

In pursuit of 'what might be':
Exploring the use of design thinking
in sport organisations

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Certificate of original authorship

I, James Gregory Joachim, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the UTS Business School at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

[Greg Joachim signature – removed for publication]

23 February 2021

Note about thesis format and presentation

This thesis is submitted in compilation format and includes four journal articles: two published, one in revision, and one under review. First, an opening chapter introduces the thesis and the overall doctoral project. Thereafter, each component study is presented within a dedicated chapter. Finally, a discussion chapter concludes the thesis by highlighting key findings, implications, contributions, and opportunities for future work.

While the component journal articles are presented in this thesis in accordance with the format required by their corresponding journal publication or submission, three broad changes have been made for the clarity and coherence of the thesis as a discrete document. First, all tables and figures have been renumbered in line with the thesis numbering system rather than that of each individual article. Second, in lieu of placing a reference list at the end of each component article, the references for each article have instead been consolidated into the master reference list at the end of the thesis. Finally, to ensure ease of reading and grammatical consistency throughout the thesis, the text of each journal article has been converted to Australian English (ise/yse) where necessary.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis – along with all of the effort that went into creating it, and all of the outcomes it has generated and will hopefully continue to generate – to the memory of my paternal grandmother:

Eva Pearl Joachim (née Vanscoy)

As with all undertakings throughout my life – from my earliest handwriting lessons through to my undergraduate and masters degrees – I have approached my doctoral research in a way that I hope would have made her proud. I wish I could take this thesis to her house after school, as I did those sheets of handwriting practice. Her idea of my potential was always greater than my own. As a result, my work would always impress her, but it would never surprise her. If there is a higher form of praise, it is not known to me.

Her relationship with me was hardly a unique case. She distributed love as she distributed Nilla Wafers: frequently and generously. The walls of any room she was in reverberated with this warmth – it enveloped all those who were in her company. She was the Sun in many a personal solar system.

I miss her every day, but she lives on not only in my heart but in the hearts of all who had the pleasure of knowing her. We continue to orbit around her eternal warmth.



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First, thank you to my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Nico Schulenkorf. This project began with Nico and I enjoying a beer at the Manly Wharf in the months after I had completed my MBA at UTS. During those MBA studies I had been particularly invigorated by key concepts to which Nico introduced me in his sport management subjects. I suspected there was more to learn, and it took Nico all of about five minutes to convince me that there were indeed further and compelling depths to explore through a doctoral study. From that day and throughout this entire process I have never felt any less than completely supported by him. He is not only my valued mentor, but also a true friend.

I would also like to sincerely thank my alternate supervisor, Dr. Stephen Frawley, and co-supervisor, Associate Professor Katie Schlenker for their considerate and thoughtful guidance throughout this project. Their influence on my development and this project was invaluable. Likewise, thank you to Dr. Adam Cohen for guidance both professional and personal in the latter stages of my candidature.

I also owe a great debt of gratitude to the Sydney Sixers organisation and front office staff. As an introvert, the component of my project which most intimidated me was that of data collection. However, by embracing my presence with warmth, patience, and ceaseless good humour, the Sixers made data collection the part of my project that I will remember with the greatest fondness. Smash 'em, Sixers!

Thank you also to UTS and the UTS Business School for hosting my doctoral candidature and providing a UTS Doctoral Scholarship and the Gordon Young Memorial Scholarship to financially support it. In particular I would like to acknowledge Associate Professor Hussain Rammal, Associate Professor Bhuva Narayan, Associate Professor Daryl Adair, and Professor Peter Fleming for their various forms of support at key times in the project. I would

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I would also like to acknowledge the support of family and friends. Naturally, I owe a great debt of personal gratitude for a lifetime of support from my parents, Diana and Don. Casey offered, as always, unwavering moral support. Zina kept my mind sharp with philosophical conversations neither of us ever wanted to conclude. Jake is to blame for introducing me to cricket, not realising he would become data one day. After I became enchanted with the sport, Safaa attended more matches with me than can reasonably be counted. I was also ceaselessly supported by my wife’s parents and sisters – my Australian family.

I would also like to acknowledge my bone-deep roots as an Appalachian-American born and raised in West ‘By God’ Virginia and educated at West Virginia University. Long ago I adopted the motto of the state – *Montani Semper Liberi* (‘Mountaineers [are] always free’) – as my own motto because it highlights an unimpeachable truth about those who come from the West Virginia hills: we are free in a way that nobody from within or without can take away. Existentially, we are as unassailable as the mountains themselves. Though I now live in Australia, where “the radio reminds me of my home far away” (Danoff, Denver, & Nivert, 1971), my ties to Appalachia and West Virginia remain strong, as they forever shall.

