

**The Leadership Role and Influence of Team Captaincy in Professional Rugby
Union**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

The aim of the study and research question was to understand the leadership role, interpersonal style and impact of the team captain in a professional rugby union context and evaluate the implications of the findings for the practice (and development) of team captaincy. Loughhead *et al.* (2006) indicated that the majority of sport leadership research has focused on the coach but that athlete leadership within a team was an important source of influence. Much of the literature in the team captaincy field was based on the experiences of varsity populations and there was scope, as Loughhead *et al.* (2006) proposed, for future research to examine athlete leadership at other levels of competition including professional sport.

The study was framed by an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative methodology. The research was based on a single, instrumental case study, the Southern Warriors (pseudonym), a professional rugby union team classified as competitive elite (Swann *et al.*, 2015) who played in a top tier league. Data collection techniques included semi structured and informal conversational interviews, overt participant observation (over the course of a season) and archival research. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The study found that the professional rugby context was distinguished by three dimensions - commercial (gladiatorial) spectacle, demanding (and dynamic) endeavour and collective camaraderie; that the team captain performed three key roles - environment influencer, game shaper and stakeholder ambassador; that the influencing style of the team captain was based on three key dimensions - personal qualities, process skills and agile practice and finally, that the team captain impacted three areas - team purpose, team performance and team satisfaction.

The study provided original contributions to the body of knowledge through “real world” professional sport insights (a complex and pluralist ecosystem of competing and sometimes contradictory organisational dynamics); by further developing the current taxonomy of leadership roles and revising the current definition of athlete leadership. The study also provided insights into leadership currency and proposed a framework of key in game leadership evaluation indicators.

Practical implications of the research findings for the effective practice of team captaincy included terms of reference for the supervisory leadership group, a team captain job description, a team captain person specification, a team captain (i) self-appraisal process and (ii) 360 appraisal process.

Recommended future avenues of inquiry included evaluation of the social leadership role off the field, the evaluation of leadership role and style during a game and evaluation of the selection process and development activities for team captains.

Publications

Digennaro, S., Lowther, M. and Borgogni, A. (2019) *'The SATSport model: an applied and adaptive approach to grassroots sport organisations' governance arrangements'*. In M. Winand and C. Anagnostopoulos, Research Handbook on Sport Governance (pp72-88). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Drawing on research undertaken for the thesis this publication provided a critique of leadership theories, outlined key leadership concepts and proposed a revised definition of leadership.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and rationale

The purpose of the research is to understand the leadership role and influence of team captaincy in professional rugby union. Loughead *et al.* (2006) indicate that the majority of sport leadership research focuses on the coach but that athlete leadership within a team is an important source of influence. Indeed, Carron *et al.* (2005) argue that the role of team captain is critical and Gould *et al.* (1987) that it is an important component in effective team functioning. More recently Loughead (2017, p58) indicated that team captaincy is “an important source of leadership within a sports team” and Cotterill and Cheetham (2016, p1) that the role “can have a marked impact upon performance”.

Much of the literature in the team captaincy field is based on the experiences of varsity populations and there is scope, as Loughead *et al.* (2006) proposes, for future research to examine athlete leadership at other levels of competition including professional sport. Cotterill and Cheetham (2016, p1) confirm that there has been “very little research exploring the role and associated demands at an elite level”. The literature (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2009; Loughead *et al.*, 2006; Vincer and Loughead, 2010) focuses not only on varsity sport but also on traditional North American sports such as basketball and ice hockey. Rugby union is relatively unexplored and Beech and Chadwick (2004) indicate that rugby union is at a pivotal phase of its development from amateur to professional and now commercial enterprise.

The purpose and rationale for the study also connects and resonates with the researcher’s work experience which spans 25 years in public and private sector

sport facility management then 12 years (to date) in academia with expertise in leadership and high performance teams (across international and national rugby union, rugby league, football, cricket, field hockey and ocean racing). The researcher has developed a particular interest in the rugby union domain and linked to this a number of personal connections that enabled access to the professional setting.

1.2 Theoretical approach

The researcher was motivated to explore the application of leadership theory from the organisational (psychology) domain to the sport setting and how this application might help understand and explain team captain activities and actions. The literature review is in part based on a critique of key leadership theories, the identification of key concepts and the subsequent development of a revised definition of athlete leadership.

Klenke (2008, p13) observes that for “two decades, transactional and transformational leadership have been the poster child” of leadership theories. Loughead *et al.* (2014, p589) suggest that the “primary theories (applied specifically to athlete leadership) include behavioural models of leadership and transactional and transformational leadership”. The researchers subsequently conclude that transformational leadership is believed “to be the most effective form of leadership” (Loughead *et al.*, 2014, p591).

Transactional and Transformational theory emphasise the nature and quality of the relationship with followers and the underlying interdependency between the leader and, for example, employees or teammates in organisational and sport settings. Transactional activities (and theory) understand leadership endeavour as a focus on tactical issues; a preoccupation with power and position, politics and

benefits; and are built on an employees need to make a living (Covey, 1992). Transformational activities (and theory) understand leadership endeavour as a focus on strategic mission; a preoccupation with purpose and values, morals and ethics; and are built on an employee's search for meaning (Covey, 1992).

Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) suggest that as the world becomes more complex and competitive and leaders require discretionary effort and innovative insights from followers to remain competitive and responsive that a transformational approach to mutual dependency is increasingly important. In summary, therefore, the theoretical approach and anticipation of the researcher is that transformational leadership theory might provide the most notable explanation for effective team captain or athlete leadership activity.

In addition to the consideration of theoretical approach the study is also cognisant of Kogler Hill's influential conceptual model of team leadership. The model provides a representation of leadership practice based on leadership interventions; internal (task and relational) actions; external (environmental) actions and team effectiveness. One of the papers of particular or pivotal interest in the recent development of the field by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) explores the nature of athlete leadership. The authors advance a starting definition of athlete leadership, identify three important team functions of the team captain and identify the characteristics of team and peer leadership. The leadership roles (and activities) identified in the paper are derived from Kogler Hill's (2001) model.

In turn, Kogler Hill (2017) provided an original and unique insight (through correspondence with the researcher) into the model that reflected

My early years when Benne and Sheats and Bales outlined group roles focusing on social and tasks issues. I also used books by Cohen and Cohen which focused on growth groups and critical incident interventions. It was the first time I actually focused on the "leader" or "member as leader" engaging in the mediation of

groups. These leaders were given tools to look at the various (internal) dimensions and processes in the group and to intercede or "take action" when needed. I was also influenced by Larson and LaFasto and their team books. They focused on the factors that made teams excellent including leadership. Concurrently, I could see the important role of embedded groups/teams in organizations. This led to the focus on environmental influences in teams.

In summary, therefore, the conceptual frame and anticipation of the researcher is that Kogler Hill's (2001) Team Leadership Model might provide the most notable representation of the process for effective team captaincy or athlete leadership.

1.3 Research design

The study is framed by an interpretivist paradigm (Klenke, 2008) - shaped by a relativist ontology and social constructionism epistemology - and a qualitative methodology and research design (Creswell, 2007). The research is based on a single, instrumental case study (Harrison et al., 2017; Stake, 1995), the Southern Warriors (pseudonym), a professional rugby union team classified as competitive elite (Swann *et al.*, 2015) who play in a top tier league. Data collection techniques include semi structured and informal conversational interviews, overt participant observation (over the course of a season) and archival research. Data is analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Integral to the research process are a number of other considerations. Ethical risks and trustworthiness criteria were carefully managed (and documented). The researcher also maintained a reflexive and reflective research diary (Borton, 1970) to consider role and impact on the research process. This diary keeping provided reflection on a select number of unforeseen problems (and reactions) regarding negotiation of system entry and the establishment of workable relationships

1.4 Structure and outline of thesis

Following the introductory chapter, the thesis is structured and presented around four additional chapters – literature review, methodology, (combined) results and discussion and conclusion. The opening section of the literature review chapter provides a rationale for the material included in the review, outlines the approach taken to synthesis and considers the main historical developments in the field as well as key scholars and scholarly activity (publications). The chapter proceeds to define team captaincy (following a review of leadership theories and concepts), explores the role and notable activities of the team captain, the leadership process and style of team captaincy, the perceived influence and impact of team captains and finally, the selection and development of team captains. The methodology chapter outlines the research paradigm and research design, data collection methods and techniques (interviews, observations and archival research), field setting and participant sample and approach to analysis and presentation of findings. The chapter also considers the assessment and management of risks and the evaluation of research quality and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a reflective account of starting assumptions (about leadership practice and process interventions) and unforeseen problems (regarding system entry and workable relationships). The combined results and discussion presents and then evaluates study findings through four discrete chapters - wider context and expectations of leadership in professional rugby union, the leadership role and activities of a team captain, the leadership process and interpersonal style of a team captain and finally, the influence of the captain on team performance and satisfaction. The concluding chapter evaluates the implications of the research findings for the practice (and development) of team captaincy, clarifies

the original contribution(s) of the study to the body of knowledge then evaluates study limitations and proposes future avenues of inquiry.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction and scope

The purpose and structure of the literature review was to set the scene, critically appraise existing knowledge, consider the significance of the study for academic and applied fields then establish clear objectives for the research (Bryman, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011 and Gray, 2009). The critical appraisal of the body of knowledge was presented through the following themed sections - defining and clarifying team captaincy; the role and notable activities of the team captain; the leadership process and styles of team captaincy; the perceived influence and impact of team captains; the selection and development of team captains. A detailed literature search strategy, outlined below, was established to demonstrate a systematic and transparent approach to the selection, analysis and synthesis of the body of work (Fink, 2005).

2.1.1 Rationale for selection and evaluation of relevant and appropriate literature

The literature review was framed by the research question and the exploration of the leadership role and influence of team captaincy in professional rugby union. The initial search terms and phrases were team captaincy and professional rugby union. Following a review of the nature and range of returns the search was extended to athlete leadership, professional team sports and sport leadership.

Four sources (one general and three discipline specific) were selected for the search of relevant literature – MetSearch which is the Cardiff Metropolitan University library search engine for print and electronic resources; SPORTDiscus (a database

for national and international sport publications); Sport Development (a database of academic resources for sport development, management and coaching); OvidSP (a database relating to psychology and sport). Following this initial and extensive review of the body of knowledge [Zetoc Alerts](#) were established based on the search terms sport, rugby, team, leadership, captaincy to track the latest articles or journal titles and ensure the literature review evolved and remained current.

A screening criterion was established in order to help decide on what basis material would be included for consideration in the review of literature (Gratton and Jones, 2010). This screening criterion (Anderson and Kanuka, 2003; Fink, 2005) included issues of quality (publication source), currency or relevance (topic, study setting and participants, publication date and language) and finally, personal judgement (based on researcher expertise in the field and the specific terms of reference of the study).

As a consequence of this approach the study focused primarily on peer reviewed journal articles related to team captaincy and athlete leadership in professional (male, 15 a side) rugby union and professional team sports settings and written since the inception of professional rugby union in 1995 (Ryan, 2008). Active consideration was also given to peer reviewed journal articles related to sport leadership (more widely) and varsity team sports (more specifically) as much of the available and broadly relevant academic literature has emerged from this field and context. In addition to peer reviewed journal articles the scope of the study also considered monographs, text books and handbooks related to team functioning and leadership activities as well as professional rugby team captain autobiographies and biographies. The eventual study library or resource comprised a core of 59 peer reviewed journal articles directly related to team captaincy and athlete leadership,

plus 84 peer reviewed journal articles related to wider team functioning and leadership activities and 53 monographs, text books, handbooks, autobiographies and biographies related to professional rugby team captains but also more widely team functioning and leadership activities (n = 196).

2.1.2 Approach to analysis and synthesis of literature under review

Following the identification of appropriate and relevant sources of literature for review an analytical framework or recording protocol (Bryman, 2012) was established to capture or extract and describe the key concepts and details for subsequent synthesis. These key details included study context and aim, methodology and participant sample, findings and recommendations as well as publication source and keywords (Gratton and Jones, 2010). The analytical framework was populated from the previously identified and recognised sources with a range of data or key details until saturation demonstrated by a noticeable pattern of recurring references (Gratton and Jones, 2010) was established (or as far as this could be unequivocally determined).

At this point of saturation the material was subjected to thematic synthesis (Thomas and Harden, 2008). The intention here was to go beyond individual study details and translate these into broad or themed lines of common argument representative or indicative of the body of knowledge including both widely agreed principles as well as any particularly controversial issues.

This synthesis was approached using an inductive and cyclical process dependent on researcher expertise and insights (Thomas and Harden, 2008) but guided by an interrogative lens. Broad themes or patterns were based (Gray, 2009; Thomas and Harden, 2008) on the extent to which individual studies were

collectively similar, interesting and significant (subject consensus) or alternatively noteworthy as different or unusual (discipline dilemmas).

2.1.3 Historical developments, key scholars and scholarly activity (publications)

Before presenting the key literature review themes in detail a broad introduction and summary critique of the field including historical developments, range and scope of published material as well as key scholars and contributions was provided. Behrendt *et al.* (2017) suggested that the study of leadership in an organisation setting dates back 100 years indicating that the Hawthorne experiments conducted by Mayo in the late 1920's (and the subsequent birth of the Human Relations movement) was a significant event. However, the first leadership theory – Great Man – can be traced back earlier than this to the lectures and writing of Carlyle in 1841 while (much) later leadership studies at the Universities of Ohio and Michigan in the 1950's and 60's were considered pivotal in contemporary leadership research (Northouse, 2013).

It was indicated by Loughhead (2017) that the study of athlete leadership emerged as a topic of initial academic interest 50 years ago. Subsequent endeavour on this specific subject has been sparse with researchers predominantly focused on the leadership activities of the coach. As far as such timelines can be established with any certainty it was the case that a journal article by Grusky in 1963 (57 years ago) studied athlete playing position, leadership skills and career mobility in professional baseball organisations.

The application of organisational management and leadership theories to the sport domain were first applied or transferred 35 years ago by Chelladurai in his

academic text “Sport Management Macro Perspectives” in 1985. Subsequently, “the majority of research since then and over the past 25 years in particular has focused on the roles and impact of both the coach and manager on sport teams” (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016, p116). It was also indicated by Loughhead (2017) that since 2007 there has been an increased interest in athlete leadership but that the field it is still considered to be in its “infancy” (Ibid, p60).

The study literature review process identified a core body of knowledge of 59 peer reviewed journal articles published on the central topic with Fransen (Belgium), Boen (Belgium) and Loughhead (Canada) indicated by authorships and contributions as the leading scholars in the field. Eys (Canada) and Cotterill (UK) should also be considered influential researchers on the basis of citations and publications in both journal articles and academic texts

Of the 59 core journal articles published on athlete leadership and directly related issues 10 focused on the definition and roles of athlete leadership, 15 on athlete leadership behaviour and style, 9 on the impact of athlete leadership on team performance and 14 on the development of athlete leadership skills. 5 articles were broader summaries or critiques of athlete leadership addressing a range of topics and 6 articles considered the dynamics of the professional or elite sport setting (although 14 of the 59 journal articles in total drew on elite or professional athletes in their population sample). Of the 59 articles published 6 directly considered the role and demands of team captaincy in the rugby union context (and only 4 of those in the professional rugby union setting) while 7 in total drew on a small number of rugby union players in the population sample.

Loughhead (2017) undertook a review of theoretical, measurement and empirical literature as it related to athlete leadership and identified four papers of,

what the author described as, particular interest in the recent development of the field. The first paper was The nature of athlete leadership by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) in which the authors advanced a starting definition of athlete leadership, identified three important team functions of the team captain and identified the characteristics of team and peer leadership. The second paper was The relationship between athlete leadership behaviours and cohesion in team sports by Vincer and Loughhead (2010) in which the authors found that the nature of athlete leadership behaviours were related to both task and social cohesion (and that autocratic behaviour was negatively associated with the four dimensions of cohesion). The third paper was the Measurement of transformational leadership and its relationship with team cohesion and performance level by Callow *et al.* (2009). This study found that athlete transformational leadership behaviours in particular were related to cohesion. The fourth and final paper was Who takes the lead? Social network analysis as a pioneering tool to investigate shared leadership within sports teams by Fransen *et al.* (2015a). This study was one of the first to use social network analysis to examine athlete leadership structures and empirically identify the existence of shared leadership in sports teams.

To these four papers the author has added a further five papers of notable interest in the development of the field (and of specific interest to this study). In the Experience of captaincy in professional sport: The case of elite professional rugby Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) explored the role and associated demands of team captaincy but at an elite level and in the specific professional rugby union context. In The Myth of team captain as principal leader Fransen *et al.* (2014) extended the Loughhead *et al.* (2006) classification to include a fourth (motivational) role and highlighted the important role of informal leaders in the team domain. In Collective

leadership: A case study of the All Blacks Johnson *et al.* (2012) evaluated the development of a formal collective leadership approach by the All Blacks (New Zealand's national men 's rugby team). In The impact of athlete leaders on team members' team outcome confidence, Fransen *et al.* (2014) the findings were the first in sport settings to highlight the potential value of collective efficacy and team identification as underlying processes. The study also provided initial evidence for the applicability of a social (and shared) identity based leadership approach in sport settings. Finally, in Developing sport team captains as formal leaders Newman *et al.* (2019) presented a conceptual model with empirically-informed resources to help collegiate sport coaches develop team captains. Five key processes focused on fostering a team culture of leadership; determining the role(s) of team captains; identifying and selecting team captains; developing and supporting team captains; and evaluating and reinforcing team captains.

In conclusion, while interest in the specific role, style and impact of athlete leadership on team performance (underpinned directly by organisational psychology, transformational leadership theory and Kogler Hill's conceptual model of team leadership as well as sports coaching research and Chelladurai's multi-dimensional model of leadership) has notably increased in the last decade it is still considered to be in its "infancy" (Loughead, 2017, p60). In particular, there was sparse research on the role and demands of team captaincy in the professional rugby union setting.

2.2 Defining and clarifying team captaincy

The purpose of this section was to explore the definition and meaning of the terms leadership and team captaincy. It was argued that while definitions of leadership do exist in the sport context (and were explored) these have been

informed and adapted from leadership theories originally developed in the organisational setting. Binney *et al.* (2012) argued that leadership theories and explanations are transferable but that what is unique is the context or setting in which leadership practice takes place. Weinberg and McDermott (2002) proposed that this transference has occurred because of the similarities between business and sport. In order to fully understand the application of leadership definitions to sport it was important and appropriate to begin by exploring and explaining these wider leadership theories and derived from these key leadership concepts. Developments in the evolving definition of sport leadership were explored including the widening of the original understanding from a focus on the formal leader (team captain) and informal (or peer) leaders to the role of leadership (or sub-leader) groups. Finally, some key dilemmas were examined including the challenges and moral implications of defining leadership in the wider organisational and more specifically, the sport setting.

2.2.1 Leadership theories

While leadership in the context of the church, politics and the military have been studied for a number of years the study of leadership in contemporary organisational settings began in earnest following the industrial revolution during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Bolden *et al.*, 2003). The requirement to adapt to dramatic changing circumstances, prudently manage resources and maximise workforce productivity initiated and developed early and explanatory thinking into the role and impact of leaders and leadership. From this industrialised period in history to the current knowledge and technology economy there have been eight notable

developments and schools of thought in leadership theory (Bolden *et al.*, 2003; Marturano and Gosling, 2008; Northouse, 2013).

Great Man theory indicated that leaders were born (not made) with divine qualities and that leadership could be explained by an individual's personal virtues and resultant practical exploits (Carlyle, 1888). These individuals were considered to be predominantly, if not exclusively, male hence the title of the theoretical explanation. In part this narrow view reflected the limited opportunities available to women in society at this time. There was no apparent description or empirical evidence for what virtues and exploits qualified for consideration and leadership, by implication, was confined to a restricted community – those, predominantly male, born with innate qualities. Spencer (1896) argued that rather than leadership being a divine and distinctive (cause and effect) impact on historical events that leaders were a product of their social environment, of fortunate circumstance and that leadership was often attributed in hindsight. Nevertheless the notion of (natural) leaders being born was a simple, if oversimplified, and powerful concept which appeared to resonate with the media and the wider public in contemporary society evidenced in part by charismatic leadership narratives in news coverage and the popularity of (great man and woman) leadership autobiographies (Schyns and Shillings, 2011).

Interest in the simplicity of the Great Man theory and the (unclassified) virtues and attributes of leaders subsequently underpinned the development of the second leadership theory or **Trait approach**. This theory sought to identify and isolate the important characteristics and attributes of successful leaders and then by practical implication use these criteria for leadership recruitment and selection. The main issue with this explanation of leadership was that a number of years of research activity have produced copious lists of traits yet no consistent or conclusive pattern

of attributes (Stogdill, 1974). The presence of certain traits was notable in some leaders but absent in others who nevertheless demonstrated leadership. However, Northouse (2013) has indicated that the following traits - confidence, determination, intelligence, charisma, sociability and integrity – do appear to indicate leadership potential but are not a guarantee for success. In this regard a strong work ethic and other considerations are required (Allen, 2008).

One such consideration was a leader's choice of behaviour – or **Behavioural theory**. The focus of the behavioural school of thought was on leadership style (what a leader did) rather than divine qualities or personal attributes (what a leader was like). McGregor (1960) and Blake and Mouton (1964) proposed or categorised patterns of behaviour and leadership styles based on leader assumptions about human nature. Theory X leaders (McGregor, 1960) believed that people valued clarity and security and disliked work and therefore responded to an authoritative approach with an emphasis on task completion (Blake and Mouton, 1964). Theory Y leaders (McGregor, 1960) however thought that employees valued responsibility and creativity and embraced work and therefore responded to a participative approach with an emphasis on employee inclusion. This contrasting approach while establishing simple and distinct behavioural styles appeared to oversimplify the human condition and organisational complexity (Pedler *et al.*, 2010). In addition, it was not clear from where leader's powerful and informing assumptions about human nature had been derived. Allen (2008) and Erikson (1959) indicated such pre-conceptions are influenced by significant childhood experiences and influential role models and needed to be explored and understood to enable informed behavioural choices.

