
| Transfer btw Clubs - A-League | 44               | 12.1           |
| Total                         | 365              | 100            |

**Table A10 – Local Players versus Marquee Players: Average Number of Club, Seasons and Age on League Entry.**

| <b>Player Status</b> | <b>Clubs</b> |          | <b>Seasons</b> |          | <b>Age</b>  |          |
|----------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|                      | <b>Mean</b>  | <b>#</b> | <b>Mean</b>    | <b>#</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>#</b> |
| Local                | 1.47         | 514      | 2.93           | 514      | 22.73       | 514      |
| Marquee              | 1.70         | 27       | 2.74           | 27       | 31.07       | 27       |

**Table A11 – A-League Franchises Utilisation of Marquee Players Season  
2005/06 – 2012/13**

|                                 | 2005/06          | 2006/07          | 2007/08          | 2008/09             | 2009/10             | 2010/11             | 2011/12             | 2012/13                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Adelaide United</b>          | –                | –                | –                | –                   | –                   | Marco Flores (I)    | Sergio Van Dijk (I) | –                        |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | Dario Vidusic (A)   | Dario Vidusic (A)        |
| <b>Brisbane Roar</b>            | –                | Danny Tiatto (M) | Craig Moore (M)  | Craig Moore (M)     | Craig Moore (M)     | Thomas Broich (I)   | Thomas Broich (I)   | Thomas Broich (I)        |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | –                   | –                        |
| <b>Central Coast Mariners</b>   | –                | Tony Vidmar (M)  | Tony Vidmar (M)  | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                        |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | –                   | –                        |
| <b>Gold Coast United</b>        |                  |                  |                  |                     | Jason Culina (M)    | –                   | –                   |                          |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | Jason Culina (A)    | –                   |                          |
| <b>Melbourne Heart</b>          |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | Fred (I)            | Fred (I)                 |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | –                   | –                        |
| <b>Melbourne Victory</b>        | –                | –                | –                | Archie Thompson (M) | Archie Thompson (M) | Richardinho (I)     | Harry Kewell (I)    | Marco Flores (I)         |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | Archie Thompson (A) | Archie Thompson (A) | Archie Thompson (A)      |
| <b>Newcastle Jets</b>           | –                | –                | Mario Jardel (M) | Edmundo Zura (M)    | Fabio Vignaroli (M) | –                   | –                   | Emile Heskey (I)         |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | –                   | –                        |
| <b>New Zealand Knights</b>      | –                | –                |                  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                          |
| <b>North Queensland Fury</b>    |                  |                  |                  |                     | Robbie Fowler (M)   | –                   |                     |                          |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   |                     |                          |
| <b>Perth Glory</b>              | –                | –                | –                | –                   | Mile Sterjovski (M) | Robbie Fowler (I)   | –                   | –                        |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | –                   | Shane Smeltz (A)    | Shane Smeltz (A)         |
| <b>Sydney FC</b>                | Dwight Yorke (M) | –                | Juninho (M)      | –                   | John Aloisi (M)     | –                   | Brett Emerton (I)   | Alessandro Del Piero (I) |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | Nicky Carle (A)     | Nicky Carle (A)     | Brett Emerton (A)        |
| <b>Wellington Phoenix</b>       |                  |                  | –                | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                   | –                        |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     | Jade North (A)      | –                   | –                        |
| <b>Western Sydney Wanderers</b> |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     |                     |                     | Shinji Ono (I)           |
|                                 |                  |                  |                  |                     |                     |                     |                     | –                        |

Nb: Original each franchise was only allowed to sign one "Marquee" (M) player per season, however this provision was extended prior to season 2010/2011 allowing all franchises the opportunity to sign both an "International" (I) and "Australian" (A) Marquee Player.

## Appendix B: Participant Introduction Letter



Alec Wilson  
Auckland University of Technology,  
AUT North Shore Campus, Akoranga Drive,  
Northcote, 0627  
New Zealand

May 6, 2013

[REDACTED]

Attn: [REDACTED]  
**Chief Executive Officer**

I am writing to you to extend an invitation for your A-League Football Franchise to participate in a study which focuses on recruitment, registration and retention of players within the A-League. This research will contribute to the completion of a Master of Business (Sport Management).

The aim of my thesis is to assess and review the current processes A-League Clubs employ to recruit and retain key staff, especially that of players and coaches. Findings will allow recommendations to be generated on how franchises can develop more sustainable human resource management policies and practice.