Oh, the West Virginia hills! I must bid you now adieu.

In my home beyond the mountains I shall ever dream of you;

In the evening time of life, if my Father only wills,

I shall still behold the vision of those West Virginia hills.

(Engle, 1886)

Finally, my deepest thanks of all are owed to my wife, Claire. On our wedding day I shared these feelings with our guests:

She walked toward me today with ethereal fluidity, her movement in step with one of nature's most ancient yet fleeting cadences. Hers is a rare grace to which she allows only a select few to tune their senses. Those who behold her grace embrace slumber each night in the hope they will experience it again in a dream.

After my own first, oneiric encounter with that grace, I promptly chased it over mountains, deserts, and oceans. It is not a dream from which I am eager to wake.

Hers is not a melody I am capable of ignoring.

In step with this cadence and melody, The Girl continues to let me write verses of her song with her. Were I not doing that writing with her, I would not have been able to do the writing which generated this thesis. To both ends, her support has been unwavering.

Thanks for everything, Bear.

Preface

Marty: Hey Doc, we better back up. We don't have enough road to get up to 88 [miles per hour].

Doc Brown: Roads? Where we're going, we don't need *roads*.

In the above exchange – which constitutes the final scene of one of my favourite movies, *Back to the Future* (Zemeckis, 1985) – teenager Marty McFly demonstrates an unfortunate lack of imagination. He has limited his thinking to the predictable parameters of the world he knows and is used to – a world where cars are almost exclusively driven on roads (and always on the ground). Despite his youth (and having only moments earlier witnessed Doc Brown feed organic matter into his time-traveling DeLorean's 'Mr. Fusion' power generator), Marty doesn't consider that there might be a way to get the DeLorean up to 88 miles per hour – the speed at which the car time travels – without a long enough length of road on which to accelerate. Doc Brown prompts him to free his imagination from the need for roads just before the car lifts into the sky and rockets up to 88 miles per hour and into the future.

We have all been the Marty in the car at one point or another – perhaps at many points. Our brain runs on autopilot and we go through rote repetitions of the way things have always been done. As the old saying goes: 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

In undertaking this research project, I have rejected any such notion. In fact, the very framing of this phrase restricts our way of interpreting and engaging with it. To suggest that only broken things can be fixed suggests that fixing is inherently (and exclusively) a response to a negative; that by trying to improve something we are implicitly suggesting there is something wrong with it – that it is in some way broken.

But this is simplistic framing. By liberating ourselves from such conceptual shackles we are free to reinterpret problems and opportunities. Suddenly we can begin to approach perfection with things we previously would not have touched until they became problematic. We can stop and ask: why *is* that the way we have always done things – and should we still be doing them that way?

When we wait for things to be broken before investing any energy or other resources into them, we find ourselves having to put out fires even as they ignite. If we transcend such limited thinking, we could use the time we currently sit around waiting for fires to start to instead start investigating, say, the *cause* of the fires. We can attempt to cure the disease rather than trying to mitigate the harm of the symptoms.

What we are not freed from in this course of action are the practical restrictions imposed by resource limitations. Many of us do not have the luxury of daydreaming about flying cars when the needs of the present moment dominate our attention and cognitive capacity. Even if we had the time to imagine such things, acquiring the funding and other resources required to make those dreams into a reality is another mountain sometimes even more difficult to climb.

What we all *can* do, however, is make real the impacts that something like a flying car would offer. For it is not necessarily the flying car that people want, but the outcomes that a flying car could generate – concepts like the freedom to explore the unpaved world, among others. While a flying car requires several feats of engineering, generating freedom of exploration is somewhat easier – indeed, it is downright *achievable*. Further, unlike a new technology that must be researched and developed, such freedom is something we can have *now*.

This thesis aims to show how and why we might fix what ain't broke – and when it gets up to 88 miles per hour, you're going to see some serious shit.

Nothing in the world, I thought to myself,
is as old as what was futuristic in the past.

- Ben Lerner, *10:04*

Abstract

This doctoral project is concerned with the use of design thinking in the field of sport management. Design thinking is a human-centred approach to generating value for users which makes the thinking and the doing of expert designers accessible to practitioners in non-design fields (Brown, 2009; Carlgren, Rauth, & Elmquist, 2016). At the outset of this project design thinking had received no attention in the field of sport management, despite representing a potential means of overcoming user-centric challenges currently faced by sport organisations.

The project began with a scoping study, which allowed for the review and rapid mapping of existing literature in the field. Findings of the scoping study revealed the existence of at least nominal design thinking alignment in each sport organisation captured in reviewed articles. Sport organisations which align with all five themes of design thinking were found to share traits which represent points of entry for the possible implementation of design thinking practice into the field.