Situational theory proposed that leadership could not be explained just by individual personality and behavioural style - in a vacuum or reasonably steady state - but should consider the ability and extent to which someone was able to adapt to different settings – both specific situations and organisational contexts (Reddin, 1967; Hersey and Blanchard, 1969). Northouse (2013) described this approach – or skill - as behavioural flexibility which required frequent monitoring and re-calibration of leadership style (Marturano and Gosling, 2008). The choice of leadership style typically ranged from authoritative to participative dependent – or contingent – on a range of factors. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) proposed that the key situational variable was the level of maturity (or development) of followers relative to the task in hand. A potential issue with situational agility was the assumption that a leader has a level of self and social awareness in order for them to sense and notice what might be an appropriate contextual style and make the necessary re-calibration (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Goleman *et al.*, 2003).

Contingency theory went further than a relatively simple and general situational awareness and sought to identify what the important - or contingent - variables were in any given setting. Fiedler (1967; 1972) proposed that key variables were the nature and complexity of the task, the quality of the leader/follower relationship and the level of power available to and exercised by the leader. This final variable – level of power – drew attention to organisational context or more specifically position and role in the organisation structure or hierarchy (Bolden *et al.*, 2003).

Reflecting on the simplicity of the previously identified behavioural approach and, in particular, the subsequent nuance of the situational and contingency approach Tanenbaum and Schmidt (1958; 1973) considered that the rather stark –

or black and white - leadership responses of authority and/or participation were oversimplified. They therefore proposed a more varied and fluid continuum of four choices – autocratic, persuasive, consultative and democratic (Tanenbaum and Schmidt, 1958) subsequently extended (Tanenbaum and Schmidt, 1973) to seven choices because of subtle variations in the consultative and democratic options. While acknowledging the role of behavioural flexibility along a continuum of leadership styles Sadler (1998) also drew attention to the value attributed by employees to a clear sense of consistency and conviction (or knowing where they stand) in the behaviour demonstrated by leaders.

Transactional theory and **Transformational theory** built on a key aspect of the situational or contingency school and this was the nature and quality of the relationship with followers and the underlying interdependency between the leader and, for example, employees or teammates in organisational and sport settings. This interdependency could typically be based on a contractual or transactional exchange of service for benefits or the relational or transformational pursuit of a shared purpose (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Tichy and Devanna, 1986; Covey, 1992; Bass and Avolio, 1994). Transactional activities typically included a focus on tactical issues; a preoccupation with power and position, politics and benefits; and were built on a person's need to make a living (Covey, 1992). Transformational activities typically included a focus on strategic mission; a preoccupation with purpose and values, morals and ethics; and are built on a person's search for meaning (Covey, 1992). In effect these theoretical perspectives present a polarity or stark choice although Bolden (2004) argued that both kinds of leadership are necessary or what Binney *et al.* (2012) call both/and options rather than either/or choices. However, as the world becomes more complex and competitive and leaders require innovative

insights and discretionary effort from followers to remain responsive and competitive Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) indicated that a transformational approach to mutual dependency may be increasingly important.

The final explanation was **Dispersed theory** and this approach indicated that leadership was an organisational capability or influencing (and decision making) process that can be widely developed and encouraged. Rather than being a designated authority role leadership influence can emerge informally in relationship at any time in the organisation setting (Heifetz, 1994). Raelin (2003) also reflected that in practice no one person was an ideal leader in all circumstances and so developing a wider perspective and capability was both desirable and essential for employee satisfaction and organisational achievement (Chelladurai, 2006). This theory proposed a leadership democracy and drew on concepts such as organisational culture and climate. However, such a perspective required a reduction in status differentials (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006) supported by active leadership role modelling (Schein, 1985). As a consequence therefore dispersed influence relied on those in formal leadership positions to either enable or curtail such democratic influencing activities. From this review of the evolution and development of the eight theories of leadership a number of key concepts were synthesised. The following section explored these concepts as segue between the detailed theoretical explanations of leadership and a practical working definition of the subject.

2.2.2 Leadership concepts

The eight theoretical explanations of leadership weaved or grouped into four key patterns (Digennaro *et al.*, 2019) that together provided a series of key concepts to facilitate sense making and evaluation of the subject. Firstly - Great Man, Trait and

Behavioural theories indicated the concept of **Person** and that authentic leadership was based on personal virtues, individual attributes and style (Digennaro *et al.*, 2019). Secondly - Transactional, Transformational and Dispersed theories indicated the concept of **People** and that relational leadership was based on (the nature and quality of) follower interdependency, collective capability and wider development (Digennaro *et al.*, 2019). Thirdly – Situational and Contingency theories indicated the concept of **Place** and that adaptive leadership was based on contextual awareness and the ability to re-calibrate approach (Digennaro *et al.*, 2019). Fourthly – explicit in all theories was the concept of **Performance** and that effective leadership was based on achieving objectives, solving problems and monitoring plans (Digennaro *et al.*, 2019).

Researchers (Bolden *et al.*, 2003; Marturano and Gosling, 2007 and Northouse, 2013) have identified a number of related leadership theories which were derivatives or refinements of the eight original and established explanations. Servant Leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1970) focused on the central role of purpose and leaders serving the organisation and its stakeholders in this pursuit. Social Identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) focused on the role modelling activities of leaders in order to develop and implement a sense of shared belonging and allegiance to group ambitions. Serving (Servant Leadership) and role modelling (Social Identity) sit within the Person concept and leadership behaviour theories. LMX (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1991) or Leader Member Exchange theory focused on the nature and quality of leadership interactions to elicit the most effective relational connection and conversation with employees. Path Goal theory (House, 1971) focused on taking a tailored motivational approach to employee endeavour in order to remove a range of work related obstacles and challenges. Tailored interacting (LMX) and motivating

(Path Goal) sit within the People and Place concepts and both contextual and followership theories.

From the eight original and established theoretical explanations – Great Man, Trait, Behavioural, Situational, Contingency, Transactional, Transformational, Dispersed and the four synthesised concepts – Person, People, Place and Performance the attention of the literature reviews turned to the consensus, developments and dilemmas in defining leadership in organisation and, in particular, sport and rugby union settings.

2.2.3 Leadership definitions

Bolden (2004, p4) indicated that “leadership is a complex construct open to subjective interpretation”. Reflective of such complexity and subjectivity Bennis and Nanus (1985) had earlier noted some 850 definitions of leadership during their research while Rost (1993) more modestly identified in the region of 100 definitions. Other leadership researchers empathised with the complexity and subjectivity of the topic yet offered a different perspective on the process of definition. Marturano and Gosling (2008) indicated that, in fact, there were common leadership ideas in theory, Ulrich *et al.* (2009) that there were some common leadership rules in practice and finally, Owen (2009) that there was common understanding on the things that leaders did well. Therefore, Marturano and Gosling (2008), Ulrich *et al.* (2009) and Owen (2009) argued that while the topic of leadership was not straightforward researchers know enough to define it well enough. By way of balance, Bolden (2004) indicated that ultimately the deciding definition should be a matter of choice and a consequence of personal and organisational preference mindful of assumptions, context and implications.

Common definitions - or more accurately indications - in the literature included Barrow (1977) and more recently Northouse (2013). Barrow (1977, p232) indicated that leadership was “the behavioural process of influencing individuals and groups towards set goals”. Northouse (2013, p3) proposed that leadership was “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. The shared understanding from these two common definitions was that leadership can be understood as the personal endeavour of influencing others towards performance goals. Based on the earlier evaluation of leadership theories and concepts it would appear that this understanding touched on the identified concepts of person, people and performance but neither definition explicitly mentioned situational agility nor collective (and dispersed) capability.

2.2.4 Applications to sport

The definitions of leadership by Barrow (1977) and Northouse (2013) in the organisational setting identified above were also frequently cited in the sport setting – Barrow in Cotterill (2013) and Cotterill and Fransen (2016) but Northouse, in particular, in Cotterill and Fransen (2016); Dupuis *et al.* (2006); Gould *et al.* (2013); Fransen *et al.* (2014); Loughhead *et al.* (2006); Price and Weiss (2011). Weinberg and McDermott (2002) proposed that this transference has occurred because of a number of key similarities between both businesses and sport especially the common role and impact of leadership, group cohesion and communication. Nevertheless sport also has a number of unique features (Taylor *et al.*, 2015) - in particular emotion, (competitive and collaborative) interdependency and uncertainty - which indicated that a definition emerging from the sector rather than applied to it might be a useful development.

In this regard, Loughhead *et al.* (2006) indicated that there has been a lack of clarity and consistency in defining leadership in the sport setting and proposed a definition specific to the role of athlete leadership in the sport context. This proposed definition of athlete leadership was “an athlete, occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal” (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006 p144). This definition of athlete leadership by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) appeared to have found support within the sport research community (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Cotterill and Fransen, 2016; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Fransen *et al.*, 2015b; Price and Weiss, 2011; Vincer and Loughhead, 2010). Based on the earlier evaluation of leadership theories and concepts it was the case that the Loughhead *et al.* (2006) definition of athlete leadership touched on the concepts of person, people (including collective or informal and emergent capability) and performance but did not explicitly mention situational agility or place.

The rugby union literature was relatively sparse on the subject of defining leadership and team captaincy although was more forthcoming on the captain’s role and activities. Johnson *et al.* (2012) in their study of the New Zealand All Blacks implied that leadership and team captaincy involved collective mobilisation towards a determined purpose. Murray and Mann (2001) in Nicholls and Callard (2012) were more explicit in stating that “leadership occurs when a person influences others to do what he or she wants them to do to achieve specific goals”. Again, based on the earlier evaluation of leadership theories and concepts it is the case that these definitions of athlete leadership and team captaincy touched on the concepts of person, people and performance but with no explicit mention of situational agility or place. The Murray and Mann (2001) definition was also notable for its more authoritative, even Machiavellian, tone of influencing people to do what the leader

wants. This appears to be a singular and prescriptive focus rather than the collective mobilisation (which may include the appropriate use of authority) referred to by Johnson *et al.* (2012) or indeed the co-operative endeavour advocated by Brearley (2001) in his landmark text on team captaincy.

2.2.5 Definition developments

While team captains or formally designated athlete leaders (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Loughhead *et al.*, 2006) are of great importance (Chelladurai and Riemer, 1998) and a crucial factor (Zaccaro *et al.*, 2001) as Cotterill and Fransen (2016, p22) observed “athlete leaders do not lead in a social vacuum but instead are embedded in a web of interpersonal relationships with their team mates and coach”. In this regard there have been developments in the scope and nuance of the definition of leadership in the sport sector that included peer leaders (informal influencers) and sub leaders (leadership groups). While team captaincy was central to this study these refinements – and interdependencies - needed to be recognised.

Peer leadership was first identified by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) who recognised that the team captain (or athlete leader) performed an important formal function with direct influence on team objectives. However, it was also indicated (Ibid, 2006) that peers (or fellow athletes) were an important source of informal leadership influence and that this emerged during interaction within the group and could be an important source of help or hindrance (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2015) in the team environment – and to the team captain. More specifically, Cope *et al.* (2011, p19) identified “three informal roles perceived as having a detrimental effect on team functioning and nine perceived as beneficial for sport teams” (See Figure 2.1). The three detrimental roles were distractor (diverts attention), cancer (negative emotions) and malingerer

(prolongs injury). The nine beneficial roles group into two themes – task roles (spark plug, enforcer, informal leader nonverbal and team player) and relationship roles (comedian, mentor, informal leader verbal and social convenor). One role – star player bridged both task (performance) and relationship (personality).

Informal role	Definition
Comedian	An athlete who entertains others through the use of comical situations, humorous dialogue, and practical jokes. This individual can also be referred to as a jokester, clown, or prankster.
Spark plug	An athlete who ignites, inspires, or animates a group toward a common goal. May be referred to as the task booster.
Cancer	An athlete who expresses negative emotions that spread destructively throughout a team.
Distracter	An athlete who draws away or diverts the attention of other teammates decreasing their focus.
Enforcer	An athlete who is physically intimidating or willingly belligerent and who is counted on to retaliate when rough tactics are used by the opposing team.
Mentor	An athlete who acts as a trusted counselor or teacher for another athlete on the team. This athlete has usually been with the team for a few years and has experience and wisdom to teach the less experienced athlete(s).
Informal leader – non verbal	An athlete who leads the team by example, hard work, and dedication.
Informal leader – verbal	An athlete who leads the team both on and off the playing surface through verbal commands. This individual is not selected by the team as a leader but assumes the role through social interactions.
Team Player	An athlete who gives exceptional effort and can be seen as a workhorse that is willing to sacrifice and put the team before his/her own well-being.
Star player	An athlete who is distinguished or celebrated because of their personality, performance, and/or showmanship.
Malingerer	An athlete who prolongs psychological or physical symptoms of injury for some type of external gain (e.g., sympathy, attention, access to athletic therapy).
Social convener	An athlete who is involved in the planning and organization of social gatherings for a team to increase group harmony and integration.

Figure 2.1 – Informal roles in sport teams (Cope *et al.*, 2011)

In addition to the formal and designated influence of the team captain and the informal and emergent role of peer leaders Johnson *et al.* (2012) also noted the increasingly formal use in rugby union of sub leaders (normally around six but including the captain) as a recognised senior leadership group to undertake a collective supervisory role within the team environment. The role of this group was typically to support the coach's vision and the captain's endeavours in establishing high standards and managing cultural expectations (Johnson *et al.*, 2012).

It could therefore be established that the team captain's web of interpersonal relationships included informal influencers and group supervision and that defining sport leadership with a simple and single focus on one formal designated position underestimated the complexity of the role and the reality of the environment. As previously identified such leadership democracy drew on concepts such as organisational culture and climate. However, such a perspective relied on those in formal leadership positions, such as the team captain, to either recognise or restrict such democratic influencing activities. It could therefore be argued that the captain was both a direct influence and indirect enabler of leadership effectiveness in the team environment. As Brearley (2001, p255) noted "one member of the team (the captain) is also peculiarly set apart from it; he is influenced by its character, but also responsible – to a degree – for moulding it's character; *of it* , but separate from it; required to act, like the others, but also overseeing their actions"

2.2.6 Definition dilemmas

In exploring the wider context of leadership definitions in the organisation setting and the specific application to the sport and rugby setting there appeared to be three potential dilemmas in the literature – situational agility and collective capability (which will be discussed together) and finally, moral considerations.

Northouse (2013, p3) proposed that in the organisational setting that leadership was "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". The proposed definition of athlete leadership in the sport setting was "an athlete, occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal" (Loughead *et al.*, 2006 p144). Finally, Murray and Mann (2001) in Nicholls and Callard (2012) stated

that in the rugby union environment that “leadership occurs when a person influences others to do what he or she wants them to do to achieve specific goals” Based on the earlier evaluation of leadership theories and concepts and a synthesis of the three explanations above it is the case that the definitions of leadership and team captaincy in organisation then sport and rugby union settings touch on the concepts of a person (individual person or athlete), influencing people (group of individuals or other team members) to achieve performance (common or specific goal). However, as part of the people concept there is only one mention of informality (or collective and dispersed capability) and no explicit mention of situational agility or place.

With regard moral considerations, Hogan *et al.* (1994, p3) indicated that definitions of leadership appear to be “morally neutral” and Kellerman (2004, p45) that leadership “is not a moral concept”. Furthermore, Kellerman (2004, p45) argued, “to assume all leaders are good people is to be wilfully blind to the reality of the human condition” and Binney *et al.* (2012) noted that leaders are ordinary (and sometimes flawed) people not mythical heroes. Others (Brearley, 2001; Grint, 2004; Heifetz and Linsky, 2002; Hodge *et al.*, 2014; Hogan *et al.*, 1994; Lebed and Eli-Bar, 2013) argued that the issue was less about being a good or perfect person but more about acting responsibly in the common good. While leadership may not be, theoretically, a moral concept, in practice it has an increasingly important moral dimension especially in the context of corporate governance and social responsibility in organisation, sport and rugby union settings (Lowther *et al.*, 2016). Grint (2004) indicated that effective – or true – leadership emphasised influence not coercion, Hogan *et al.* (1994) and Heifetz and Linsky (2002) that leadership was persuasion not domination and Brearley (2001) that team captaincy required the appropriate use

of authority but not manipulative activities. Hodge *et al.* (2014) in their study of the New Zealand rugby union team noted the concept of “better people make better All Blacks” and emphasised that connecting with others and doing things the right way was a fundamental aspect of the team environment. Lebed and Bar-Eli (2013) proposed that sport team leadership was a context dependent relationship based on the interaction between personal traits and different situations *but* to promote the common good.

In conclusion, and following the evaluation of leadership theories and concepts and consideration of developments and dilemmas the following definition of leadership (Digennaro *et al.*, 2019) and original contribution to the body of knowledge was proposed using the Northouse (2013) definition as a starting point but with three important refinements in parenthesis. The revised definition was “leadership is an (adaptive) process whereby an individual influences (and develops) a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (and good)”. While definitions are a sensible starting point for an shared introductory understanding of the topic Hogan *et al.* (1994, p4) argued “effectiveness is the standard by which leaders should be judged” and on that basis the literature review moved to consider the role, influence and impact of leadership endeavour and activities.

2.3 The role and notable activities of the team captain

2.3.1 Initial classification

Before exploring the developments of role classification as they applied to team captains or leaders in a sport and rugby setting a brief context to the important wider and informing development of teams and team leadership was established.

Beyerlein (2000) indicated that the study of group working and team research (and subsequently team leadership) in contemporary organisational settings emerged in the 1920s and 1930s with the Human Relations movement focused on encouraging collaborative (not just individual or scientific) efforts at work. This study progressed further in the 1940s with the development of social science theory to seek explanations for different group dynamics. In the 1950s, training groups (known as T-groups) or shaped learning and research environments (with some field studies) were established to explore the specific role of leadership in groups. This was followed in the 1960s and 1970s by the Organisational Development movement, which sought to develop team and leadership effectiveness. The 1980s and 1990s explored the role of teams (and team leadership) as a source of quality control, continuous improvement and competitive advantage. More recent research by Ilgen *et al.* (2005) indicated that studies since the mid 1990's have focused on understanding team processes and variables – including team leadership – and the impact on team performance and viability. In summary, team research has sought to understand collaborative working and group dynamics as a source of competitive advantage and the role and effectiveness of leadership in this endeavour. In this regard “the totality of research evidence supported the assertion that team leadership was critical to team outcomes” (Stagl *et al.*, 2007, p172).

Early research and “original evidence” (Rees and Segal, 1984, p110) on the specific topic of role differentiation (Bales, 1950; Bales and Slater, 1955 and Slater, 1955) was explored in experimental groups of three to five members and identified two key leadership roles - instrumental (task focused) and expressive (relationship focused). This research informed the development of Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1971) and Path Goal Theory (House, 1971). These two different roles (task or

relationship motivated) were originally considered separate and incompatible although Lewis (1972) considered this was not the case and that often the two leadership roles tended to be integrated.

While role differentiation theory had been applied to social or family aspects (Zelditch, 1955) and professional or organisation contexts (Etzioni, 1965) Rees and Segal (1984) applied the research to a field (rather than experimental group) setting and explored the implications in the sport group domain through two varsity American football teams.

161 players were invited to complete a questionnaire during preseason practice identifying the top five players on two separate criteria – those they considered the best players and those whom they felt contributed the most to group harmony. The research also introduced, as part of the evaluation protocol, the notion of professional respect (role competence) and personal affection (relational connection).

101 players completed the questionnaire and although there were those that were task or social leaders only the study found “a relatively high degree of leadership role integration” (Rees and Segal, 1984, p119). It was indicated that this was the case because in order for goal directed groups to achieve their aims leaders need to facilitate individual relationships in order to co-ordinate and realise collective tasks (Rees and Segal, 1984). Furthermore, the study concluded by observing that “groups that function under stress and that required co-ordinated effort, such as sports teams and military units, are likely to be characterised by leadership role integration and by leadership behaviour that is both instrumental and expressive, especially if such groups are to be successful” (Rees and Segal, 1984, p121).

Drawing on the research of Rees and Segal (1984) Loughhead *et al.* (2006) identified not two but three - specific and operational - athlete leadership roles as task (achieving performance goals), social (showing concern for others) and, a new role emerging from their study, external (managing and adapting to outside issues).

Task leaders were expected to help focus the team on its goals, clarify team mate responsibilities, offer instruction when required and assist in decision making (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006) or in other words ensure task clarity with regard to what needs doing, by whom and how. Social leaders were expected to offer (individual) support and be trusted by teammates, help solve interpersonal conflicts, foster (collective) harmony within the group and ensure teammates were involved in team (social) events (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006) or in other words provide social support to individuals and facilitate interpersonal relationships and group working. Finally, external leaders represented the team's interests in meetings with coaches, attempted to secure resources, support and recognition for the team, buffer team members from outside distractions (e.g. media) and promote the team well within the community (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006) or in other words represent (and protect) team interests with key individuals & groups and in the wider community.

The 3 leadership roles (and 12 related activities) identified in the sport team setting above by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) were derived from Kogler Hill's (2001) Model for Team Leadership (See Figure 2.2).

