It was an inspired decision by the editorial team at the *Journal of Sport Management* (JSM) to invite proposals to guest edit a special issue on sport leadership. In departing from previous calls, this action targeted a specific topic area (sport leadership, i.e., the topic of leadership in sport management) and urged scholars to consider new and innovative approaches. For us, this said two things: Sport leadership carries major significance for our field and we need a “booster shot” of published research in sport leadership that is a step change in the evolution of leadership scholarship for sport management. The broader aim of the special issue was therefore to bring together articles that would set out what we know, where we are in our theoretical understanding of leadership in sport management (and as applied to practice), as well as present creative ways forward to explain and guide future thinking in research and practice. What shape would creative pathways forward take and how would we encourage submissions that represented a step change in the evolution of leadership scholarship for sport management?

While we consider leadership theory and research to be constantly evolving, over the past 10 years, we see a significant shift away from a preoccupation with formal, assigned leaders (e.g., chief executive officers) toward greater emphasis on (what has been variously described as) the social construction of leadership (Dee, Bryham, & Ferkins, in press; Grint, 2005). This perspective views leadership as a social, collaborative, and relational experience focusing on the idea that leadership emerges from the interactions and constructions of people in a particular context (Dee et al., in press; Grint & Jackson, 2010; Kihl, Leberman, & Schull, 2010; Ospina & Foldy, 2009). In this outlook, leadership is viewed as a collective achievement, not something that belongs to an individual (Cullen-Lester & Yammarino, 2016).

This is an example of an innovative turn in leadership thinking that we consider has important implications for the study of leadership in sport management, organizations, and systems (or “sport leadership”). In what way have we (sport management scholars) kept pace with this new generation of leadership thinking? While we thought our field of sport management was perhaps too small to limit a special issue on sport leadership to submissions orientated toward the social construction of leadership, we did encourage approaches that considered multilevel analysis (Burton, 2015; Fink, 2008; Welty Peachey, Damon, Zhou, & Burton, 2015) and fresh approaches to leadership. As explained by Welty Peachey et al. (2015) in their 40-year review of leadership research in sport management, multilevel analysis of leadership research includes individuals, dyads, teams, groups, and organizations. We would also add systems. We agree that, “There is a critical need to incorporate multilevel investigations into our work to develop sport-focused leadership theory . . .” (p. 578) in a way that appreciates the diverse contexts and ways within which leadership occurs within our sector.

A multilevel approach to leadership expands on a foundational bias in the literature toward researching traits and characteristics of individual leaders (often White, male; Burton, 2015) where leader-centered perspectives and theories, such as transformational, transactional, and charismatic, have taken prominence (Welty Peachey et al., 2015). A response to concerns about the leader-centric focus (sometimes referred to as the hero leader—often propagated by the sports media) has been the emergence of follower-centered perspectives on leadership (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Still relatively new to the leadership theory debate, this more expansive view of leadership aligns with the social construction of leadership and has also
helped to advance a resurgence of alternative theories, such as authentic and servant leadership (Avolio & Mhatre, 2012; Greenleaf, 1998; Parris & Welty Peachey, 2013). Such approaches have extended mainstream leadership research and practice but need more exploration in sport settings (O’Boyle, Murray, & Cummins, 2015). We also point to the emergence of self-leadership and emotional intelligence as a central aspect of new leadership thinking that complements a more expansive view of leadership theory (Schneider, 2013). As Pearce and Manz (2005) offer, “In contrast to the traditional approach to leadership development, we argue that followers should also be included in leadership development efforts in order to prepare them to argue that followers should also be included in leadership development efforts in order to prepare them to exercise responsible self-leadership and to effectively utilise shared leadership” (p. 130).

We considered there to be immediate relevance of this broader view of leadership for a special issue on sport leadership for JSM. Thus, collecting together articles that in some way exemplified leadership as a social construction became a more specific aim of the special issue, and one we hoped would enable a focused-themed approach. Most encouragingly for the scholarship of sport leadership, the special issue was “oversubscribed,” and we were forced to choose a maximum of seven articles from the successful submissions. While each of the seven articles chosen advances a particular idea, each in some way also acknowledges leadership as a social construction and/or values collective/multiple interactions of leadership. That is, these articles consider leadership as something beyond the individual. Grint (2005) describes this as the need to put the ship back into leadership. In Figure 1, we graphically represent how we saw the connections between articles and to our theme.

**Overview of the Articles in the Special Issue**

Beyond the graphic representation presented in Figure 1, this section provides more details about each article and teases out its connection to our theme. The overview of this is set out in Table 1. The first article by Jones, Wegner, Bunds, Edwards, and Bocarro examines the environmental characteristics of shared leadership in a sport-for-development (SFD) organization. The authors claim that leadership studies in sport have largely focused on individual traits of leaders and that multilevel analysis of leadership interactions is needed, in their case, to understand how environmental characteristics might influence leadership development. As a premise for their research, the authors’ argue that community development philosophies that underpin SFD mean that the building of local leadership that fosters long-term sustainability will likely be critical. They therefore explore the notion of shared leadership and how environmental characteristics influenced the development of this particular approach to leadership. They point out that “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” approaches to SFD necessitates a way of viewing and doing leadership that moves beyond conventional leader-follow dualities. Shared leadership, they argue, embodies this, and for the purposes of their study, they draw on Pearce and Conger’s (2003) definition of shared leadership as, “a dynamic, interactive process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals” (p. 1). They conclude that shared leadership (alongside servant leadership) can collectively empower the work of local champions to capitalize on multiple community assets and voices. A focus on leadership embodying something beyond individual traits and characteristics is clearly evident.

The second article by Welty Peachey, Burton, Wells, and Chung explores how servant leadership might influence work-related needs of followers within a SFD and peace setting. The authors point out that it is only in recent times that the SFD field has begun to examine the nature of leadership. Interestingly, as with Jones et al., those few studies that have done so have highlighted the association between SFD philosophies and servant leadership. The connection here to our theme is the emphasis that servant leadership has on multiple leadership interactions between leaders and followers, specifically, service to followers, follower development, and stewardship (as explained by Welty Peachey et al.). Perhaps just as we were becoming attuned to the notion that leadership as a social construct might be most aligned with pure SFD contexts, our third article focuses our attention on Australia’s leading national sport governing body, the Australian Football League. This article...