Participation in the study is voluntary and any information you do provide will be treated with the strictest of confidence with privacy been assured during the reporting process, as only pseudonyms will be used.

There are no significant costs associated with participating in this study, all that I require would be the opportunity to conduct a 60-90 minute interview with yourself or another appropriate staff member, such as a your football operations manager.

This interview would be organised for a time and place that best suits the interviewee and will be completed in person or via Skype / phone.

If you are willing to participate or have any questions surrounding the study then feel free to contact me, or my supervisor via email or phone (details below).

Alec Wilson – AUT student researcher  
Email: [alec.wilson1982@gmail.com](mailto:alec.wilson1982@gmail.com)  
Phone: +64 21 508 282

Richard Wright –Head of AUT Sports Business Research Group  
Email: [richard.wright@aut.ac.nz](mailto:richard.wright@aut.ac.nz)  
Phone: +64 9 921 9999 ext 7312

Yours Sincerely

Alec Wilson

# Participant Information Sheet



**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

19 April 2013

**Project Title**

Recruitment, registration, & retention of talented foreigners: A review of HRM practices and player recruitment strategies of A-League Football Franchises.

**An Invitation**

My name is Alec Wilson, and I am a current Masters student at AUT University. I have also spent a number of years working in the football industry both as a player (including a period in the Victorian Premier League) and now currently as a football development coach, for a local Auckland based club.

You are invited to participate in my research which uses a human resource management approach to investigate player recruitment and retention practices of A-League football franchises. This research will contribute to the completion of a Master of Business (Sport management) qualification. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and any person or organisation that contributes may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the data collection.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research is to complete a thesis project to complete a Masters degree in Business majoring in Sport and Recreation Management. The overriding aim of my thesis is to investigate the applicability and application of HRM within the sporting internationalisation of A-League Football Franchises. Research objectives will be completed by assessing and reviewing (a) current trends and patterns surrounding the recruitment, registration, and retention of visa players and foreign coaches since the inception of the A-League. (b) HRM practices implemented by A-League franchises. The finding will allow recommendations to be generated on how current and future franchises can develop more sustainable HRM and player recruitment/retention strategies.

**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

The recruitment and selection process involved in this project is the following. An initial contact was made with each A-League football franchise from contact details provided on their official websites. Each franchise was then emailed with an official letter outlining my course of study. You have been invited to participate in this research due to the position you hold as the head of your A-league Franchise.

**What will happen in this research?**

This project involves completing semi-structured interviews with each selected participant, lasting no more than 1.5 hours. These interviews where possible will be completed face to face, however in situations where this is not possible they will be completed via Skype or phone. Each interview will be recorded (when permitted) and transcribed verbatim. Following the transcription process, recurring themes will be highlighted and subsequently subtracted and discussed in relation to the research aims and objectives.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

It is anticipated that the research will have none/minimal discomforts or risk associated with it, as the researcher will ensure that the data collection method will protect all participants from discomfort.

#### How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

If a situation does arise where a participant does experience discomfort or feel at risk they can (a) choose not to answer the related questions or (b) withdraw themselves and/or any information that has been provided for the project at any time prior to the completion of data collection without being disadvantaged in anyway. With such a withdrawal all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed. Also all participants will have access to a copy of their documented transcript to ensure their comments have not been taken out of context.

#### What are the benefits?

The benefits of this research project are two-fold. For the Researcher it will allow for the completion of both a Thesis project and a Masters of Business degree. In regards to the participants and their A-League franchises the findings will allow recommendations to be generated on how current and future franchises can develop more sustainable HRM and player recruitment/retention strategies. All participants/A-League franchises involved will receive a summary of the research key findings and if they also desire a copy of the final assessed thesis can also be made available (upon request).

#### How will my privacy be protected?

All participants that supply information during the data collection process will be assured that all the information that they have supplied will be treated as confidential. To ensure confidence and privacy during the final reporting process no participant will be seen as identifiable, as only pseudonyms will be used.

| <u>Actual terminology</u>     | <u>Terminology used in final report</u>            |
|-------------------------------|--|
| A-League franchises name      | A current foundation franchise....                 |
| Overseas Football Club name   | Was signed from a European based club....          |
| A players name                | When a former notable International was signed...  |
| A current franchises employee | The CEO of an expansion franchise believed that... |

#### What are the costs of participating in this research?

In terms of cost, participant time is the only significant cost required from participating individuals. Interviews will last no more than 1 hours. The only other time that the participants will be required to divert to this project would be to read and complete associated documentation e.g. Information sheets, consent forms or review interview transcripts (optional, if participants want to ensure comments have not been taken out of context).