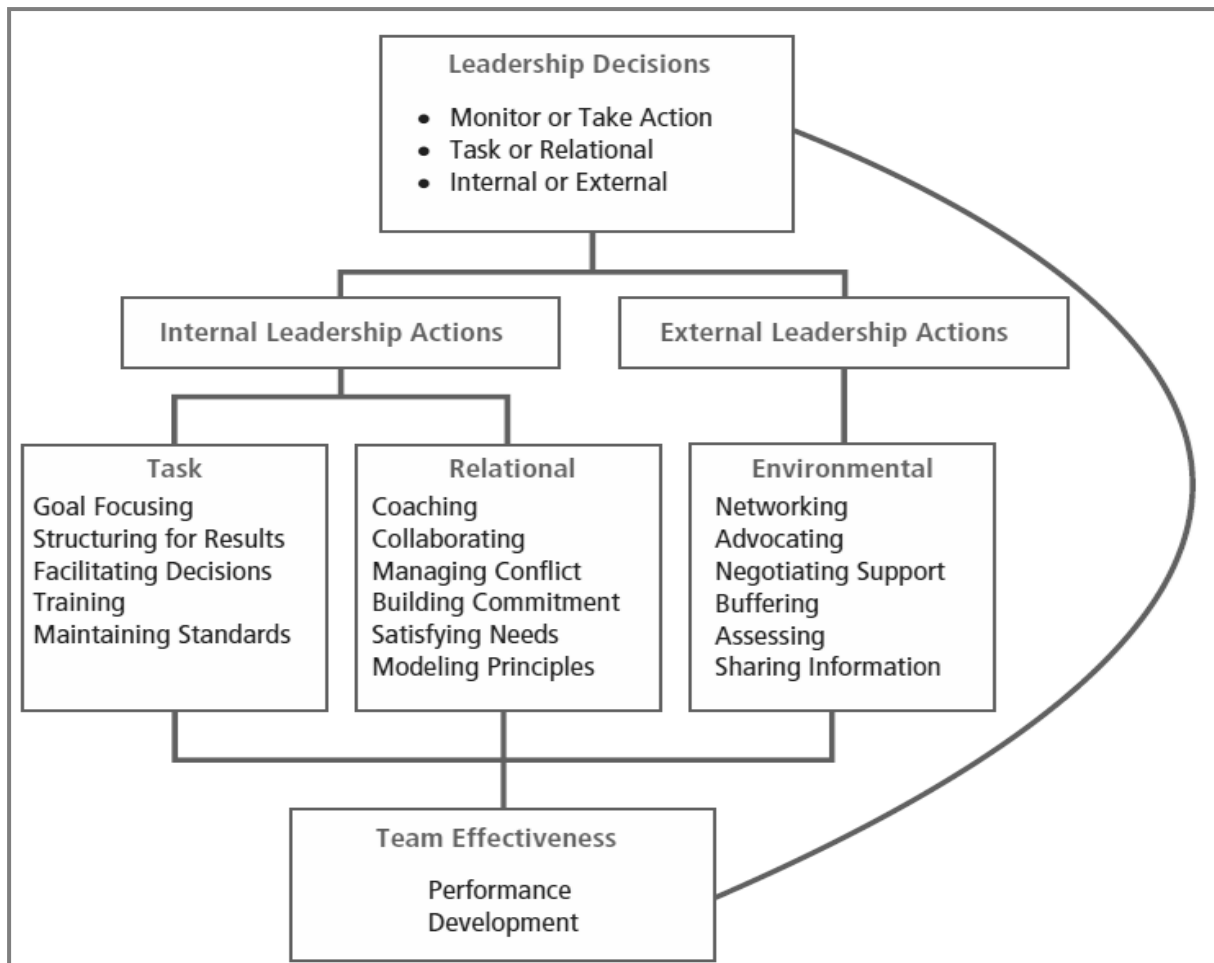


Figure 2.2 – Team leadership model (Kogler Hill, 2001)

This model contained three leadership roles which Kogler Hill (2001) entitled task (or achieving performance goals as described by Loughhead *et al.*, 2006), relational (or showing concern for others as described by Loughhead *et al.*, 2006) and environmental (or managing outside issues as described by Loughhead *et al.*, 2006). Kogler Hill (2001) considered task and relational to be internal (within group) roles and environmental to be an external (outside the group) role.

Furthermore, Kogler Hill (2001) identified 17 related activities in her Model for Team Leadership of which Loughhead *et al.*, 2006 subsequently applied 12. The rationale for including or excluding activities or any process of synthesis was not evident or explained in their research study. The five leadership activities, which do not appear to have been applied based on content comparison and conceptual

inference, were training (and preparation) in task skills, coaching interpersonal skills, (role) modelling ethical principles, sharing relevant information and assessing (performance).

The Kogler Hill model was based on three important concepts and supporting academic studies dating back to 1986 – leadership actions (LaFasto and Larson, 2001; Zaccaro *et al.*, 2001), leadership monitoring and mediation (Barge, 1996; Hackman and Walton, 1986) and team effectiveness (Hughes *et al.*, 2002; Larson and LaFasto, 1989; Nadler and Nadler, 1998). The studies of LaFasto and Larson (2001) were based on a research database of 600 teams and 6000 team members including the sports sector. The Kogler Hill conceptual model also appeared to resonate with the four key (and subsequent) leadership concepts identified by Digennaro *et al.* (2019). The concept of Person and authentic leadership was similar to leadership decisions; the concept of People and relational leadership was similar to internal (task and relational) actions; the concept of Place and adaptive leadership was similar to external (environmental) actions and the concept of Performance and effective leadership was similar to team effectiveness.

The results emerging from the Loughhead *et al.* (2006) study of three leadership roles (and twelve related activities) were based on a varsity or university population sample of 258 athletes drawn from 13 teams. 69 or 27% of the athletes involved with the study were rugby players. Questionnaires - based on Kogler Hill's (2001) Model of Team Leadership - were distributed at the start and end of the season to gauge participant's views on the functions, presence and stability of team leadership during the period under review.

In addition to the roles and activities – or functions - findings, the study also concluded that the majority of leaders present were senior (third year) players,

athletic ability was an important consideration for leadership selection and influence and that team leadership was stable and consistent over the season. The study also indicated that both team captains (formally designated because of appointment) and recognised team members (emerging influencers because of group interaction) were sources of athlete leadership. In other words, while the captain was an important source of leadership (particularly with regard external activities) within the group leading on a range of task and social activities was dispersed or also undertaken by other recognised team members.

2.3.2 Subsequent developments

Eight years later, Fransen *et al.* (2014) further developed the three-role framework proposed by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) and included a fourth aspect entitled motivation (securing maximum effort). Motivational leaders were expected to help encourage the team to maximise discretionary effort and re-energise players through periods of particular pressure or discomfort (Fransen *et al.*, 2014) or in other words ensure group motivation with regard to positive action and interaction.

At the time of this conceptual development, it was also indicated that task and (the new) motivation functions were on field roles and social and external functions were off field roles (Fransen *et al.*, 2014). However, task instruction and motivational influence are important not just in the competitive arena (or field) but also in the wider training and preparation environment.

The methodology employed by Fransen *et al.* (2014) was a web based questionnaire resulting in data from 4451 participants in nine different team sports from Flanders in Belgium. 73% of participants were from the court sports of basketball and volleyball with smaller surfaces and fewer players than typical pitch

sports. 84 participants (or 2% of the total) were rugby union players. While the sample was drawn from national, provincial, regional and recreational levels the elite level was not separately or distinctively defined or quantified. The authors noted that the response rate of 27% was lower than average for online surveys. Nevertheless, the study provided a broad range of interesting findings in topics appropriate for evaluation and directly relevant to this paper.

In addition to identifying and validating a fourth and distinctive leadership role of motivation and drawing attention to on and off field roles the study also indicated that leadership influence was spread or distributed through a number of key formal and informal leaders in the group rather than concentrated in one individual (Fransen *et al.*, 2014). The most important leadership role was task instruction (37% of responses), motivational endeavour (28% of responses) and social concern (15% of responses). The external representation role (attending meetings and media gatherings) was considered to be the least important role (7% of responses) with nearly half of all players noting that it was not evident or provided at all.

Distributed leadership provided through formally appointed and emerging informal leaders was considered to be important for group cohesion, satisfaction and confidence (Fransen *et al.*, 2012; Price & Weiss, 2011, 2013; Vincer & Loughhead, 2010) as well as team resilience and identification (Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Morgan *et al.*, 2013). Pim (2010, p7) called this distributed leadership presence the core group that “sets the tone for everyone else” and implied that realising the benefits previously listed were posited on a “positive approach” to this tone setting. No further explanation was provided for how positive might be defined.

One of the central issues raised by Fransen *et al.* (2014) was, as they described it, the myth of the team captain as the principal leader in the group

environment. While the authors drew attention to the assumption and “general conception” by coaches, players and the sport media (Fransen *et al.*, 2014, p6) that the captain takes the lead both on and off the field it was not clear on what objective basis that view was reached.

The research indicated that the captain was the (formally appointed) leader of the team performing a number of important functions and engaging in both task and social behaviours (Mosher, 1979; Voelker *et al.*, 2011). It was also argued that their individual effectiveness relied on appointing the right person and that they subsequently selected an appropriate style (Johnson *et al.*, 2012). The issues of personality and style are considered in the forthcoming section (2.4) on leadership process and styles of team captaincy.

Nevertheless, what was also clear from studies was not that team captaincy was a myth but rather that leading and captaining a team draws on a wider formal and informal leadership influence from a core group of players. Indeed, the study by Fransen *et al.* (2014) indicated that the captain was perceived to be the primary leader on the field in relation to task and motivational roles but also that others in the team actively contributed to task execution and motivational endeavour as well as taking a clear – and more dominant – role on social activities off the field.

However, the study also concluded that 43% of participants did not perceive the captain to be the best leader on any of the four domains (task, motivation, social and external). This could be because the process of selecting and developing team captains requires further thought or that distributed leadership - the core group - had been well developed.

2.3.3 Application to rugby

A review of relevant rugby union literature indicated that the four roles previously identified (task, motivation, social and external) applied to the rugby domain with recognition of the increasingly important role and impact of leadership groups – or distributed leadership - on team functioning with Greenwood (2015, p111) observing that “the bulk of tactical decisions are made by players in set positions”.

Rees and Segal (1984), Loughhead and Hardy (2005), Loughhead *et al.* (2006) indicated that the athlete (team and peer) leadership population or cohort was typically 30% of group size. In a 40-player rugby squad, that indicated 12 people fulfilling the athlete leadership role with 6 players formally appointed to the recognised leadership group.

Greenwood (2015) proposed that the team captain performed four key or specific roles both on and off the field within the group environment – technical director, discipline supervisor, tempo manager and master of ceremonies. The technical director role involved responsibility for the intensity of training practice, accurately executing team policy (or game plan) on the field and the wider efficacy of the group (Greenwood, 2015). The technical director role aligned with task responsibilities and achieving performance goals.

The discipline supervisor role related to implementing team policy (or game plan) and involved creating clear expectations that infringements, including player sanctions and penalty points as well as the impact on team momentum, are minimised (Greenwood, 2015). The discipline supervisor role aligned with task responsibilities and achieving performance goals.

The tempo manager role related to the sustained effort required to maintain the pace or intensity of playing style and competitive advantage so as to create tactical pressure and physical demands on the opposition (Greenwood, 2015). The tempo manager role aligned with motivational endeavour and securing maximum effort from the player group.

The master of ceremonies role related to building relationships and extending courtesies towards others including officials and visitors before, during and after a fixture (Greenwood, 2015). The master of ceremonies role aligned with the responsibilities of social (showing concern for others) and external (managing stakeholder community). However, while this role clearly indicated social concern for (external) officials and visitors it did not conceptually or directly consider the criteria of demonstrating (internal) social support for individual players and facilitating interpersonal relationships and group working.

In the specific context of professional rugby, Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) suggested that the captaincy role is broadly the same but with an increased emphasis (compared to varsity settings) on the external leadership role including player representative, player coach buffer, challenge coach and media liaison.

In conclusion, the role and related activities of leaders in the sport group setting have evolved from an early and initial classification of two broad functions (Bales, 1950; Bales and Slater, 1955; Slater, 1955) to three functions (Loughead *et al.*, 2006) and then, more recently, four functions (Fransen *et al.*, 2014). These four roles or functions are achieving goals, securing effort, showing concern and managing external issues. The formally appointed captain was considered to be an important leadership figure in the team setting but so are informal leaders whose influence emerges as a result of interaction with other colleagues. The four

leadership roles in the wider sport context apply and also exist in the professional rugby setting although the focus and emphasis was more goal oriented and mindful of external leadership responsibilities. In addition to the team captain, the formality of leadership has often and increasingly been extended to a leadership group of typically six players with different responsibilities including tactical decision-making.

2.4 The leadership process and styles of team captaincy

While there was a degree of consensus and common ground on the main roles of the team captain (namely - achieving group tasks, securing team effort, showing concern for teammates and managing external relationships) there was a wider range of views on the leadership process, behaviours and style of team captains and the qualities of effective athlete leaders. However, there were some broad categories in the literature and these were explored and evaluated below.

2.4.1 Athlete leadership studies on process and style

Several key authors (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006 and Holmes *et al.*, 2010) have collectively proposed that the process and style of athlete leadership, or how leaders effectively influenced others, was based around three broad concepts – personal qualities and expectations (who you are); relational endeavour and communication (how you work with others); reflective learning and flexibility (how you adapt). Firstly, the studies advocated that athlete leader's personally role model expected behaviours (such as being honest, positive and considerate), led by example and demonstrated a strong work ethic. Secondly, athlete leaders related to others and acted, in a trustworthy and respectful manner. Thirdly, athlete leaders were adaptable and open to learning from different situations and experiences. The

most consistent and noticeable leadership theme across all three studies was leading by example. As one captain observed in the Dupuis *et al.* (2006, p72) study “It all comes back to leading by example. The one quality of a good team captain is leading by example, during practice and games, and even off the ice”.

The three key areas (and related activities) highlighted above were indicative and noticeably common concepts based on the listed studies - of Bucci *et al.* (2012), Dupuis *et al.* (2006) and Holmes *et al.* (2010) - that provided three different but related perspectives incorporating the triangulated views of team coaches, captains and athletes. These multiple views from key stakeholders and independent studies on the leadership influencing process provided, collectively, an interesting and representative shared perspective.

The first study by Bucci *et al.* (2012) undertook semi structured interviews with six ice hockey coaches of high-performance ice hockey players aged between 16 – 20 years old. The interviewed coaches identified three leadership scenarios or influencing contexts - in general, on-ice and outside the rink. In general, athlete leaders were expected to be positive role models for other players, establish a positive and close coach athlete relationship and take responsibility for fostering the team’s culture and standards (as envisioned by the organisation and coaching staff). A number of coaches drew attention to the issue of positive role modelling suggesting that such a potentially vague concept needed to be made explicit with one observing that “we put the criteria on paper for them” (Bucci *et al.*, 2012, p253). Such an observation also indicated that the basis of a positive coach athlete relationship and the team’s cultural values should also be made explicit to encourage both coherent and effective practice and ongoing leadership evaluation and development. On-ice athlete leaders were expected to demonstrate a strong work

ethic, lead by example and both individually follow and collectively communicate coach instructions. Off-ice expectations included demonstrating generosity, being honest and taking care of teammate's well-being. Generosity was not further defined but the implication was that captains were generous with their time and effort in taking care and showing concern for teammates.

While the study acknowledged that "athlete leader behaviours and character impacted the team" (Bucci *et al.*, 2012, p253) one coach cautioned that "I don't think that everybody can become a leader" (Bucci *et al.*, 2012, p253). This indicated that while leadership behaviour and personal character were important to the team that active consideration of style and traits were also important prior to appointment. One of the issues emerging from the literature (Voight, 2012) was that not enough attention was paid to the recruitment and selection process for athlete leaders. This could result in an appointed leader but not an authoritative (or credible) one. On a final note, the study proposed that replicating such research in the professional sports domain with its different constraints and challenges would be an interesting research direction.

The second study by Dupuis *et al.* (2006) undertook semi structured interviews with six former college ice hockey captains. The interviewed former captains identified three higher order leadership and influencing categories – personal qualities and skills, team functioning and task behaviours and verbal interaction style (including type of feedback). Personal qualities and skills reflected the captain's self-awareness and ability to be authentic and exhibit trust, to display a positive attitude and control emotions under pressure and communicate in an honest and respectful way. As one captain observed "Honestly, you just have to be yourself. I would never change my style just because I have a letter on my jersey "(Dupuis *et*

al., 2006, p68). The study indicated that the captain's background in sport and their evolution through experiential and peer learning was an important contributing factor in their selection and leadership practice. In turn, the implication of this finding was that beyond essential technical and tactical progression that leadership decision making and influencing opportunities should be part of a player's wider - and early - personal development. The findings also indicated that being yourself and realising your own style was not only important (Goffman, 1990; Goffee and Jones, 2006, Binney *et al.*, 2012) but also, again by implication, simple and straightforward. Interpersonal conflict, group dynamics and organisation politics suggest that (blindly) being yourself is more complicated and also involved being skilful (Goffee and Jones, 2006), managing impressions and levels of personal disclosure (Luft and Ingham, 1955; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006) and experimenting with other approaches (Northouse, 2013).

The second higher order leadership and influencing category identified by Dupuis *et al.* (2006) - team functioning and task behaviours – indicated that team captains lead by example, set team rules and deal with team problems and interact and build relationships with referees and match officials. The context for leading by example included practice, games and off the ice and incorporated off season planning, formal and informal meetings to deal with team issues and morale and external meetings or receptions with fans, sponsors and the media. In this regard captaincy was more than just game leadership and extended to creating the wider team environment and managing external relationships. As Dupuis *et al.* (2006, p75) noted “the leadership behaviours of team captains have consequences beyond the immediate interaction, by influencing team norms and consequently the atmosphere of the team - in practice, competition, off-season and social situations”. In this micro

(game management) and macro (team atmosphere) environment the “opinions of team captains were important to their team mates and they were the “go to guy” when important decisions were required” (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006, p72).

The third and final higher order leadership and influencing category identified by Dupuis *et al.* (2006) - verbal interaction style (including type of feedback) – indicated that team captains adopted a situational approach and blended different communication styles from authoritative instruction to democratic consultation dependent on circumstances (but shaped by personal preferences and learned experiences). However, a democratic or participative style appeared to be the most prevalent approach. Other considerations in the verbal interaction category included message content (typically either general information or positive feedback depending on requirements) and timing or choosing the right moment to communicate (again, suggesting situational agility). Verbal interactions were considered central to the nature of the coach and team captain relationship as well as the chemistry between the team captains, assistant captains and experienced team members (normally comprising the leadership group and representing complementary strengths). One captain observed that “it is impossible to be an effective team captain if your assistant captains dislike you” (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006, p70). It could be argued that it is equally impossible to like everybody you play or indeed work with and the literature on professional sport (Johnson *et al.*, 2012) indicated that athletes are able to perform effectively on the basis of working respect if not personal warmth. The importance of interaction and connection between the team captain and coach has already been alluded to and this relationship also provided a vital bridge or wider liaison between coaches and players via the captain. In this regard, the study noted that the team captain held a formally designated and strategically important position

in the group hierarchy. However, the study also highlighted and recognised “the significant roles of informal leaders on the team” (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006, p71) that emerged and contributed through their actions and interactions in the environment.

Following on from the views of coaches then captains the third study by Holmes *et al.* (2010) undertook focus group interviews with 33 college athletes from 11 different team sports. The interviewed athletes characterised effective leadership as being based on personal characteristics, behaviour and communication. Team leaders were expected to be experienced, trustworthy and respected. Valued behaviours included leading by example, a strong work ethic and the ability, as appropriate, to exert control (or display authority). Communication was seen as an important skill with leaders expected to be vocal, deliver and re-enforce key messages and positively motivate colleagues.

The issue of personal characteristics and the extent to which being liked by others was important (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006, p70) or whether interpersonal respect was sufficient (Johnson *et al.*, 2012) for a working relationship was further explored in this study. Holmes *et al.* (2010, p457) observed that “likeability was not deemed a necessary personal characteristic for a leader to be effective. Leaders could earn respect even if they weren’t liked by the team”. From another perspective Hodge *et al.* (2014, p70) reflecting on the motivational climate in the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team noted that the coaches “selected the right people and worked really hard on developing better people who had strong connections, played for themselves, but also played for each other, and people they loved. And they loved each other clearly, within the All Blacks. I think that was a real source of performance”. On balance, it could be argued that being respected is a minimum and necessary requirement for a professional working relationship but that a level of personal connection (whether

liking or platonic affection) can secure deeper levels of commitment and performance (Brown and Arnold, 2019).

2.4.2 Professional sport demands and athlete leadership insights

Camire (2016, p119) had argued that the majority of research “on captaincy in sport has been conducted within high school or university settings”. These settings provided “strong indications” (Camire, 2016, p119) of effective leadership practice but he also argued that more needs to be done to “examine the realities of captaincy at the highest level of professional competition” (Camire, 2016, p118). In this regard, it was appropriate to build on the strong indications outlined above and explore the professional realities and three studies by Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) provided such insights. The three studies offered the varied views of different captain’s (and their coaches) on the demands of team leadership in professional sport from ice hockey and rugby union (club and international) contexts.

The first study by Camire (2016) was based on two separate interviews with the captain of a professional National Hockey League team in Canada. The first interview identified broad themes and the second interview explored particular aspects in more detail. The interviewed captain identified three higher order aspects and influences on the process and style of athlete leadership – the winning context (and impact on leadership style), the importance of personal qualities and the role of the leadership group (as a vehicle for collaboration between the captain and senior players).

Firstly, with regard winning context, the study by Camire (2016) found that the professional domain presented particular challenges related to the physical and

emotional demands of the sport, mainstream media scrutiny and social media attention. Becoming a professional athlete was considered to be drastically different to other playing environments with players paid to compete and win. This context established particular pressures on the captain whose role was to make sure the team won. In responding to this pressure, the leadership style and actions of the captain were shaped in a number of ways. Maintaining a healthy perspective - “Just relax and play the game” (Camire, 2016, p126), - establishing a sound working relationship with the coach and delegating duties to trusted senior players (and potential leaders) were all considered important. The captain also observed that the pressure of the role could lead to a more conservative style or risk averse approach to decision making.

On a positive note, the responsibility of captaincy allowed a player to actively influence the work environment and be involved in important decisions. Day *et al.* (2004) also noted that the responsibility of captaincy was generally associated with better individual performances and Deutscher (2009) that the role of captaincy could have a positive impact on player's salaries.

Secondly, with regard the personal qualities of the captain, their style demonstrated an “exemplary work ethic and leadership by example” (Camire, 2016, p127), the ability to communicate well (including the use of humour) appropriate to the circumstances and an openness to learning. The captain was also expected to be ambassadorial, welcoming new recruits to the team and representing the team at formal events.