To explore how such engagement with design thinking might unfold in sport management practice, a case study was undertaken with the Sydney Sixers, one of eight clubs in the Big Bash League, Australia's professional Women's and Men's Twenty20 (T20) cricket competition. The initial exploration revealed the existing practice of the Sixers to be aligned with all five themes of design thinking, which suggested they were capable of the performative component of design thinking and needed only to engage with the ostensive component – the *idea*. A subsequent intervention sought to initiate engagement with the ostensive component by identifying a design activity which would both suit the Sixers' preferred way of working and maintain, if not enhance, their existing links to design thinking themes. A structured brainstorming activity known as the Lightning Decision Jam (LDJ)

achieved these objectives. Thereafter, the final study explored the Sixers' adoption of the LDJ into their ongoing practice and planning cycle.

Six contributions are made to the field of sport management. First, design thinking is shown to be useful in sport management as a derivative theory. Second, a framework is provided for 'fitting' design thinking for sport management practice. Third, design thinking is foregrounded as a means by which human-centred innovation can be achieved in sport. Fourth, the LDJ is highlighted as a means by which reflection can be restored to the practice of professional sport organisations. Fifth, increased adoption of design activities (the performative component of design thinking) which are utilised toward achieving human-centred outcomes (the ostensive component of design thinking) by sport organisations can have flow on effects beyond the designs being pursued, such as enhanced perceptions of organisational performance. Finally, the value of shadowing as a data collection technique in qualitative sport management research is highlighted.

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Publications arising from this project

Journal articles

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., & Frawley, S. (2020). Design thinking and sport for development: enhancing organizational innovation. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 25(3), 175-202. doi:10.1080/23750472.2019.1611471

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., Frawley, S., & Cohen, A. (2021). 'No idea is a bad idea': Exploring the nature of the design thinking alignment of an Australian sport organization. *Journal of Sport Management*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1123/jsm.2020-0218

Conference presentations

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., Frawley, S., & Cohen, A. (2020, December). *An Intervention to Introduce a Design Thinking Activity into the Practice of a Professional Sport Organisation*. Paper presented at the Annual Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference, Canberra, Australia.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., Frawley, S., & Cohen, A. (2019, December). *Using Design Thinking to Enhance the Innovation of Sport Organisations*. Paper presented at the Biennial Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies Conference, Queenstown, New Zealand.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., Frawley, S., & Cohen, A. (2019, December). *Exploring the design thinking alignment of a professional sport club*. Paper presented at the Annual Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Frawley, S., Schlenker, K., & Cohen, A. (2019, May).

Enhancing Innovation in Sport Management With Design Thinking: The Case of an Australian Professional Cricket Franchise. Paper presented at the Annual North American Society for Sport Management Conference, New Orleans, USA.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Frawley, S. & Schlenker, K. (2018, November). *Approaching*

'wicked problems' in sport management through the use of design thinking. Paper presented at the 24th annual Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference, Adelaide, Australia.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Frawley, S. & Schlenker, K. (2017, December). *Empowering*

Change Agents Through Adaptable Design Thinking (aDT). Paper presented at the 13th Biennial Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies Conference, Hobart, Australia.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Frawley, S. & Schlenker, K. (2017, November/December).

Adaptable Design Thinking (aDT) for Sport Management. Paper presented at the 23rd annual Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Frawley, S. & Schlenker, K. (2016, November). *Design*

Thinking and Sport [for] Development: Maximising Social Capital. Paper presented at the 22nd Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference, Auckland, New Zealand.

Conference poster

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., Frawley, S., & Cohen, A. (2020, May).

Shadowing as a Data Collection Method in Qualitative Sport Management Research.

Poster presented at the Annual North American Society for Sport Management Conference, San Diego, USA.

Contribution of authors to component studies

Study One

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., & Frawley, S. (2020). Design thinking and sport for development: enhancing organizational innovation. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 25(3), 175-202. doi:10.1080/23750472.2019.1611471

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Katie Schlenker	PhD panel; secondary conceptual and theoretical feedback.	Removed for publication
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Study Two

Joachim, G., Schulenkorf, N., Schlenker, K., Frawley, S., & Cohen, A. (2021). 'No idea is a bad idea': Exploring the nature of the design thinking alignment of an Australian sport organization. *Journal of Sport Management*. Advance online publication.
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Katie Schlenker	PhD panel; secondary conceptual and theoretical feedback.	Removed for publication
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Katie Schlenker	PhD panel; secondary conceptual and theoretical feedback.	Removed for publication
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