#### What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Each participant will have at least 1month (minimum) to consider participating in this research project. In relation to the project timeline interviews with recruited participants are scheduled to be completed during the months of July and August.

#### How do I agree to participate in this research?

Individual and their associated A-League franchises that agree to participate in this research need to do so in writing to the researcher (contact details are provided). Once agreement to participate has been received the researcher will distribute a consent form which needs to be completed prior to the conduction of an interview. In regards to completing the interview the researcher will make contact at a later date with the individual to organise a suitable time and completion date.

#### Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

All participants/A-League franchises involved will be receive a summary of the research key findings surrounding how current and future franchises can develop more sustainable HRM and player

recruitment/retention strategies. Furthermore a copy of the final assessed thesis can also be made available (upon request).

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Sean Phelps, [sean.phelps@aut.ac.nz](mailto:sean.phelps@aut.ac.nz), +64 9 921 9999 ext 7094

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6902.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Alec John Wilson, AUT Master of Business Student,  
Email: [a.j.wilson\\_17@hotmail.com](mailto:a.j.wilson_17@hotmail.com) Phone: +64 21 508 282

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

1. Dr Sean Phelps, Lecturer, School of Sport & Recreation, Building AF AUT North Shore Campus, Akoranga Drive, North Shore City, NZ.  
Email: [sean.phelps@aut.ac.nz](mailto:sean.phelps@aut.ac.nz) Phone: +64 9 921 9999 ext 7094
2. Dr Richard Wright, Lecturer, School of Sport & Recreation, Building AF AUT North Shore Campus, Akoranga Drive, North Shore City, NZ.  
Email: [richard.wright@aut.ac.nz](mailto:richard.wright@aut.ac.nz) Phone: +64 9 921 9999 ext 7312

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23/04/2013, AUTEK Reference number 13/43

## Appendix D: Consent Form

### Consent Form



**Project title:** Recruitment, registration, & retention of talented foreigners: A review of HRM practices and player recruitment strategies of A-League Football Franchises.

**Project Supervisors:** Dr Sean Phelps, Dr Richard Wright

**Researcher:** Alec John Wilson

- i. I have read and understand the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet. Dated: ..../..../.....
- ii. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- iii. I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- iv. I would like to receive a copy of the transcribed interviews to ensure it is a true and fair reflection of what I have said in the interview (please tick one).  
Yes  No
- vi. I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- vii. If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- viii. I understand and agree with the provisions taken to protect privacy and that my anonymity whilst protected cannot be guaranteed.
- ix. I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one).  
Yes  No
- x. I agree to take part in this research.

**Participant's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participants contact details:**

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Ph Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23/04/2013,

AUTEC Reference number 13/43

## **Appendix E: Interview Schedule**

**Table E1 – A Summary of the Interview Schedule**

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### **Phase 1 – Introduction**

*Aim:* Outline the structure of the interview including its expected duration, overall aims and to reinforce confidentiality for the participant. During this phase initial discussion will centre on the researchers and participants background in football and reasons for interest in the topic.

### **Phase 2 – Human Resource Planning**

*Aim:* To explore the planning processes that clubs have used to configure their playing and coaching departments. Identify who was responsible for setting the overall strategic direction for player recruitment and development.

### **Phase 3 – Recruitment and Selection**

*Aim:* To understand the methods and practices utilised for the recruitment and selection of football specific staff (players and coaches). While at the same time construct an understanding of the individual roles of the key stakeholders involved in the recruitment process (e.g. Club representative, Player agent, Scouting network).

### **Phase 4 – Orientation and Socialisation**

*Aim:* To explore the methods which clubs utilises to integrate new football specific staff into their set ups, how they are familiarised with the club culture and working environment.

### **Phase 5 – Training and Development**

*Aim:* To examine how the club assists players and coaches with ongoing development, not only from a football standpoint but also personal development.

### **Phase 6 – Performance Management**

*Aim:* To develop an understanding of the methods that clubs employ to manage and maintain the performance of football specific staff.

### **Phase 7 – Contract Extension and Separation**

*Aim:* To outline the processes that clubs employ when it comes time to make decision surrounding the retention or release of football specific staff.

### **Phase 8 – End**

*Aim:* Express and appreciation of the participant's time and articulation of their experiences and offer an opportunity for further classification and/or dialogue.

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