Finally, with regard the role of the leadership group, this was considered a vehicle for working closely together and providing mutual support for the efforts of the captain as well as an opportunity to present different perspectives. The study

indicated that the group was primarily used “when team performance falls below expectations” (Camire, 2016, p129). This deficit-based approach while important could be considered rather limited. Such a leadership group could also be considered for a wider strategic role and proactive approach to tactical and operational issues in the team environment.

The second study by Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) was based on interviews with eight professional rugby club captains from the English Premier League. The interviewed captains identified three higher order aspects and influences on the process and style of athlete leadership – the complex and challenging context (and impact on leadership style), the importance of personal qualities, relational endeavour (including the role of the leadership group) and adaptive practice and finally, the development of wider team identity.

Rather like Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) drew attention to the challenges, complexities and pressures of the professional environment. These demands included the numerical range and cultural diversity of people (coaching teams, international players etc.) and relationships in an elite sport club setting, media attention and scrutiny and finally, the transition process (and lack of initial support) for captaincy. In the face of these numerous challenges and demands captains were expected to take a nuanced approach - drawing largely on their own learning and intuition - tailoring their style to different individuals, groups and contexts as required (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016).

The study emphasised the personal qualities of “being yourself” (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016, p6) and leading by example; the relational endeavours of communication, treating people equally and resolving conflict as well as adaptive practices drawn from personal experiences and an openness to evolve. While the

captain was expected to demonstrate tactical understanding and sound decision making as well as enhance the confidence of other players it was noted that in a large and diverse squad of typically 40 players plus a range of coaching and related staff that senior players and the presence of a leadership group served an important supportive and supervisory role (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016).

An interesting finding and observation of the Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) study was that although captains were recognised as formally appointed authority figures in the group hierarchy they were not distant or outside the team boundaries but located within the border of the group and at the heart of its activities. While the responsibilities of the role may mean they were sometimes authoritatively apart from the group they were always part of the team dynamics. As a consequence, they had a process responsibility to develop a shared sense of identity and belonging (Ruggieri, 2013) to the group through their actions and interactions. These efforts in turn attributed a notable uniqueness to the team and impacted on collective confidence, effort and performance (Gundlach *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Fransen *et al.*, 2015a).

Steffans *et al.* (2014) recognised four approaches (or leadership behaviours) that could fashion and foster shared identity within a team. Firstly, leaders created a shared sense of collective identity (or what Steffans *et al.*, 2014 described as entrepreneurs of identity). Secondly, leaders represented the unique qualities that defined the group (in group prototypes). Thirdly, leaders developed structures that embedded the group's identity (embedders of identity). Finally, leaders promoted and advanced the core interests of the group (in group champions). Steffans *et al.* (2014) indicated that entrepreneurs of identity (i.e. shared purpose) and in group prototypes (i.e. role models) were most likely to be dimensions or approaches

associated with the team captain. It could be argued that the other two dimensions of developing structures (embedders of identity) and advancing interests (group champions) might be associated with senior players and the leadership group.

The third study by Johnson *et al.* (2012) was based on 20 separate interviews with both captains and coaches from the All Blacks (New Zealand's national rugby team). The interviewed captains and coaches identified four higher order aspects and influences on the process and style of athlete leadership – personal qualities, professional competence, relational endeavour (including collaboration with senior players and the leadership group) and finally, collective learning and adaptive practice. There was an “emphasis on winning” (Johnson *et al.*, 2012, p59) and the importance of leadership in the All Blacks environment with one study participant observing that “if you looked at one thing since 2004 that has been hugely influential in the All Blacks having an 86% to 87% winning ratio...it's the leader” (Johnson *et al.*, 2012, p60).

The personal qualities and “character traits of the captain are` expected and valued by others in the team, and act as a prerequisite for effective relationships” (Johnson *et al.*, 2012, p62). Such character traits include “total honesty in oneself” (Johnson *et al.*, 2012, p53), personal accountability and persistence. There was also an expectation of professional competence with members of the leadership group including the captain required “to be the best player on the field in your position” (Johnson *et al.*, 2012, p60). Collective leadership was a notable feature of the All Black's approach with senior players undertaking distinct but complementary roles, actively supporting (or constructively challenging) the efforts of the captain and demonstrating a level of formal alignment with the vision of the coaches. Leadership group dynamics were based on honesty, evaluation and reflection which

demonstrated a number of the key features associated with a learning organisation (De Geus, 2002). A practical implication of this learning approach was the “situational awareness” (Johnson *et al.*, 2012, p61) and problem-solving skills of players which enabled the All Blacks to adapt quickly to shifting competitive circumstances. The combination of a relentless approach, high standards, collective leadership and adaptive practice evidenced by the Johnson *et al.* (2012) study resonated with the research of Denison and Mishra (1995) on the traits associated with organisational effectiveness (namely - clear direction, high standards, active involvement and innovative practice).

The collective view of Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) appeared to be that the process and style of athlete leadership, or how leaders effectively influenced others in professional sport reflected many of the personal and interpersonal qualities and adaptive practices indicated in the studies by Bucci *et al.* (2012); Dupuis *et al.* (2006) and Holmes *et al.* (2010). Their studies also appeared to reflect the key leadership roles identified by Rees and Segal (1984), Loughhead *et al.* (2006) and Fransen *et al.* (2014)

For example, Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) proposed that personal (being true to oneself, work ethic and leading by example) and interpersonal (communication, collaboration, conflict resolution) qualities and adaptive practices (being open to learning and evolving) were important in the professional domain. The leadership roles of tactical decision maker (achieving group tasks), confidence builder (securing team effort) and team ambassador (considering colleague well-being and managing external relationships) were also common.

However, Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) indicated that the professional setting seemed to emphasise firstly, the playing competence of the captain (how good you are) and secondly, the particular importance of the relationship between the captain and the senior players or leadership group (who you work with). The leadership group in this domain was presented as an action learning set (Revans, 2011) based on honest, reflective and evaluative debate with senior players holding individually distinct but collectively complementary roles. Formal strategic and operational alignment between the coaches and senior players (including the captain) was an important feature. A third theme in the professional setting was the leadership influence of the captain in developing team identity and wider purpose (what we stand for) or what Steffans *et al.* (2014) described as the capacity to build – or create and manage - a shared social identity.

The most noticeable leadership theme across the three studies from the professional sport domain by Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) was the contextual emphasis on winning or “the primacy of winning” (Camire, 2016, p123). There was a sense that the challenges, demands` and complexities of professional sport established a level of pressure (to win) and an expectation of personal accountability (for winning). As one participant observed in the Johnson *et al.* (2012, p59) study “When I first made the All Blacks the older guys were pretty tough on me, you know if we lose on Saturday it’s your fault, it’s the man in the jersey, not the jersey, that’s the whole attitude, take responsibility. While that might sound particularly hard, it’s actually true”.

2.4.3 Athlete leadership dynamics and structures

Holmes *et al.* (2010, p459) found that athletes “acknowledged that different situations called for different leaders”. In this regard Dupuis *et al.* (2006) identified four typical situations - practice, competition, off-season and social. Across the four contexts Rees and Segal (1984), Loughhead *et al.* (2006) and Fransen *et al.* (2014) identified four key roles - achieving group tasks, securing team effort, considering colleague well-being and managing external relationships.

Acknowledging these different situations (and roles) then focused attention on “the different leaders” (Holmes *et al.*, 2010, p459). While the team captain had been identified as holding a formally designated position it has also been recognised by Bucci *et al.* (2012) that assistant captains and experienced team members (normally comprising the supervisory leadership group) as well as informal – or emergent – leaders also played a significant contributory role.

In rugby, Greenwood (2015) had also drawn attention to the leadership role of tactical decision makers during competition but also by implication during practice. Typically, these were players with tactical – or game plan - responsibility for set piece (line outs and scrums), attacking strategy, defensive responsibilities and counter attacking plays. These tactical decision makers were likely, but not definitely, drawn from the captain, assistant captain, leadership group or peer leaders pool and, in the rugby setting, added further nuance and consideration.

The fundamental role and vision of the coach and coaching team (Hoye *et al.*, 2015) as well as the significant operational role of followers or players (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2013) should also be included in the wider sport leadership landscape and professional team structure. This was visually presented at Figure 2.3 and adapted

for the purpose of this thesis from the leadership research of Collins (2001) in the organisation setting.

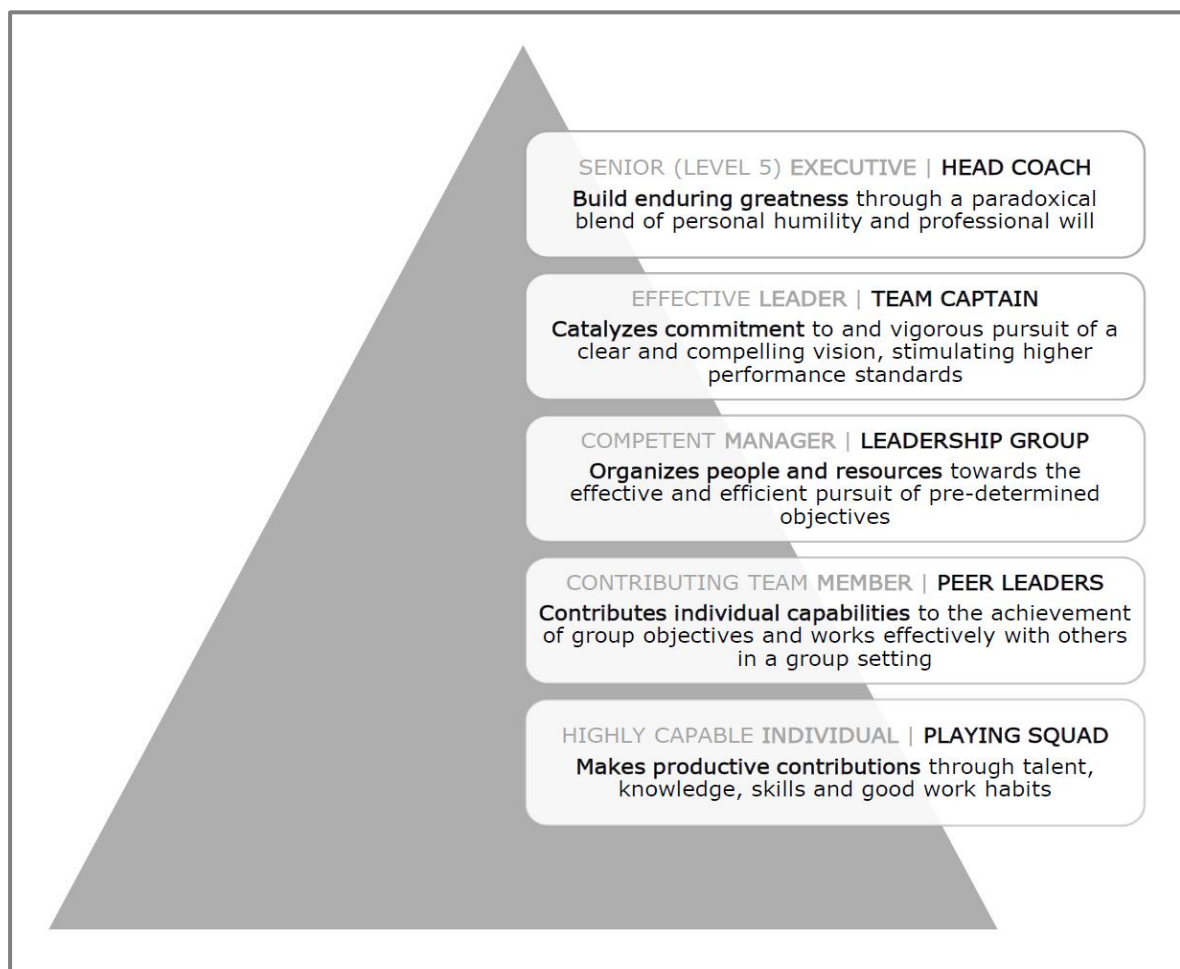


Figure 2.3 – Rugby team leadership landscape (Based on Collins, 2001)

Mention has already been made of the suggestions of Rees and Segal (1984), Loughhead and Hardy (2005) and Loughhead *et al.* (2006) that the athlete (team and peer) leadership population or cohort was typically 30% of group size. Based on the average professional rugby squad of 40 players this suggested that circa 12 people fulfilled a formal and informal athlete leadership role and typically 6 (including the captain and assistant captain) were appointed to the recognised leadership group. This further indicated that a typical squad had in the region of six informal or peer leaders in the wider environment. The balance of numbers (28 in this example) had an important partnership role as followers of leadership initiatives

and instructions as well as providing a development population of future potential leaders.

Following on from the acknowledgement of different team situations and different leadership roles as well consideration of a number of key leadership influencers (including the captain) and the landscape or structure within which they function another deliberation was which leader or leaders were regarded as the most important for effective group functioning.

The captain (or assistant captain) was a formally designated and strategically important appointment considered a cultural carrier (Robbins, 1997) or role model (that operated within established organisational frameworks) and the “go to guy” for important decisions (Bucci *et al.*, 2012). The captain appeared to be predominantly recognised for task (achieving group tasks) and external (managing external relationships) roles. As the formally appointed representative of the group emphasis on these instrumental roles could be expected. Their effectiveness assumed a considered appointment process as well as ongoing evaluation and development – in other words the “right or best” person was selected, and they continued to be reflective about their leadership performance.

Peer leaders informally emerged through action and interaction and were increasingly recognised as important sources of authority (Loughead and Hardy, 2005; Fransen *et al.*, 2014) as well as notable cultural communicators (Deal and Kennedy, 1982) that operated within informal networks. They appeared to be predominantly recognised for motivation (securing team effort) and social (considering colleague well-being) roles. On the basis of their professional expertise or personal charisma in the group setting an emphasis on these expressive roles could be expected.

However, as Rees and Segal (1984) observed (on this oversimplified split) it was also likely that the team leader (or captain) would display role integration and behaviour that was both instrumental (achieving tasks and managing externally) *and* expressive (securing effort and considering well-being). An effective captain was likely to be capable of executing all the roles and responsibilities of the post albeit with the support of the supervisory leadership group and informal team role models.

It was also the case that the informal emergence of leadership – “to help or hinder” (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2015) - was notably influenced and enabled by the cultural role modelling and acknowledgement of the team leader (Robbins, 1997; Schein, 2010). The extent and nature of such emergence was likely to be a direct consequence of the captain’s actions and interactions (for better or worse) and did not occur in a vacuum. Shawn Burke *et al.* (2019, p727) observed that “very few leadership functions are enacted solely through informal sources” and that formal leaders (and team captains) are important enablers and promoters of “a climate where the source of leadership is allowed to flow from all members in the team”.

It was also the case that the team captain, assistant captain and informal peer leaders – beyond the importance of their individual roles listed above – were likely to constitute the formally recognised squad leadership group and fulfil – on behalf of the team - tactical decision-making responsibilities during preparation and competition. In other words, the success and satisfaction of the wider squad and the team in particular relied on these important individuals working collectively and effectively together. Pearce and Conger (2003) described this shared leadership “as a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisational goals or both”.

Where the real power lies in this fluid group dynamic was an interplay and balance of two broad and six specific factors (French and Raven, 1959; Raven, 1993). The two broad sources of power were professional and personal and these do not appear to have been explicitly and extensively explored in the existing athlete leadership literature. Professional power draws on four sources linked to a person's role and related formal authority – legitimate (the ability to make demands), informational (the ability to control data), reward (the ability to compensate) and coercive (the ability to punish). Personal power draws on two sources related to an individual's personality and informal influencing – expert (level of skill and knowledge) and referent (level of charisma). Quantitatively those with professional power (e.g. team leaders) are able to draw on four sources of formal authority as opposed to those with informal roles (peer leaders) who can only draw on two sources of influencing. Qualitatively, French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1993) suggest that personal power (expertise and charisma) was perceived to be more persuasive in a group setting.

The implications of this research were that firstly, the four sources of formal authority - linked to a fair and reasonable approach (Taylor *et al.*, 2015) - constituted a powerful source of organisational currency (and consequence) in team member exchanges. Secondly, that in order to maximise individual power and group influence team leaders could be considered (and appointed) on the basis of their technical expertise as a player as well as their personal qualities. Finally, as French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1993) confirmed those not in formal leadership positions, who were so inclined, were still able to exert expert and referent influence in a group setting through their actions and interactions with others.

In conclusion, and taken together, the indications of the three representative studies by Bucci *et al.* (2012); Dupuis *et al.* (2006) and Holmes *et al.* (2010) and the professional insights of the three studies by Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) indicated that the leadership process and influencing style (and effectiveness) of the captain was a blend of five key dimensions. The five dimensions were personal qualities (role modelling predominantly positive behaviours), playing competence (being the best player in their position), relational endeavour (collaborating formally and informally with others, in particular, the coach and leadership group), team identity (developing a shared and unique purpose) and adaptive practice (learning and adjusting to different circumstances). While these dimensions provided a synthesised perspective from the literature on effective influencing, athlete leadership broadly, and the role of the captain specifically, were fluid and dynamic concepts dependent on the nuance of competitive context and challenges, the nature and quality of personal relationships and the nature and complexity of performance tasks.

2.5 The perceived influence and impact of the team captain

The literature indicated that effective athlete leaders (both formal and informal) in the team environment have a positive impact on a range of indicators including confidence (Fransen *et al.*, 2014), identification (Fransen *et al.*, 2014) cohesion (Vincer and Loughhead, 2010) and satisfaction (Eys, 2007). Cotterill and Cheetham (2016, p1) proposed that the role of team captain “can have a marked impact upon performance”. Athlete leaders are perceived to be important cultural architects (Railo, 1986) and role models (Bucci *et al.*, 2012) for facilitating excellence and enjoyment in team environments.

There was, however, no explicit evidence directly linking particular leadership endeavours to favourable competitive results. In other words, there was no guaranteed formula for winning - because in part it was reliant on luck (Smith, 2012) - only established principles that improved the chance of success. As Alexanco (2008, p15) stated “if we do everything well, the winning comes as a consequence”. It was argued that what researchers needed to better understand was the reality of the organisational setting and day-to-day implementation (Slack and Parent, 2006; Binney *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, sustained observation in the field setting (O’Gorman and Macintosh, 2014) was advocated as an appropriate explanatory research technique to understand such dynamics.

While some argued that the means through which leadership impact occurred are less well understood (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016) others argued that there are in fact common ideas in theory (Gosling *et al.*, 2008), some leadership rules in practice (Ulrich *et al.*, 2009) and there are things (we know) that leaders do well (Owen, 2009). These positive impact “influences” have already been alluded to through the roles and strategies of effective athlete leaders in both internal and external contexts. The four roles or functions are achieving goals, securing effort, showing concern and managing external (or stakeholder) issues. The five influencing strategies or dimensions are personal qualities (role modelling predominantly positive behaviours), playing competence (being the best player in their position), relational endeavour (collaborating formally and informally with others, in particular, the coach and leadership group), adaptive practice (learning and adjusting to different circumstances) and finally, team identity (developing a shared and unique purpose).

While much can be learnt about the positive influence and impact of team captains and leaders in general from examples of “good” practice there was also

much that could be learnt – on reflection and in hindsight – from “bad” practice. Studies on distressed organisations and corporate failure have drawn attention to a range of causal factors with the role of poor management – or more specifically autocratic rule – as common in many failing firms. In their studies on derailed (Van Velsor *et al.*, 2010), dysfunctional (Kets De Vries, 2001) and destructive (Padilla *et al.*, 2007) leadership researchers identified three common themes of poor practice – lack of competence (an inability to get the job done), lack of collaboration (an inability to get on with others) and lack of flexibility (an inability to adapt to circumstances). By implication these findings emphasised the importance of professional competence, collaborative working and adaptive practice to maximise the perceived influence and impact of leaders.

In order to assess or measure the perceived influence and impact of leadership practice researchers have developed a number of instruments (or scales, questionnaires and inventories). These instruments are summarised at Figure 2.4. It can be seen that there have been three predominant and broad phases with the first instrument designed in 1980 followed by further developments in the early 1990’s and more recently a collection of designs from early to mid-2010’s. The measurement focus of the instruments was on what leaders do (role) and how (style) to be perceived as effective. Overall, role dimensions considered activities such as training and instruction, feedback, support, group representation and group identity. Style dimensions consider two main approaches – a goal orientation (autocratic, instrumental, task) and relational orientation (democratic, expressive and social). Such measurement tools are problematic in that they polarise responses and choices and may not reflect the nuance and pragmatism of adaptive and applied practice. In addition, the choice of the word autocratic, in light of the negative

connotations and implications from both the organisation and sport setting was interesting.

Instrument title	Academic source	Measurement focus and scope
Leadership Scale for Sport	Chelladurai and Saleh (1980)	Training and instruction, positive feedback, social support, autocratic behaviour, democratic behaviour
Player Leadership Scale	Kozub (1993)	Instrumental or task leadership behaviours and expressive or social leadership behaviours
Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire	Bass and Avolio (1995)	Passive, transactional and transformational leadership
Sport Leadership Behaviour Inventory	Glenn and Horn (1993); Price and Weiss (2011)	Instrumental athlete leadership - confident, skilled, determined, leader and respected; pro-social athlete leadership - honest, positive, organised and responsible.
Peer Sport Leadership Behaviour Inventory	Glenn (2003); Price and Weiss (2011)	(Task behaviour) - focus & commitment, problem solving, physical and technical skill, creativity & intelligence, (Relational behaviour) - character, responsibility and maturity, motivation, compassion
Identify Leadership Inventory	Steffens <i>et al.</i> , (2014)	(Represent and promote group qualities and interests) - In group prototypes, in group champions, (Create and facilitate shared narrative and understanding) - entrepreneurs of identity, embedders of identity

Figure 2.4 - Athlete leadership measurement instruments

Loughead *et al.* (2014, p591) indicated that “to date, there is no gold standard inventory that measures athlete leadership behaviours”. The range of instruments presented at Figure 2.4 are drawn from researchers own theoretical paradigms (Ibid, p591) and research agendas. It was also the case that the athlete leadership instruments (and underpinning theories) are drawn from a combination of other inventories (e.g. Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire), existing theoretical explanations (e.g. behavioural, transactional and transformational) and other fields of endeavour (e.g. sport coaching and organisational psychology). They also appear to have been developed predominantly through testing and evaluation in varsity

(university or high school) settings. As a consequence of these potential issues of validity, reliability or trustworthiness Loughhead (2017, p60) has called for the specific “development of an inventory to measure athlete leadership behaviours” based on “strong theoretical frameworks”.

2.6 The selection and development of the team captain

There was limited literature on the selection and development of team captains. Loughhead *et al.* (2014, p594) indicated that “considering the relative infancy of research into athlete leadership it is not surprising that few studies have been conducted to ascertain how to develop athlete leaders “. Arrangements are mixed at best with little evidence of formal selection criteria and appointment, guidance (and training) on behavioural expectations and standards or subsequent review of leadership practice and performance (Voight, 2012; Gould *et al.*, 2012).

With regard selection the literature drew attention to particular factors that were considered to differentiate formal leaders from other athletes in the team. These factors could be grouped into three categories – personality traits, leadership attributes (including playing position) and leadership behaviour.

The study of leadership traits in organisation settings identified determination, confidence, intelligence, sociability, charisma and integrity as potential indicators of success (Stogdill, 1974). In sport settings, Klonsky (1991) indicated that athlete leaders displayed higher levels of ambition, dominance, responsibility and competitiveness. A study by Greenwell *et al.* (2013) found that team captains were neutral as to their role and responsibility in encouraging ethical conduct from their teammates. This would appear to support the common narrative in much of the literature regarding a single minded focus on performance – or emphasis on winning

- in professional sport (McDougall *et al.*, 2015). Others have argued more widely for consideration of not just results but also the nature and quality of (participative) group processes and (a safe) organisation environment as indicators of leadership effectiveness (Grey-Thompson, 2017; MacLean, 2001).

The leadership attributes that indicated a greater likelihood of recruitment and selection as a team captain revolve around four key factors. Players who are older, more experienced, have higher skill levels and hold a central playing position are more likely to be perceived as an athlete leader (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Kim, 1992; Glenn and Horn, 1993).

Wright and Cote (2003) identified four important team captain or athlete leader characteristics – a strong work ethic (and role modelling), a high skill level (or technical mastery), advanced tactical knowledge (or game management) and finally, a good rapport with teammates. Fransen *et al.* (2015b) indicated that while the leadership activities and practical characteristics of the team captain were important it was the extent to which teammates felt closely connected to their leader – and the rapport between them – that was the most decisive factor in determining a player's leadership quality.

Cotterill and Fransen (2016) called for the development of a conceptual framework to both address selection and development issues in practice and form the basis for further and much needed research in this area. Newman *et al.* (2019) presented such a conceptual model with empirically-informed resources to help develop team captains although it was targeted at collegiate sport coaches rather than the professional sport context. Five key processes focused on fostering a team culture of leadership; determining the role(s) of team captains; identifying and selecting team captains; developing and supporting team captains; and evaluating

and reinforcing team captains. In organisational settings such frameworks exist and could be adapted to sport settings mindful of current and applied initiatives in leadership development emphasising personality profiling, applied case studies and scenarios, work-based experiences, mentoring schemes, reflective practice and formal appraisals (Marturano and Gosling, 2008).

Loughead (2014) further indicated two main considerations in the blended design of development initiatives for athlete leaders – the provision of naturally occurring leadership development opportunities (applied, on the job learning) and the targeted educational development of leadership practice (academic, workshop based learning). Grandzol *et al.* (2010) undertook a season long review of sport team captains (again in a collegiate setting) who were provided with practical opportunities to demonstrate and develop their leadership practice. The findings indicated that leadership qualities can develop naturally when captains are afforded such opportunities but it was less clear whether this on the job learning optimised the leadership skills of the participants. The implication of this study emphasised the importance of an underpinning conceptual framework and reflective practice activities to guide and review skill development. Another study by Voelker *et al.* (2011) drew attention to the role of formal training in athlete leadership development programmes but emphasised the importance of recruiting or selecting the right athletes who are motivated to improve their leadership practice.

In order to further the academic debate regarding the selection and development of team captains Loughead *et al.* (2014) proposed consideration of a number of further issues. The first consideration related to the type(s) of leadership role that should be recruited and advanced and the conclusion of Eys *et al.* (2007) was that a balance of roles (e.g. task, social and external) within the environment

should be encouraged to optimise team performance. It was possible that an athlete leader could fulfil all three leadership roles. The second consideration related to organisational structure and which athletes should be identified for development training – those with identified leadership qualities (e.g. the team captain and leadership group) or those with, as yet unfilled, leadership potential. The answer to this dilemma was likely to rest on the philosophy of the coaching team and whether they preferred hierarchical arrangements (a select few leaders) or a flatter structure (wider team member development). The third consideration related to the intended purpose of selection and development and whether this was to balance leadership skills and styles within the group or to reinforce the leadership philosophy of the coaching team. Loughhead and Hardy (2005) indicated that a compensation approach could be beneficial where coaches and athlete leaders were able to provide a complementary range of leadership behaviours. However, Schein (2010) indicated that the recruitment and promotion of role models with similar approaches (to the coaches) was a powerful way of reinforcing the culture of an organisation. The final consideration related to the nature of the recruitment and selection process (and the potential impact on group performance). In this regard Loughhead *et al.* (2014, p595) themselves indicated that “coaches should seek out the perspectives of athlete followers in selecting leaders as well as consider how well athlete leaders will work alongside coaches and their vision for the team”.

Following on from the four considerations outlined above Loughhead *et al.*, (2014) identified a number of implications for the future selection and development of athlete leaders. They advocated the use of leadership profiling in the selection process, a blended approach to development incorporating both experiential learning and workshop education and finally, individual coaching sessions and performance

appraisals. The ongoing involvement, support and mentoring of the coaches was seen as essential to the efficacy and effectiveness of any selection process and development programme.

2.7 Literature review summary, research question and objectives

The literature review explored a range of issues relating to athlete leadership. Athlete leadership was **defined** as a process of formal (appointed team leader or captain) and informal (emerging peer leader) influencing in a group setting to achieve shared goals. Leadership – or supervisory – groups (typically comprising around six leaders) have become an increasingly noticeable and important feature in large playing squads or rosters. Within this broad definition of athlete leadership and the increasing presence of leadership groups the team captain was still, a pivotal cultural and operational figure.

It has been identified that athlete leaders undertake four important **roles** or activities in the group setting – setting direction, securing effort, showing concern and managing (external) stakeholders. Important task-related behaviours included effective communication skills, guiding group tasks and fostering goal attainment (Price and Weiss, 2011; Riggio *et al.*, 2003; Wright and Cote, 2003). Controlling emotions and remaining positive during a game were established as key motivational leadership behaviours (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006). Research also revealed important social off-field behaviours that characterize a leader. Examples are being vocal and trustworthy, possessing good interpersonal skills, showing care and concern for others, and facilitating relationships with teammates and discussions with the coaching staff (Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 2010; Price and Weiss, 2011). In the specific context of professional rugby results indicated that the captaincy role

was broadly the same but with an increased emphasis (compared to varsity settings) on the external leadership role including player representative, player coach buffer, challenge coach and media liaison (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016).

The interpersonal process and influencing **behaviour** of athlete leaders was typically based on five dimensions – being a competent player, being a positive role model, working collaboratively, adapting to circumstances and building a wider purpose. Important leadership attributes included age (Bucci *et al.*, 2012), team tenure or experience (Loughead *et al.*, 2006; Rees & Segal, 1984; Tropp & Landers, 1979; Yukelson *et al.*, 1983) and a central playing position (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Klonsky, 1991; Lee *et al.*, 1983). Demonstrating a good work ethic set a powerful leadership example to teammates (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 2010). Common leadership traits included being competitive, energetic and expressive (Klonsky, 1991; Moran and Weiss, 2006). A player's popularity in the team has been cited as influencing the leadership status of a player and his/her impact on the team (Kim, 1992; Weese & Nicholls, 1986). Fransen *et al.* (2015a) found that the most important determinant of a player's leadership quality was the extent to which teammates felt closely connected to their leader. Transformational leadership "is believed to be the most effective form of leadership" (Loughead *et al.*, 2014, p591). One of the latest trends in leadership research emphasized the importance of a leader's capacity to build a shared identity within the team (Rees *et al.*, 2015). Effective leaders were able to create a shared sense of 'we' with leaders as in-group prototypes and champions and 'us' with leaders as entrepreneurs and embedders of identity within the team. In the specific context of professional rugby results indicated that captaincy style and influence was shaped by technical and interpersonal skills, behavioural approach strategies and support arrangements

including informal leaders and (in particular) the senior or collective leadership group and the nature of the coach relationship (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016).

Effective athlete leaders had a notable **impact** on team confidence, cohesion, and performance although evidence and research (in the professional context) were relatively limited on the important process of leadership selection and **development**.

Cotterill and Fransen (2016) proposed that leadership was no longer a simple vertical view but was shared between three main actors - the coach, team captain and peer leaders. Cotterill and Fransen (2016) and Loughhead (2017) have called for a deeper understanding of athlete leadership challenges in **real-world contexts**.

Cotterill and Cheetham (2015); Cotterill and Fransen (2016) and Loughhead (2017) indicated that research investigating the role of the captain in shared leadership structures was relatively sparse, that there needed to be further consideration of specific team captaincy roles and the effective traits and behaviours required and in particular evaluation of leadership impact during competitive games and social/external endeavours off the field. Cotterill and Fransen (2016) and Loughhead (2017) have called for the development of a specific athlete leadership behaviours inventory to further consider such impact. Voight (2012) and Gould *et al.* (2012) suggested the need for further research on how team captains are identified (and selected) and their leadership training and development needs addressed through planned programmes and ongoing review. In the specific context of professional rugby and high level competition research needs to further clarify the role of the captain, the skills required, and the process of selection and crucially how to support the development of both current and future captains (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016).

It has been indicated that the study of athlete leadership emerged as a topic of initial academic interest some 50 years ago and while there has been increased

endeavour in the last decade research in the field was still considered to be sparse and in its **infancy**. Much of the research has been undertaken by scholars in Belgium and Canada using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods but with limited examples of sustained observation in the field. Much of the literature was based on the experiences of varsity populations and there was particular scope for future research to examine athlete leadership at other levels of competition including professional sport where the contextual emphasis was on “the primacy of winning”. It was also identified that professional **rugby union** was at a key phase in the sports competitive and commercial development. Cotterill and Fransen (2016, p17) indicated that “team leadership is socially constructed and highly dependent on the surrounding context” and identified the importance of understanding both the different and real-world environments in which team captains’ practice. Loughhead *et al.* (2006) also proposed that research should examine athlete leadership at other levels of competition including **professional sport**.

In conclusion, and on the basis of the relative infancy of the athlete leadership research field and the need to further explore the role, behaviour, impact and development of team captains, especially in real world, professional sport contexts, the aim of the study and research question was: **What is the leadership role and influence of team captaincy in professional rugby union?** The related research objectives were –

1. To understand the wider context and expectations of leadership in professional rugby union.
2. To explain the leadership role and activities of a team captain.
3. To explain the interpersonal leadership style(s) of a team captain.

4. To explain the influence of the captain's leadership role and style on team performance and satisfaction.
5. To evaluate the implications of the research findings on the practice (and development) of team captaincy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction, structure and aim

This chapter outlines the research philosophy framing the study as well as the overall design of the research process, the techniques for data collection, the approach to data analysis, the management of both ethics and risk and finally, consideration of the criteria for judging research trustworthiness (Sparkes, 1998).

In outline, the study adopted an interpretivist paradigm (Klenke, 2008) - shaped by a relativist ontology and social constructionism epistemology - and a qualitative methodology and research design (Creswell, 2007). The research was based on a single, instrumental case study (Harrison *et al.*, 2017; Stake, 1995), the Southern Warriors (pseudonym), a professional rugby union team classified as competitive elite (Swann *et al.*, 2015) who played in a top tier league. Data collection techniques included semi structured and informal conversational interviews, overt participant observation (over the course of a season) and archival research. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A reflexive and reflective research diary (Borton, 1970) was also maintained to consider the role and impact of the researcher on the research process.

The aim of the study and research question was to understand the leadership role, interpersonal style and influence of team captaincy in a professional rugby union context and then critically evaluate (in the combined results and discussion section) the implications for future team captaincy practice. Loughhead (2017, p60) suggested that “research conducted in this area (athlete leadership) has used both qualitative and quantitative research designs. The use of qualitative research designs and interviews has allowed for the in-depth examination of perceptions

concerning athlete leadership. From a quantitative research perspective, two general approaches have been utilized. The first has been the use of traditional self-report questionnaires and the second, newer, approach has been the use of Social Network Analysis (SNA) to examine athlete leadership". Few studies, if any, to date have explored the perceptions and experiences of athlete leaders, coaches and athletes in a professional rugby union context across four different situations (pre-season, preparation, game and social) sustained over the course of a competitive season using a blend of interviews, observations and archival records. While this research process was both appropriate to the demands of the research question it was also unique and original in terms of wider research endeavour in the community of practice.

3.2 Research paradigm and assumptions

Klenke (2008, p20) identified five major research paradigms in the study of leadership (see Figure 3.1).

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Research Methods
Constructivism	Relativistic – reality is socially constructed and experientially based, local and specific in nature	Knowledge consists of mental constructions about which there is relative consensus	Case studies, interviews
Interpretivism	Researcher and reality are inseparable	Knowledge is based on abstract descriptions of meanings and constituted through a person's lived experiences	Case studies, interviews, phenomenology, ethnography, ethnomethodology
Symbolic Interactionism	Researcher and reality are intertwined	Knowledge is created through social interactions and the meaning that arise from them	Grounded theory
Pragmatism	Reality is equivocal but grounded in terms of language, history, culture	Knowledge is derived from experience; researcher as reconstructor of the subjectively intended and "objective" meaning of the actions of others	Interviews, cases, surveys
Positivism	Reality is objective and apprehendable	Knowledge acquisition is value neutral and stripped of moral content	Surveys, experiments, quasi experiments

Source: Denzin, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Howe, 1988; Joas, 1993; Tasakkori and Teddlie, 2003a; Wicks and Freeman, 1998.

Figure 3.1 - Major leadership research paradigms (Klenke, 2008, p20)

Although each paradigm embraces unique assumptions and uses different methodologies “it is sometimes difficult to discern the nuances of the differences between these paradigms” Klenke, 2008, p28) and “there are many similarities that undergird some of them” (Klenke, 2008, p20). What unites these paradigms is engagement with the lived experiences of social actors being in the world and here most qualitative paradigms assume reality is subjective (and relative) and knowledge is co-created (and constructed) by researchers and participants (Klenke, 2008).

An interpretivist paradigm and related (ontological and epistemological) assumptions underpinned and framed the approach to the research study. Interpretivism focuses on the day to day lived experiences, social practices, shared norms and cultural values of participants (Klenke, 2008). Reality and knowledge - or “movement towards consensus” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p113) on these fundamental issues - emerge or are interpreted based on the exploration of individual interactions and a process of collective sense making in specific contexts. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that it was not possible to generalise or transfer findings from one context to another. However, it might be possible – using thick or rich domain descriptions – to extend collective sense making and relative consensus beyond a specific micro setting to the level of community practice. One of the objectives of the study was to evaluate the (wider) implications of the research findings on the practice (and development) of team captaincy.

The ontology – or nature of reality and method of inquiry - of the interpretivist paradigm is relativist where reality is considered to be “experientially and socially based and local and specific in nature” (Klenke, 2008, p20). Such a view of reality accounts for individual perceptions, multiple realities and a shared sense of understanding and is context dependent (Klenke, 2008). The researcher is considered to be a “passionate – and engaged - participant” in this unfolding and dynamic process (Klenke, 2008, p20). The challenge for the “passionate participant” (Ibid, p20) is being close enough to connect with other participants and establish a working relationship yet not so close so as to unduly influence the unfolding inquiry and the work being undertaken (Gray, 2009).

The epistemology – or sources of knowing and ways of learning - of the interpretivist paradigm is social constructionism where knowledge is considered to

consist of individual “mental constructions about which there is relative consensus” (Klenke, 2008, p20). This epistemological assumption is based on the view that the world is complex and interconnected, that the research process and inquiry should focus on the “messy and imperfect” experiences of participants and that while generalisations are problematic shared and common views are possible (Klenke, 2008, p19).

The rationale for the application of an interpretivist paradigm to the study process and subject topic reflected a wide range of views in the literature that leadership was a relative and socially constructed phenomenon (Conger and Kanungo, 1998; De Rond, 2012; Bryman *et al.*, 2013; Kihl *et al.*, 2010; Ospina and Foldy, 2009). In addition, Cotterill and Fransen (2016, p17) indicated that sport “team leadership is socially constructed and highly dependent on the surrounding context” and that understanding the dynamics of team member social interactions (and day to day actions) and the real-world environments in which team captain’s practice is important. In that regard, sustained, field based engagement and observation of athlete leadership real-world contexts and challenges (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016) was appropriate for the study.

Cohen *et al.* (2011) has drawn attention to three potential criticisms of the naturalistic setting and interpretative research process. Firstly, that such a research approach and philosophy is “hermetically sealed” from the outside world, presents a narrow perspective and “gives up hope” of discovering useful generalisations (Ibid, p21). In actively managing (or reflecting on) this criticism, the study sought to provide a thick, cultural description of the (wider) professional sport context and setting beyond, while not forgetting, the immediate and important focus of the research (Sparkes, 1998).

Secondly, that subjective data collection and reports may be incomplete (and misleading), less controlled and “abandon scientific verification” (Ibid, p21). In actively managing (or reflecting on) this criticism, the study sought to demonstrate prolonged engagement, persistent observation and the triangulation of multiple data sources as well as the application of appropriate supervisor review and reflection activities (Sparkes, 1998).

Finally, that power dynamics and the (undue) relational influence of the researcher during data collection and analysis could lead to the “imposition of their own definitions of situations upon participants” (Ibid, p21). In actively managing (or reflecting on) this criticism, the study sought to regularly engage with supervisor debriefing and challenge as well as participant collaboration and consultation (Sparkes, 1998).

In summary, the research paradigm and guiding assumptions for the study recognised multiple realities (or perceptions) and collective sense (or meaning) making within a “real life setting” (Harrison *et al.*, 2017, p5) or social context. Data was not considered to be value free and the researcher used their knowledge (and expertise) to guide the process of interaction and inquiry with participants although both parties were collaborators and iterative interpreters in the research process. While subjectivity was openly acknowledged “to manage this the researcher embraces a reflexive stance “(Harrison *et al.*, 2017, p4).

3.3 Research methodology rationale

Klenke (2008, p4) suggested that quantitative methods are “ideal” in certain circumstances and particular purposes but are “poorly suited to helping us understand the deeper meanings leaders and followers ascribe to significant events

(and processes) in their lives and the (wider) success or failure of their organisations". Several authors (Bryman, 2004; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Klenke, 2008; Steiner, 2002) argued that qualitative methods have a "pivotal" role in the study of leadership by enabling and facilitating the exploration of "deeper structures" (Klenke, 2008, p4) and wider "contextual information" (Lincoln and Guba, 1994, p106).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Creswell (1994) identified a number of shared themes in their separate definitions of qualitative research that were appropriate for the study. Firstly, qualitative research is conducted in natural settings. Secondly, it seeks to explore and capture the richness of people's individual and collective experiences. Thirdly, it attempts to discover meaning, interpret significance and make sense of these lived experiences.

Building on these broad defining features Klenke (2008) identified six important and detailed characteristics of qualitative research. Firstly, qualitative study designs are flexible and should be able to respond and adapt to the ebb and flow and changing dynamics of the research process. Secondly, they employ a purposive approach to population sampling with the researcher intentionally selecting participants who can contribute an in depth and information rich understanding of the phenomenon under question. Thirdly, qualitative data is derived from participant's viewpoints and collaborative engagement with the process to build a narrative based on individual perspectives and shared perceptions. However, in this endeavour the researcher is not a rational and detached bystander but the primary data collection instrument "with all of their prejudices, bias and professional baggage" (Klenke, 2008, p11).

The role of the researcher as “passionate participant” (Klenke, 2008, p20) is an important factor in the process of inquiry and their “perceptions and interpretations become part of the research and as a result a subjective and interpretive orientation flows through the inquiry” (Harrison *et al.*, 2017, p4). On this basis it is important to maintain, as far as possible, a reflexive position through the use of a journal (Sparkes, 1998) as well as an openness to challenge and debate through supervisor debriefing and participant collaboration and consultation (Sparkes, 1998).

Fourthly, qualitative research applies the principle of saturation (rather than quantitative scale) as an indication of when to discontinue data collection. This moment is generally considered to be when adding more data does not appear to add new or notable information to the study. Fifthly, qualitative research is predominantly inductive and seeks to identify patterns, new insights and understanding of the phenomenon in question from the data analysed. Finally, qualitative research is notable for its use of descriptive and expressive language with the “presence of voice in the text” (Eisner, 1991, p36).

In summary, the primary focus of qualitative research is to undertake detailed analysis of a topic within a bounded field setting and with the perspective of participants central to the inquiry. As a consequence of this orientation “constructivism and interpretivism commonly permeate the implementation of this research” (Harrison *et al.*, 2017, p4) with related methods including interviews, participant observations, documents and archival records (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2014).

The strengths of a qualitative approach are that it recognises that context shapes the practice of leadership (Klenke, 1996) and in this regard it has the

potential to provide extensive and thick descriptions of the leadership setting. One of the objectives of this study was to understand the professional rugby union context and domain setting.

A qualitative approach also acknowledges the importance of multiple voices and perspectives in the leadership process and is focused on the lived experiences of all participants or as many as is practically possible (Klenke, 2008). The remaining three (of five) objectives of this study were to understand the role (and activities) of the team captain; the interpersonal leadership style(s) of the team captain and the influence of the captain on team performance and satisfaction.

Creswell (2007, p76) identified five qualitative approaches to inquiry (see Figure 3.2) – narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Narrative Research</i>	<i>Phenomenology</i>	<i>Grounded Theory</i>	<i>Ethnography</i>	<i>Case Study</i>
Focus	Exploring the life of an individual	Understanding the essence of the experience	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases
Type of Problem Best Suited for Design	Needing to tell stories of individual experiences	Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon	Grounding a theory in the views of participants	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases
Discipline Background	Drawing from the humanities including anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology	Drawing from philosophy, psychology, and education	Drawing from sociology	Drawing from anthropology and sociology	Drawing from psychology, law, political science, medicine
Unit of Analysis	Studying one or more individuals	Studying several individuals that have shared the experience	Studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals	Studying a group that shares the same culture	Studying an event, a program, an activity, more than one individual

Figure 3.2 – Characteristics of main qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2007, p76)

“All five approaches have in common the general process of qualitative research that begins with a research problem and proceeds to the questions, the data, the data analysis and the research report” (Creswell, 2007, p76). Creswell (2007) also noted that all five approaches share similar data collection processes and “potential similarities among the designs” (Ibid, p76) but commented further that “at a most fundamental level they differ in what they are trying to accomplish” (Ibid, p77). For example, exploring a single life (narrative research), exploring the lived experiences of several individuals (phenomenology), describing how a cultural group behaves or works (ethnography), studying a particular issue in a bounded system or particular context (case study) or generating a theory or explanation (grounded theory) are all different. In this regard there are some differences in disciplinary traditions and backgrounds, data collection emphasis and extent, data analysis steps and specificity and, as a consequence (of all these) the nature and shape of the written report (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2008).

On the basis of the demands of the study to understand a particular issue (the leadership role and influence of team captaincy) in a bounded system or particular “real life” (Harrison *et al.*, 2017, p5) context (professional rugby union) an instrumental or illustrative (Skate, 1995) case study approach was selected. Creswell (2014) also commented, more broadly, on the congruence between research paradigms assumptions and research methodology approach and observed that an interpretive orientation flows throughout case study inquiry.

Skate (1995) indicted that a case study was a good approach if a clearly identifiable case (in this example Southern Warriors professional rugby team) with boundaries was selected and could provide in depth understanding and different perspectives on the chosen issue (in this example team captaincy). Yin (2003, p13)

also emphasised that “you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions - believing that they might be highly pertinent to your study”. In this example, one of the study objectives was to understand the wider context and expectations of leadership in the professional rugby union setting. Beyond context, Harrison *et al.* (2017, p2) “viewed (case study research) as a valid form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behaviour and social interactions are central to understanding the topic of interest”. In this example three (of the five) objectives of this study were to understand the role (and activities) of the team captain; the interpersonal leadership style(s) of the team captain and the influence of the captain on team performance and satisfaction.

While qualitative researchers are generally reluctant to generalise from one case to another (Creswell, 2007) the final study objective (of five) was to evaluate the implications of the research findings on the wider practice (and development) of team captaincy. In order to “best generalise” (Creswell, 2007, p74) suggested that the researcher should select a representative case and Yin (2003) that common themes should be identified that transcend the case. A representative case and (transcending) common themes enable lessons to be learned and shared from the case (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Southern Warriors were selected as a representative and purposive (professional rugby union team) case study with the common themes of team captain role, style, impact and development of wider interest for both the academic and practitioner community.

Critical aspects and key elements in the design and execution of a case study approach are presented at Figure 3.3 followed by a commentary on the strategy specifically adopted for this research project.

Element	Description
The case	Object of the case study identified as the entity of interest or unit of analysis Program, individual, group, social situation, organization, event, phenomena, or process
A bounded system	Bounded by time, space, and activity Encompasses a system of connections Bounding applies frames to manage contextual variables Boundaries between the case and context can be blurred
Studied in context	Studied in its real life setting or natural environment Context is significant to understanding the case Contextual variables include political, economic, social, cultural, historical, and/or organizational factors
In-depth study	Chosen for intensive analysis of an issue Fieldwork is intrinsic to the process of the inquiry Subjectivity a consistent thread—varies in depth and engagement depending on the philosophical orientation of the research, purpose, and methods Reflexive techniques pivotal to credibility and research process
Selecting the case	Based on the purpose and conditions of the study Involves decisions about people, settings, events, phenomena, social processes Scope: single, within case and multiple case sampling Broad: capture ordinary, unique, varied and/or accessible aspects Methods: specified criteria, methodical and purposive; replication logic: theoretical or literal replication (YIN, 2014)
Multiple sources of evidence	Multiple sources of evidence for comprehensive depth and breadth of inquiry Methods of data collection: interviews, observations, focus groups, artifact and document review, questionnaires and/or surveys Methods of analysis: vary and depend on data collection methods and cases; need to be systematic and rigorous Triangulation highly valued and commonly employed

Element	Description
Case study design	Descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, illustrative, evaluative Single or multiple cases Embedded or holistic (YIN, 2014) Particularistic, heuristic, descriptive (MERRIAM, 1998, 2009) Intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (STAKE, 1995, 2006)

Figure 3.3 – Case study elements and descriptors (Harrison *et al.* 2017, p6)

The eight critical aspects and key elements (outlined in Figure 3.3) were grouped into three strategic themes – context, process and content. The context theme included: selecting the case (merged with the case); a bounded system and studied in context. The process theme included: case study design and in depth study. The content theme included: sources of evidence.

Context theme - Based on the purpose of the study to understand the ordinary, varied and unique aspects of team captaincy and leadership drawing on participant perceptions and related social processes and connections a single professional rugby union team that was also geographically close to the university and whose head coach was both personally and professionally known to the researcher was selected. Applying the Swann *et al.* (2015) classification the selected team (coded the Southern Warriors) was considered competitive elite and played in a top tier professional league. Within the squad of 40 players were 8 internationals. The selected rugby union team were bound by group and organisational structures and shared professional employment activity and were studied in the real life setting across 4 domains – preseason preparation, training activities, (home and away) competitive fixtures and social occasions. Little research has explored the professional sport setting (and the implications for team captaincy) so the study context was significant to understanding the case. Contextual variables included social, cultural and organisational factors.

Process theme – The single, instrumental case study design was explanatory (to understand team captaincy context, role, style and impact) and evaluative (to understand the implications of the study findings for wider team captaincy practice and development). Analysis was holistic (covering the whole case) and thematic (identifying key issues). The choice of case study and the

relationship with key stakeholders enabled intensive and sustained analysis of leadership activity on a weekly basis in the field across an entire professional season. Subjectivity was an acknowledged philosophical stance but the researcher and participants were active collaborators in the process of inquiry and a reflective stance with journaling was maintained by the researcher.

Content theme – Methods of data collection included (semi structured and informal conversational) interviews, observations and (archival research) documents. In addition to the triangulation of research methods the study also triangulated different participant sources (coachers, leaders and players) and situational settings (preparation, competition and social).

In summary, “case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews and documents) and reports a case description and case based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p33). The next section of the chapter explored such data collection methods and techniques.

3.4 Data collection methods and techniques

The study of team captaincy was undertaken through explanatory research techniques (semi structured and informal conversational interviews, overt participant observation and archival research) using a purposive (professional rugby team) case study. Angrosino (2007) offered further thoughts on the different strategies and benefits of gathering data in the field setting. Interviews can analyse the lived experiences of individuals and groups and provide insights into everyday “knowledge and stories” (Ibid, p8). Observation can analyse unfolding interactions (and actions)

in the moment and provide insight into theory to practice. Archival or document research drawn from the organisation or group setting can analyse experiences and interactions in hindsight (Ibid, 2007).

3.4.1 Field setting and participant sample

The athlete leadership literature (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2009; Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Vincer and Loughhead, 2010) had focused predominantly on varsity level competition and traditional North American sports such as ice hockey and basketball.

Professional rugby union – in the context of team captaincy - has been relatively unexplored in the academic field apart from one article on the direct experience of captaincy (based on interviews with English Premier League team captains) by Cotterill and Cheetham (2016). While an important contribution the results section was rather short at three pages long and two of the nine identified themes were not described or discussed in any detail. Another important article by Johnson *et al.* (2012) – based on the views of coaches *and* captains - focused on the role of the senior leadership group (and collective learning) but was based on an international squad (The All Blacks) who meet for tournaments and play circa 12 games a year rather than a professional club team who meet virtually every day to prepare and compete and play circa 36 games a season. Cotterill *et al.* (2019) specifically explored coaches' perceptions of captaincy (as an extension of their own authority) while Brown and Arnold (2019) more broadly explored the concept of thriving in the professional rugby context. This study was focused specifically on team captaincy and explored in detail the perceptions and experiences of both captains and coaches as well as athletes in the professional rugby union team

context across four different situations (pre-season, preparation, game and social) and was sustained over the course of a competitive season.

In addition to its potential for relatively uncharted exploration of the leadership process Beech and Chadwick (2004) had also indicated that rugby union was at an interesting phase of its development from amateur sport to professional game and now commercial enterprise. This development offered scope and a contemporary sport business orientated leadership context in which to explain practice, identify original insights and consider any implications for future team captaincy practice arising out of the research findings.

The choice of rugby union, apart from its scholarly benefits, was influenced by a combination of both practical and relational considerations. The researcher's institution had convenient geographic access to four professional rugby teams for the frequent observations (and related travel) required by the appropriate research approach. In addition, the institution had a heritage and standing in rugby union (based on competitive performance and coach development) and drawing on a range of professional relationships and personal networks at a number of the teams provided a viable opportunity to access this typically difficult to access elite environment (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014; Nesti, 2010; Woolway and Harwood, 2019).

As a start point, two of the four professional rugby teams were approached to gauge interest in participating as a purposive sample in the study. These initial approaches were made via email and were selected on team location relative to the university and existing professional and personal relationships with the researcher. Following further explanatory and informal face to face discussions on the university campus one of the professional team head coaches consented to provide unrestricted access to the team setting for the duration of the season long research

project. The positive nature of the conversation and open invitation to access the research site provided a degree of reassurance that the researcher would not be perceived “as more of a burden than you are worth to the community” (Angrosino, 2007, p34). The team taking part in the study had a roster of 40 professional players (including 8 internationals) and 14 coaching and support staff and competed in a professional league with a home venue stadium capacity of several thousand.

While the focus of the study was to be the role, style and influence of the team captain appointed at the start of the season the scope of the research project would also include nominated deputies undertaking the captaincy role in the face of international commitments and injuries involving the formally selected leader. Dupuis *et al.* (2009) also indicated that a broader community of assistant captains plus coaches and informal peer leaders should be interviewed to further improve the richness and breadth of data gathered.

It was therefore proposed, and agreed with the head coach, that the senior coaching staff and team leadership group as well as three selected squad players, in addition to the team captain (11 people in total), were formally approached for inclusion (subject to informed consent) in the study and their lived experiences of captaincy would be central to the planned semi-structured interviews, field observations and informal conversations.

This original (and proposed) number of 11 participants was subsequently extended to 32 people in total as other coaches and players (following a team briefing – see Appendix A: Study briefing session - on the purpose of the research) consented to take part in observations and the related informal conversations. This meant that the web of actions and interactions involving the team captain that could be observed and discussed was notably extended.

These developments meant that 60% of the organisational community were eventually involved in the study. Actions and interactions that involved the remaining players, coaches and support staff (n=22) that had not consented to take part were not collected and analysed. See Figure 3.4 for clarification and confirmation of the study focus and participant landscape.

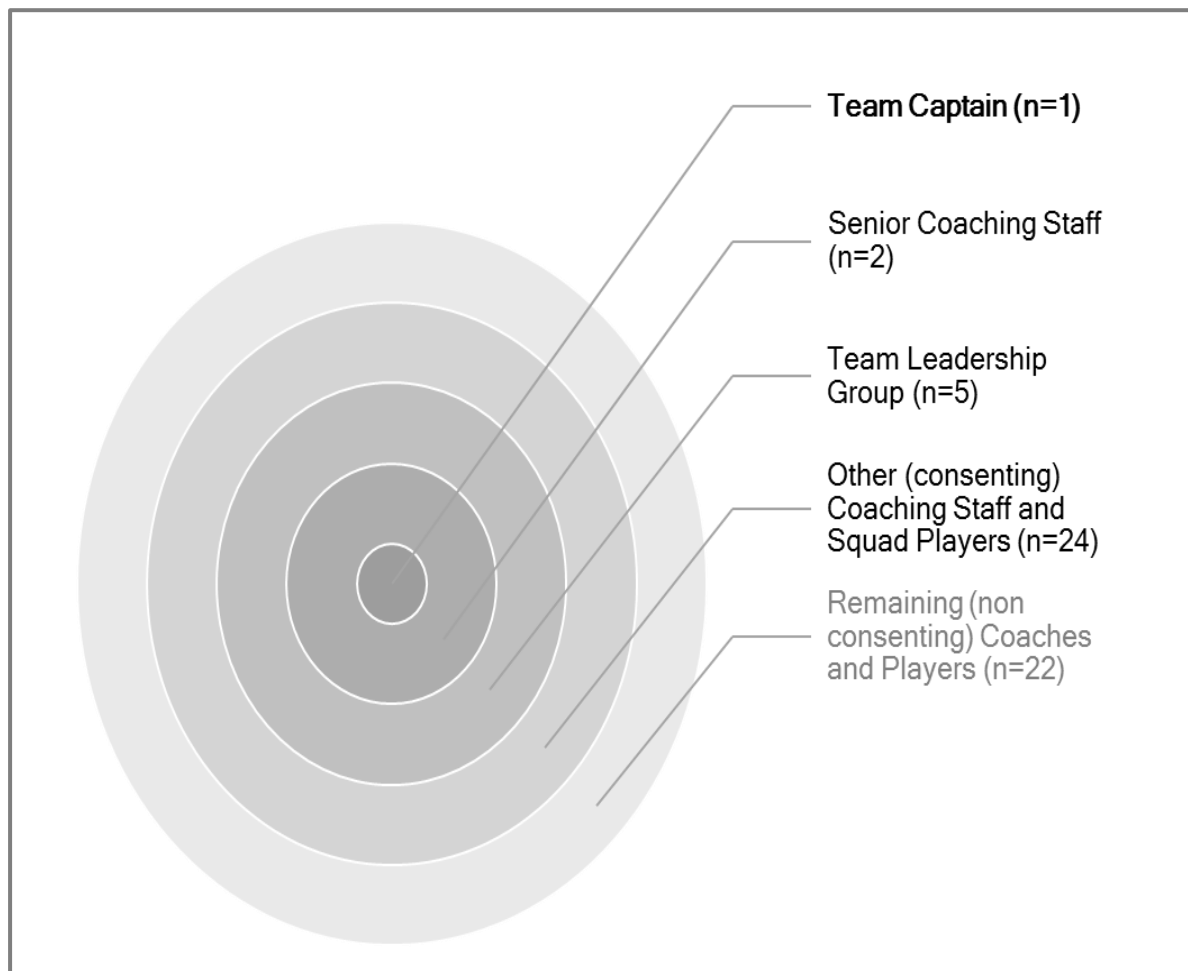


Figure 3.4 – Study participant's landscape

3.4.2 Summary plan for data collection

Figure 3.5 presents a summary of the data collection plan for the duration of the season across four research field settings - preseason preparation, practice activities, competitive fixtures and social situations (with associated descriptions based on discussion with the head coach and a review of daily team activity sheets).

Underneath each setting is the data collection focus and the dates (n=36) when the researcher was in attendance.

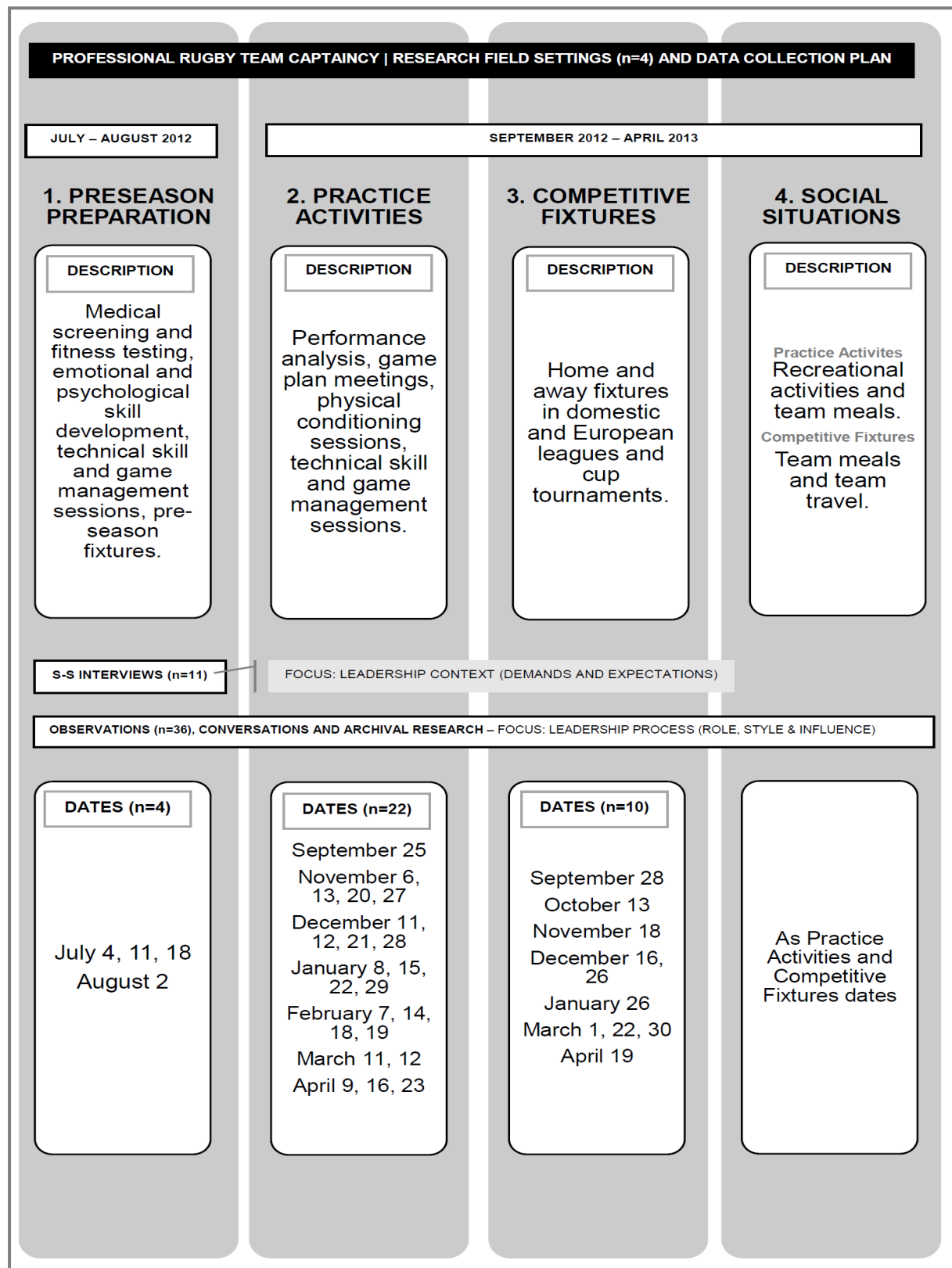


Figure 3.5 – Summary data collection plan

The semi-structured interviews with key participants (team captain, senior coaching staff, team leadership group and three selected squad players) were undertaken during pre-season in the team setting focused on the leadership context, demands and expectations in professional rugby union. These conversations were recorded with informed consent and then transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. In effect, these interviews were seeking to surface important leadership principles (for subsequent observation, conversation and archival research) as experienced by the participants in the organisational context and wider community of professional (rugby union) practice.

Field observations, informal conversations and archival research (focused on the leadership process of role, style and influence) took place across all four settings and dates in the team environment are listed in detail. Each of these dates was supported by a detailed daily sheet or schedule of activities and match day programmes provided by the team administrator. The schedules and programmes provided a daily log (and archival record) and the basis for participant observations and informal conversations recorded in a field notebook.

3.4.3 Interviews and study approach

Angrosino (2007, p42) suggested that field interviews follow many of the traditions and protocols of other interviewing styles but are potentially different in that they “take place between people who have grown to be friends” or have at least established a level of connection or acquaintance based on the researchers time in the field setting. The task of the interviewer however remains essentially the same which is “asking questions of knowledgeable people in the community or group” (Angrosino, 2007, p42). In this study those “knowledgeable people” or central

characters were considered to be the team captain, senior coaching staff, team leadership group and three selected squad player as they reflected different levels of the hierarchy (i.e. head coach to early career professional) and a breadth of different perspectives (i.e. coaches and players, forwards and backs).

Although this interview style is relatively informal because of a level of connection or acquaintance researchers are still required to think carefully about the study context and objectives and the type and range of questions (Kvale, 2007). On this basis, six broad questions directly linked to the first study objective with clarifying prompts (See Figure 3.6) were established to explore the leadership context and expectations in professional rugby union. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled with the identified players and coaches and took place in the team setting in various locations (at the training ground, stadium venue or catering facilities) depending upon the availability of accommodation space to complete the discussion. These interviews, which took place during July and August 2012 to accommodate participant's commitments, were recorded with informed consent and then transcribed verbatim for subsequent reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All interviews once started were concluded apart from 2 (of 11) because of sudden demands on the participants (head coach and captain). These interviews were recommenced when each individual became available again, on both occasions, later in the same day.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	PROMPTS (OR REFRAMES)
STUDY OBJECTIVE 1.1 - THE WIDER CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONAL RUGBY	
What are the features and expectations of the professional rugby union environment?	How would you describe the rugby workplace?
What are the opportunities and challenges of being a professional rugby union player?	What's it like being a professional rugby player?
How do you think the rugby environment and playing professionally might develop in the future?	How do you think things might change in the future?
STUDY OBJECTIVE 1.2 - THE EXPECTATIONS OF RUGBY LEADERSHIP	
What are the demands of leadership in professional rugby union?	What are leaders required to do?
What style of leadership is required in professional rugby union?	How should leaders approach others to get the best out of them?
How do you think leadership in professional rugby union might develop in the future?	How do you think things might change in the future?

Figure 3.6 – Study interview guide

While the interview guide offered appropriate shape and focus to discussions exchanges were also able to deviate and enable the researcher “to probe for meaning, to explore nuances and capture the grey areas” (Angrosino, 2007, p43).

Informal conversations described by Gray (2009, p374), as open ended and flexible, were initiated in direct relation to observations of actions and interactions in the field. This enabled “the spontaneous generation of questions” on matters arising in the moment that warranted (in the context of the study) further explanation or clarification. These informal conversations were recorded with informed consent in a field notebook. While these informal conversations offered the opportunity for

important glimpses not to be lost the challenge was that “different people are asked different questions” (Gray, 2009, p374) and therefore subsequent analysis to “find emerging patterns” (Ibid, p374) required careful attention.

A final challenge for researchers who may have “a global overview (or expertise) of the social and cultural whole that people living in it may lack” (Angrosino, 2007, p15) is to “avoid interjecting yourself too much into the narrative”. The focus should be the day to day lived experiences, social practices, shared norms and cultural values of participants (Klenke, 2008). However, there were occasions during the study when to maintain rapport and relationship that the researcher was required to offer something (e.g. direct intervention or immediate reaction) in return (Gray, 2009; Schein, 2010). This situation created a potential dilemma and delicate balancing act requiring considered navigation. In truth, this was not always possible and sometimes suggestion or comment were offered as rapport and relationship were pragmatically prioritised over the immediate requirements of the study.

3.4.4 Observations and study approach

Angrosino (2007, p37) defined field observation as the “act of perceiving the (individual) activities and interrelationships of people in the field setting”. One of the notable challenges for such endeavour was ethnocentrism which is the (often) unchallenged assumption that our beliefs, philosophy and approach are the only way to view the world and proceed in it (Schein, 2010). To guard against this, as far as possible, the study incorporated both peer challenge and participant collaboration and consultation (Sparkes, 1998).

The focus of the observations were the activities, interrelationships and impact of the team captain, senior coaching staff and team leadership group across four different contexts – preseason preparation, practice activities, competitive fixtures (both home and away) and social situations. Observations of activities and interrelationships across the four contexts took place throughout an entire season on 36 separate one day occasions and were negotiated and agreed in advance with the head coach who was the designated study gatekeeper.

Each of these dates was supported by a detailed daily sheet or schedule of activities and match day programmes provided by the team administrator. The schedules and programmes provided a daily log (and archival record) and the basis for participant observations and informal conversations recorded in a field notebook.

The purpose or intention of the field observations was a search for patterns in day to day activities, interrelationships and impacts that were “interesting, significant or unusual” (Gray, 2009, p496) and which would help further understanding of what captain’s do - study objective 2 (the role and activities of the team captain); how they do it – study objective 3 (the interpersonal style of the team captain) and finally, the impact they have – study objective 4 (the influence of the team captain on group satisfaction and performance).

Bryman (2012) advocated a degree of structure for effective observation with a well organised and considered approach to note taking. To facilitate this process an observational template was devised and completed for each of the 36 occasions in the field setting. This template can be seen at Figure 3.7. The template was populated with as “much detail as possible with as little interpretation as possible” (Angrosino 2007, p38).

Date, time & location: Data: Daily Schedule Game Plan Match Programme Match Tape Team Stats. Press Coverage			Context: Pre-season Practice Fixture Social		
What captains do		How they do it		The impact they have	
Role and activities		Interpersonal style		Influence on performance & satisfaction	
Interviews and Observations The Leadership Role And Influence Of Team Captaincy In Professional Rugby Union Mark Lowther					

Figure 3.7 – Field observations template

3.4.5 Archival research and study approach

Archival research is the analysis of materials kept (in the case of this study) for official organisational purposes. Such potentially rich resources are indicative of “histories, plans and achievements “(Angrosino, 2007, p49) and can “open doors to contextual and conceptual understandings” (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2014, p97).

Such archived documents collected for analysis in this study were planning schedules and daily activity sheets; match day itineraries and programmes; opposition analysis and game plans; performance analysis targets and data; corporate literature and promotions, emails and meeting minutes (n=155)

3.5 Approach to analysis and presentation of findings

The proposed approach to the detailed analysis of data and the visual presentation of the findings was reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A reflexive approach was appropriate to both the informing interpretivist research paradigm, the explanatory and evaluative requirements of the research question and the dynamics of the field setting. Reflexive approaches are flexible and codes can evolve throughout the process with the fluid development of themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p79) indicated that thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. While the approach has “no identifiable heritage, is a remarkably underdeveloped procedure and has few specifications of its steps it is a flexible approach that can be deployed in different contexts” (Bryman, 2012, p578). This adaptability confirmed that thematic analysis would be appropriate for the dynamic nature of the research project.

While Bryman (2012) noted that there were few specifications of its steps and Gibbs (2007) that there was no singular formula O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2014), based on Braun and Clarke, (2006), developed a set of important descriptive phases to guide the thematic analysis process (See Figure 3.8).

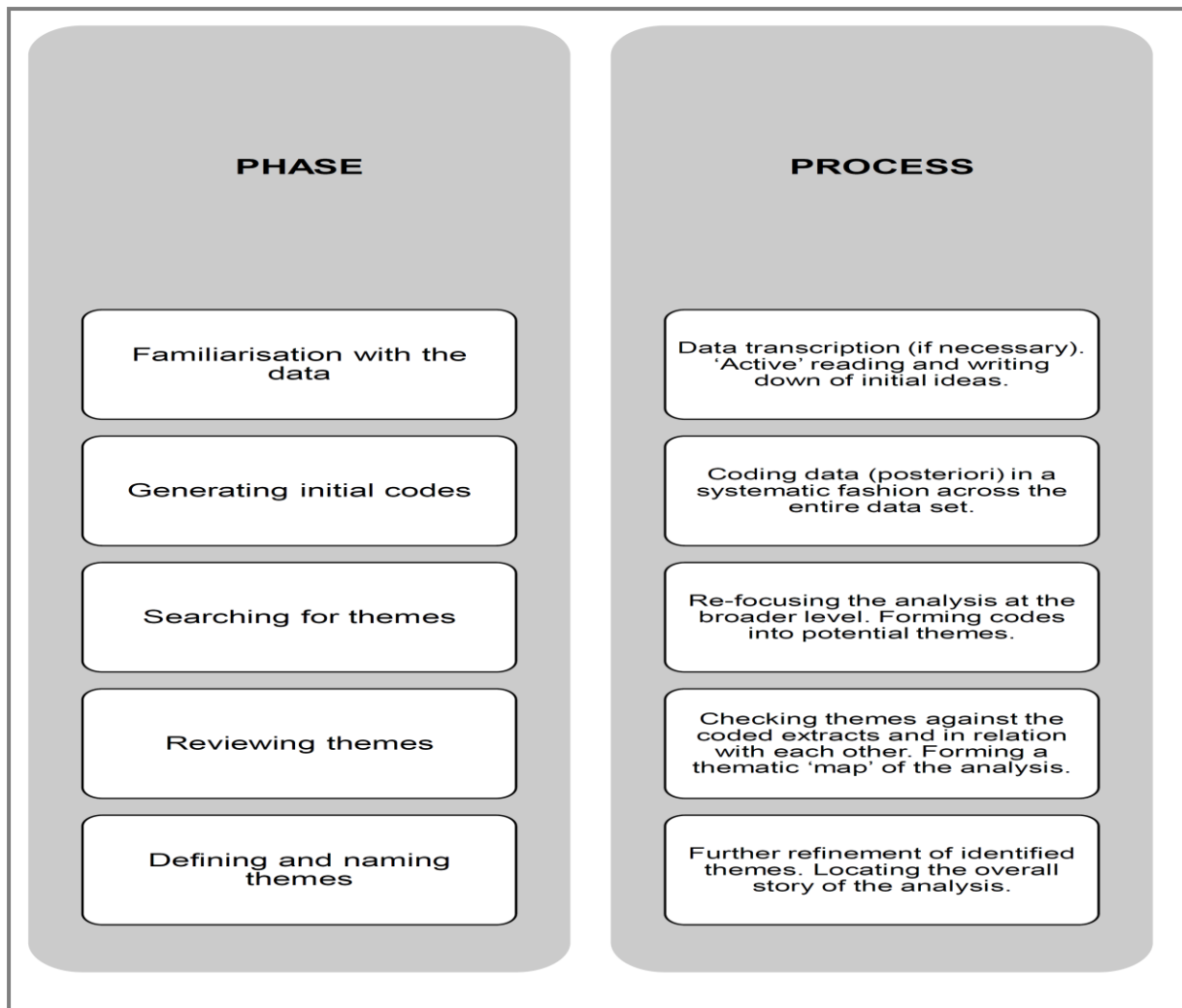


Figure 3.8 – Phases of thematic analysis (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2014)

Biddle *et al.* (2001) and Gratton and Jones (2010) appear to be in broad agreement with the intent and implications of this framework but implied the addition of a third level of analysis or what they described as general dimensions. In other words, following the initial coding of raw data units and subsequently higher order themes then further analysis (and synthesis) could generate a third tier or general dimensions. In the O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2014) schematic this might be considered or located in the defining and naming themes phase. The description of the process could be subsequently edited in parenthesis as “further refinement of

identified themes (into general dimensions, as a means of) locating the overall story of the analysis”.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) provided practical guidance on what might prompt or initiate coding and proposed that being alert to local expressions, metaphors and analogies, repetition, similarities and differences and missing data and omissions in analysing transcripts and field notes could be helpful. As Gray (2009, p496) summarised, what seems to be “interesting, unusual or perhaps significant.”

Bryman (2012, p580) turned his attention to the central role and concept of a theme and its key constituent or four defining elements. He proposed that a theme is a “category identified by the analyst; that it relates directly to the research focus and question; that it builds on codes identified in transcripts and field notes and finally, that it provides the basis for theoretical understanding (and explanation)”. Angrosino (2007, p70) indicated that analysis should begin with “no more than six themes” but that thematic categories could always be reconfigured if required and appropriate.

Finally, Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated that the analysis of data should be tailored to the particular demands of the specific project in hand and on that basis a thematic analysis framework tailored to this study is presented at Figure 3.9.

Following familiarisation and active reading each individual data collection source (interviews, observations and archival documents) was colour coded to identify raw data units of direct relevance to the research focus and the four study objectives (team captain context, role, style and impact). Equal weighting was applied to each source. Following this individual colour coding collective and cumulative colour coding (of all common raw data units for each objective) was followed by a search for broader or higher order themes then further refinement (and synthesis) into general dimensions.

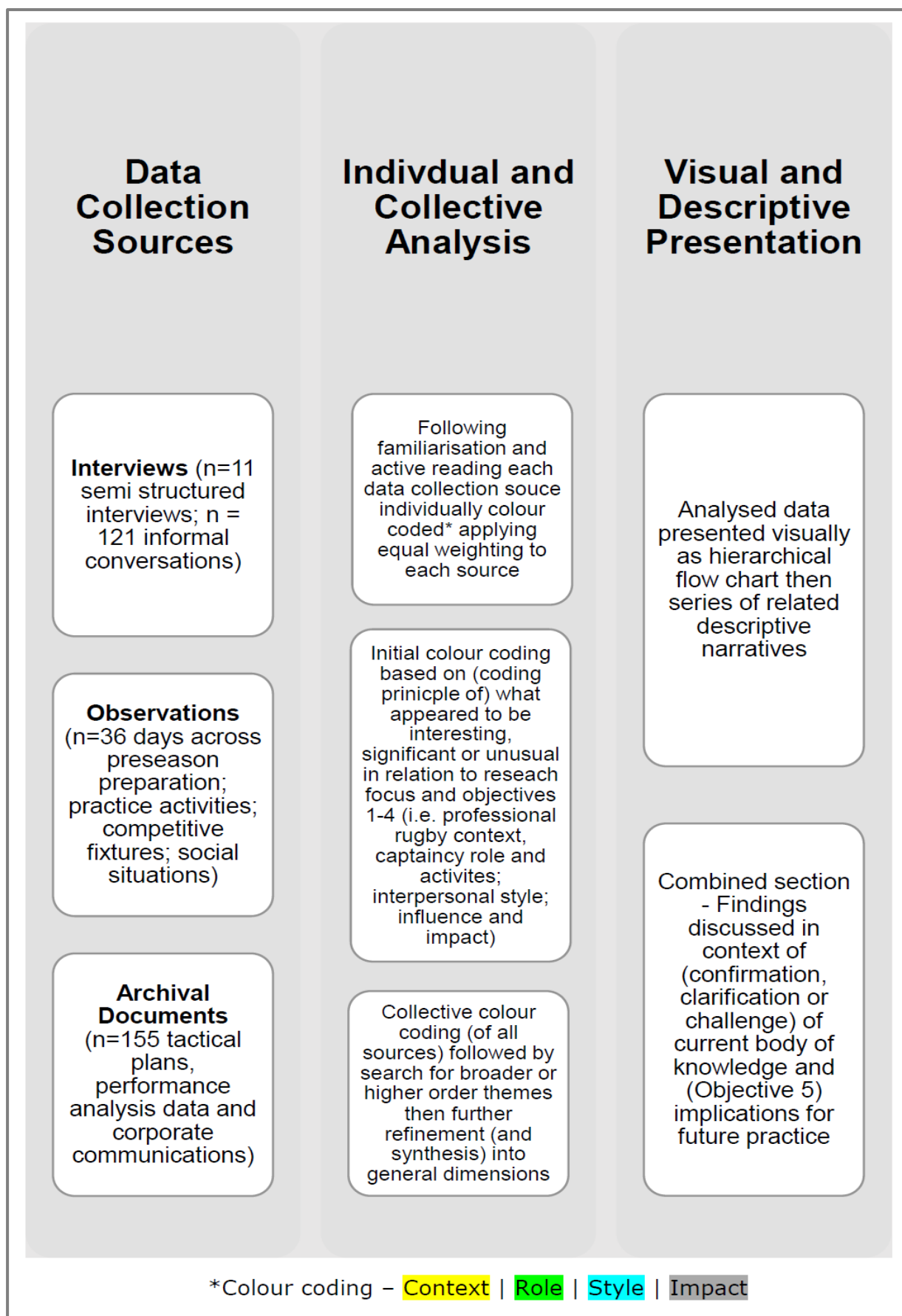


Figure 3.9 – Thematic analysis framework

3.6 Ethical considerations and assessment of risks

3.6.1 Ethical dilemmas

Klenke (2008, p49) has indicated that qualitative researchers face a number of ethical dilemmas during data collection and fieldwork. These dilemmas revolve around specific “issues of power, honesty and the overall quality of the relationship between researcher and researched”. Guba and Lincoln (1989) cited in Klenke (2008, p49) have indicated “that politics suffuse all social science research” and Van Maanen (1988) cited in Klenke (2008, p49) that such “shenanigans” can result in “obstructionist gatekeepers, in group factionalism and disputes about the veracity of findings and the dissemination of results”. The key ethical dilemmas or challenges therefore revolve around how a researcher manages power dynamics (and politics) during data collection, remains as honest (and transparent) as possible during data analysis and manages relational disputes (or tensions) in the research setting.

Ethics is fundamentally concerned with careful consideration of these challenges and potential risks and how they might be best governed (as far as is reasonably possible). In this regard an ethics strategy or study approach (see Section 3.6.3) outlined specific risks and the approach adopted by the researcher. In essence this strategy considered risks associated with people (informed consent and voluntary participation; risk of harm and maintenance of participant wellbeing), process (confidentiality and privacy) and publication (ownership of data and dissemination of findings).

Hammersley (1999, p18) has expressed concern that there is “a tendency to see research almost entirely in ethical terms, as if it’s aim were to achieve ethical goals or to exemplify ethical ideas” and that rather than establishing practical boundaries around research endeavour such demands become “the very rationale of

research” (Ibid, p18). A consequence of this approach is that the “formality of such procedures alienates some individuals and groups and may constrain the conduct of social research” (Klenke, 2008, p49). While this study was able to secure a representative level of engagement with the process (60% of the organisational community eventually consented to take part) the researcher’s personal experience was that some players did not want to read the information sheet and sign the consent form because of (in their eyes) the undue formality of the proceedings. This may have been because of reading and writing challenges or the player contract convention of not signing documents (without representation).

Beyond the (differing) views of participants it is also the case that researchers have different “moral boiling points” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p226) and will “make different decisions even when confronted with similar circumstances”. On that understanding, ethics becomes a pragmatic series of guiding principles, minimum standards and related judgements to which the researcher must be responsible and accountable rather than, in theory and isolation, a series of “one size fits all” concrete and absolute steps.

Eisner (1991, pp225-226), summed up the dilemmas and realities of qualitative research thus “We might like to ensure informed consent, but we know we can’t always inform because we don’t always know. We would like to be candid but sometimes candour is inappropriate. We would like to protect personal privacy and confidentiality, but we know we can’t always fulfil such guarantees”.

3.6.2 Ethical principles

Mindful of these dilemmas but cognisant of the need to establish “important ethical principles” to guide and steer the researcher Klenke (2008, p50) advocated

consideration of the following - Informed consent and voluntary participation; Risk of harm and maintenance of participant wellbeing; Confidentiality and privacy. Informed consent requires that participants are informed about the overall purpose and outline procedures of the research (along with any risks and benefits) and that formal (normally written) consent is secured. Voluntary participation expects that participants are invited (not compelled) to take part in a study and may also withdraw at any time without consequence. Risk of harm and maintenance of participant wellbeing anticipates that research may explore sensitive topics and powerful personal experiences and that these might be potentially distressing (and need to be skillfully and empathetically managed). Confidentiality and privacy expects that private data that identifies participants will not be reported (normally through the use of a coding system).

Another important ethical issue concerns the ownership of data and dissemination of findings. This requires a balance between “the rights of the interviewee (who owns the data), the interviewer and the sponsoring organisation” (Klenke, 2008, p51) and consideration of reciprocity. In this study, all participants consented to the use of anonymised quotes in publications and the storage and use of data for future research. Klenke (2008, p51) indicated that reciprocity may require the investigator to provide “feedback on the results of the research” in return for the participants sharing “their experiences, time and insight”. In this study, that feedback took the form of an interim summary report of key findings (and implications) provided to the head coach (and study gatekeeper).

3.6.3 Study approach (considering ethical dilemmas and principles)

Figure 3.10 outlines nine specific risks (grouped into three themes) and the approach adopted by the study researcher. In summary, this strategy considered risks associated with people (informed consent and voluntary participation; risk of harm and maintenance of participant wellbeing), process (confidentiality and privacy) and product (ownership and dissemination). The balance of this section will explore some of these risks and the related management strategies in a little more detail.

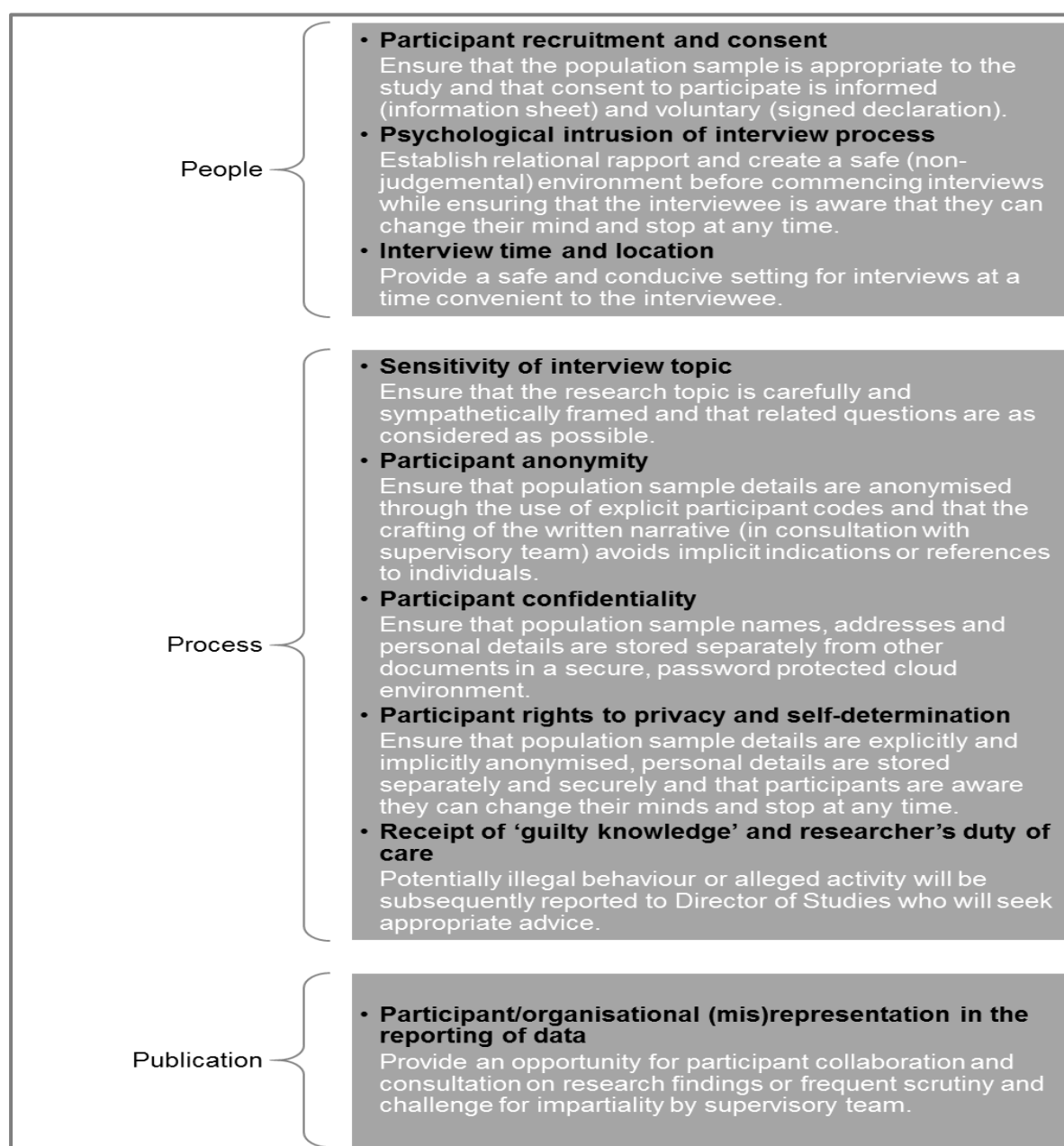


Figure 3.10 – Study ethical framework

3.6.3.1 People

The population sample rugby team taking part in the study had a roster of 40 professional players (including 8 internationals) and 14 coaching and support staff. The focus was on the rugby division of the participating organisation and staff from other departments (e.g. commercial, community and retail) were not considered directly relevant to the research focus and objectives.

While the focus of the study was to be the role, style and influence of the team captain appointed at the start of the season the scope of the research project also included nominated deputies – drawn from the team leadership group - undertaking the captaincy role in the face of international commitments and injuries involving the formally selected leader.

It was agreed with the head coach (and study gatekeeper), that the senior coaching staff (n=2) and team – or senior player - leadership group (n=5) and a small selection of representative players (n=3) - blending forwards, backs, experienced and early career professionals - in addition to the team captain (11 people in total), were formally approached for inclusion (subject to informed consent) in the study. Their lived experiences of captaincy would be central to the planned semi-structured interviews, field observations and informal conversations.

This original (and proposed) number of 11 participants was subsequently extended to 32 people in total as other coaches and players consented to take part in observations and the related informal conversations. This meant that the web of actions and interactions involving the team captain that could be observed and discussed was notably extended.

These developments meant that 60% of the organisational community were eventually involved in the study. Actions and interactions that involved the remaining

players, coaches and support staff (n=22) that had not consented to take part were not collected and analysed.

All potential participants were fully informed about the purpose of the work, how the data was to be used, why it was being carried out and who was undertaking the study. This information exchange on purpose, process and implications was undertaken through a team briefing - at the start of a scheduled squad meeting on 11th July 2012 - in the organisational setting. It was considered – in consultation with the study gatekeeper (head coach) – that this would be an appropriate way to clearly, simply and consistently introduce the study and the researcher. Appendix A: Study briefing session outlines the study briefing and prompt note that was used by the researcher as part of a 10-minute verbal presentation during the squad meeting.

Following the study briefing session information sheets and consent forms (along with pens) were circulated to each attendee and a sample left in the team briefing room. Voluntary written consent was secured from participants before data collection commenced. Appendix B: Study information sheet and Appendix C: Study consent form illustrate the information provided and the basis of consent for the study.

A photo gallery of all coaching and playing staff was produced by the researcher and updated with consent information so that both by name and image valid participants could be promptly recognised and included (or excluded) from observational activity and informal conversations. This document initially required frequent cross referencing but recognising the status of a participant soon became intuitive and immediate.

3.6.3.2 Process

All data (from interviews, observations and archival research) linked explicitly or implicitly to participants was anonymised with the use of simple participant codes (P1, P2 etc.). All observations and conversations between the participants and the researcher were to be treated as confidential unless they breached legal responsibilities. This proved not to be the case and was not an issue. The researcher ensured that the research topic was carefully and sympathetically framed and that related questions were as considered as possible. Data was stored securely on a password protected University cloud storage account (One Drive).

3.6.3.3 Publication

Opportunities for participant collaboration and consultation on emerging research findings were provided at a series of meetings with a representative sample of the consenting organisational community. Those consulted included the team captain, the head coach, a member of the team leadership group and a representative player (n=4) with a PowerPoint presentation with four working or emerging dimensions - the elite rugby environment, the elite rugby player, the professional team captain, developing the team leader(ship) - and related themes.

3.7 Evaluation of research quality and trustworthiness

Sandelowski and Barroso (2002, p213) have indicated that academics across the social disciplines have sought to define what constitutes good qualitative research and concluded that “after all this effort, we seem no closer to establishing consensus on quality criteria, or even whether it is appropriate to try to establish such a consensus”.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1994) indicated that while social research presents particular challenges abandoning any attempt at judging or evaluating the quality of qualitative research was not appropriate (and even counterproductive). Sparkes (1999, p371) argued further that if qualitative inquiry is not legitimized in some way “its findings would be taken less seriously by potential audiences”.

In this regard Bryman (2012, p390) noted that Lincoln and Guba (1985) were uneasy “about the simple application of reliability and validity standards to qualitative research in that such criteria presuppose that a single absolute account (or truth) of social reality is feasible”. Klenke (2008, p38) proposed that an appropriate criterion for considering quality in the interpretivist paradigm was the broader concept of trustworthiness having reached a similar conclusion that narrower considerations of “internal and external validity are criteria used for justifying knowledge production within the positivistic (and quantitative) tradition”.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that trustworthiness might be thought of as comprising four aspects – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and Manning (1997, p95) that “trustworthiness was conceived as a parallel to the empiricist concepts of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity”. The overall strategy for actively considering and managing the trustworthiness of the study is presented at Figure 3.11. Each criterion and technique will now be explained and evaluated to outline the approach adopted.

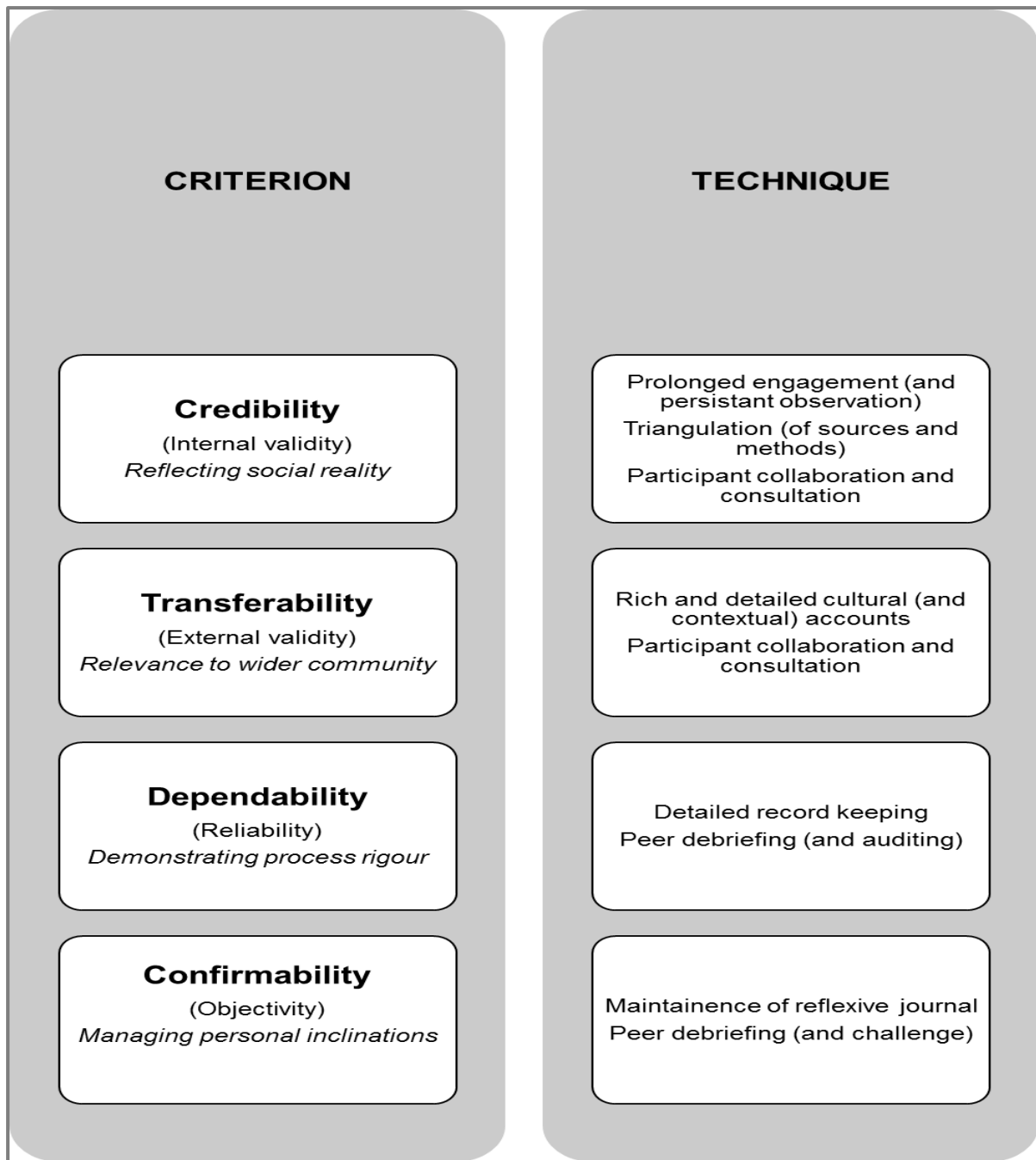


Figure 3.11 – Study trustworthiness techniques (Based on Lincoln and Gruba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998)

3.7.1 Credibility

Bryman (2012) indicated that social research typically generates numerous possible accounts of reality and that the credibility of such research rests on evidence of good initial design and practice (mindful of this multiplicity) and participant consultation (or respondent collaboration) on the resultant findings.

“Good” practice is based primarily on the triangulation of different sources of information and different approaches to investigation. The present study drew data from four different sources or perspectives (coaches, captain(s), leadership group and players) through three different approaches (interviews, observations and archival research). The credibility of the process of investigation and information gathering was enhanced by the degree of prolonged and persistent observation in the group setting (1 day a week across an 11-month season encompassing preseason, preparation, competition and recreation settings).

While triangulation seeks to establish or demonstrate credibility via the use of numerous sources and methods of investigation participant collaboration and consultation aims to provide a level of credibility through corroboration of findings (Bryman, 2012). Typically, a researcher would present participants with an account of interviews or conversations, an outline of impressions and findings or a sample of completed writing (Bryman, 2012). In this study, it was decided to provide participants with an outline of themed impressions and emerging findings three quarters of the way through the research as part of the collaboration and consultation process.

As previously outlined, opportunities for participant consultation and corroboration of emerging research findings were provided at a series of meetings with a representative sample of the consenting organisational community. Those consulted included the team captain, the head coach, a member of the team leadership group and a representative player (n=4).

Consultation with the team captain initially, then subsequently the remaining three representatives, took the form of a PowerPoint presentation with four working or emerging dimensions - the elite rugby environment, the elite rugby player, the

professional team captain, developing the team leader(ship) - and twenty-three related themes. Following each presentation, the dimensions and themes were discussed to consider whether they confirmed, clarified or challenged participant's recollections and expectations. The majority of findings were corroborated, a small number required clarification (typically around choice of language or rationale for synthesis) and a small number remained unresolved (either because participants did not recognise or did not agree with a particular finding).

Bryman (2012) identified a number of practical difficulties and challenges with the process (and usefulness) of participant validation. Firstly, as a result of relationship building in the team setting participants may have established a level of connection and regard for the researcher which means they were reluctant to query or challenge findings for fear of being considered impolite and confrontational. Secondly, (and alternatively) some participants may have been uncomfortable with the personal implications and potential consequences of some findings which may provoke an overtly defensive reaction rather than a considered and honest response to study results. Finally, Bryman (2012) and Sparkes (1999) also suggest that beyond polite corroboration or defensive challenge it may be the case that participant validation could be undermined or diminished because respondents don't have a level of self-awareness, wider knowledge or subject expertise to confidently make sense or challenge what is being presented.

By way of a final observation on the process (and usefulness) of participant validation Sparkes (1999, p378) is not clear "that members have privileged status as commentators on their actions". Fielding and Fielding (1986, p43) suggest that "feedback cannot be taken as direct validation or refutation of the observers

inferences but should be treated as yet another source of data and insight” and explicit evidence of such endeavour.

3.7.2 Transferability

Bryman (2012) proposed that transferability was concerned with capturing the contextual uniqueness of the research setting and considering the wider application - and usefulness – of research findings to other (sport) domains and relevant communities of practice (e.g. business teams). The quality and validity of transferable insights rests on thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) or rich and detailed accounts of the cultural and professional setting under study. Such endeavour “creates a database for making judgements about possible transferability of findings” (Bryman, 2012, p392). Transferability, by implication, also rests on the nature and quality of participant collaboration and consultation on any thick descriptions and detailed cultural accounts (Bryman, 2012).

While the focus of the study was the leadership role and influence of the team captain one of the five objectives of the study was deliberately established and designed to explore and understand the “rich and detailed” professional sport context. The features and expectations of the professional workplace as well as the opportunities and challenges of professional employment were investigated via interviews, observation and archival research across an 11-month season encompassing preseason, preparation, competition and recreation settings. Opportunities for participant consultation and corroboration on research findings were provided at a series of meetings with a representative sample of the consenting organisational community. Two dimensions - the elite rugby environment and the

elite rugby player- and twelve related themes created “a database for making judgements about possible transferability of findings” (Bryman, 2012, p392).

3.7.3 Dependability

Klenke (2008, p38) proposed that “dependability indicates the extent to which the same results could be obtained by independent investigators” through the demonstrable provision and management of rigorous and replicable processes. Such processes would include detailed design, documentation and record keeping by the researcher and debriefing (and auditing of the research process for rigour and replicability) by peers (Lincoln and Gruba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998).

Dependability appears to be more of a thoughtful and documented commitment to the process of undertaking research and providing genuine potential for another investigator to achieve broadly similar rather than definitively the same results. Such absolute certainty of outcome would seem to be at odds with the messy and dynamic nature of the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach.

The overall purpose of the study to understand and explain the leadership role, interpersonal style and influence of team captaincy in a professional rugby union context and critically evaluate the implications for future team captaincy practice has been clearly articulated to guide another investigator.

The philosophical and strategic approach to the study framed by an interpretivist paradigm (Klenke, 2008) - shaped by a relativist ontology and social constructionism epistemology - and a qualitative (instrumental case study) methodology and research design (Creswell, 2007; Harrison *et al.*, 2017; Stake, 1995) were clearly articulated to guide another investigator.

Methods including explanatory research techniques (semi structured and informal conversational interviews, overt participant observation and archival research) using a representative (professional rugby team) sample and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) were underpinned by a range of documentation to demonstrate a considered approach and support similar practice.

Underpinning documentation relating to research techniques included Case study elements and descriptors; Summary data collection plan; Study briefing session; Study information sheet; Study consent form; Study interview guide; Field observations template; Study ethical framework and Study trustworthiness techniques. Underpinning documentation relating to the representative sample included a Study participant's landscape. Underpinning documentation relating to thematic analysis included Phases of thematic analysis and a Thematic analysis framework. A Reflective diary sheet and Reflective diary prompts were also presented to document the approach taken by the researcher in considering "potential biases and predispositions" and monitoring "attempts to control (or regulate) them" (Klenke, 2008, p43).

In addition to the articulated study design and documented record keeping of the researcher there have been a number of formal and informal opportunities for debriefing (and auditing of the research process) by peers (Lincoln and Gruba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998). Such debriefing and auditing by two supervisors has provided an external perspective on the researchers disciplined approach to the research process (and therefore the likelihood – but not guarantee - of an independent investigator achieving broadly similar results).

Specifically, the process of research has been subject to 6 monthly reviews and an annual monitoring report. Along with ongoing feedback on written work these

mechanisms support the discussion or project ideas, the planning and organisation of work, the development of research techniques and the development of academic writing.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with the researcher's ability to manage "personal history, research experiences and disciplinary allegiances" (Klenke, 2008, p17) and to remain as objective as possible (in thought) and to act in good faith (in practice) during the research process.

Bryman (2012) indicated that the researcher is an active instrument during data collection and actively implicated in the construction of knowledge. While Klenke (2008) argued that all research is value laden and biased and Ahern (1999) that complete objectivity is impossible the researcher is expected to reflect on their underlying assumptions and day to day approach.

Lynch (2009) proposed further that this should be undertaken through philosophical self-reflection and regulation as well as methodological self-consciousness and criticism. The challenge is to "understand the effect of one's experiences rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate them" (Ahern, 1999, p408) and "through reflexivity seek to actively report" this endeavour (Klenke, 2008, p17).

Reflection has been defined succinctly as "thinking about thinking" (Johnson and Duberley, 2003, p1279) and "interpretation of interpretation" (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p6). Nadin and Cassell (2006, p208) have indicated, more broadly, that "reflexivity involves reflecting on the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes".

Reflective writing acknowledges “the emotional and personal presence of the writer” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p215) and encourages researchers “to strive not be complacent and to continue to review and critique research practice” (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p506). The benefit of such a reflexive approach is that it provides “a greater understanding of the role and impact of the researcher and increased trustworthiness of the data” (Finlay, 2002, p531).

While managing personal inclinations through reflective practice can help confirm the trustworthiness of data the “difficult (reflective) process” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p209) also provides some challenges. Firstly, Ahern (1999) warns that it is not possible to set aside things (or manage inclinations) about which researchers are not aware. Simply “adopting a research diary does not turn a non-reflexive researcher into a reflexive one” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p215). Before opening up to the reader on the research process the researcher must commit to opening up about themselves and their assumptions, values and beliefs (Schein, 2010).

Secondly, while reflective practice seeks to encourage a degree of objectivity (and, by implication, enhanced trustworthiness) during the research process Ahern (1999, p408) argued that “subjective awareness is beneficial to qualitative research” and that “preconceptions enable the identification of issues, situations and themes in common with broader human experience”. To seek a level of objectivity and detachment potentially sanitises the research process (and research relationships) and disables the ability of the researcher to bring their academic knowledge and professional expertise to bear (in service of the studied and the study).

Gould *et al.* (1996) and Eklund (1996) in Sparkes (1999) proposed that the subjective experience and expertise of researchers was a legitimate source of

trustworthiness. More recently, Hodge *et al.* (2014) in a study of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team legitimised the personal biography of the researcher (and their research experience and subject expertise) as an important and trustworthy influence.

The third challenge of reflective practice is “the thin line between interesting insight and self-indulgence in reflexive accounts” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p210) or the danger of “narcissism run amok” (Weick, 1995, p894). In this regard, Nadin and Cassell (2006, p215) argued that “personal revelations are only useful if links are made to analyse (their) relevance in terms of the broader study”.

In this study the researcher kept a reflective diary (See Figure 3.12) using a simple, single sheet proforma. While there are a number of reflective models and cycles (e.g. Gibbs, 1998; Kolb, 1984; Johns, 1994) the underpinning for the reflective diary used in the study was adapted from Borton’s (1970) model of reflection (with three phases of description, sense making and consequence).

Using a simple model and one page layout - albeit with the opportunity to write further notes overleaf - enabled the researcher to focus on capturing content rather than trying to make sense of an overly complex process or reflective cycle in a field setting. In addition, the researcher was familiar with using this model of reflection as part of formal qualification and continuing professional development in pedagogy.

Date, time & location:		Context: Pre-season Practice Fixture Social
Log	Diary	Journal
Facts and events	Feelings and reactions	Reflections and implications
Prompts	Prompts	Prompts
What happened?	So what did I feel about the experience?	Now what could I do?
What was I trying to achieve?	So what things affected my decision making?	Now what might change because of this experience?
What were the consequences?	So what other choices did I have?	Now what might happen?
Reflective Diary The Leadership Role And Influence Of Team Captaincy In Professional Rugby Union Mark Lowther		

Figure 3.13 – Reflective diary prompts (Based on Borton, 1970)

The reflective diary was used once field research commenced in July 2012 with a separate sheet being completed for each intervention (n=36) in the team environment. The sheet was completed at the time or as soon as practically possible afterwards. Sometimes notes were extensive and sometimes a series of bullet points and prompts. On occasions very little was considered revelatory or of “relevance in terms of the broader study” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p215) and therefore few observations were made on the sheet.

Nadin and Cassell (2006) indicated that “a (completed) research diary serves a number of functions”. Firstly, the diary acts as an “organisational aid (Ibid, p211) to record and track the process and timeline of the research project. Secondly, the

diary captures “social encounters” (Ibid, p211) with participants which allow the researcher to reflect on their own assumptions, values and beliefs. Thirdly, the diary enables “practical comments” (Ibid, p211) on methodological issues, improvements and developments.

While confirmability is concerned with the researcher’s ability to manage “personal history, research experiences and disciplinary allegiances” (Klenke, 2008, p17) through a level of awareness and commitment to reflection Sparkes (1998) implied that a degree of “inquiry and audit” (Ibid, p367) by influential others can also contribute to a sense of objectivity.

It has already been established that there were a number of formal and informal opportunities for “inquiry and audit” by peers (Lincoln and Gruba, 1985; Sparkes, 1998). Such debriefing and challenge by two supervisors has provided an external and dispassionate perspective on the researchers approach to the confirmability and objectivity of the research process.

Specifically, the process of research has been subject to 6 monthly reviews and an annual monitoring report along with ongoing feedback on written work including the development of research techniques and reflective practice. Sparkes (1999, p371) indicated that researchers should provide “some rationale for selecting certain techniques over others” and that this “would help the reader judge the logic and relevance of the selection process”.

The criterion and techniques identified in Figure 3.11 (Trustworthiness Techniques) are drawn from the research of Lincoln and Gruba (1985) and Sparkes (1998) and subsequently complemented by the insights of a number of other recognised qualitative researchers including Ahern (1999), Borton (1970), Bryman (2012), Geertz (1973), Klenke (2008), Lynch (2009) and Nadin and Cassell (2006).

The techniques selected have sought to strike a balance between self-management and regulation by the researcher (e.g. prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation of sources and methods, rich and detailed cultural accounts, detailed record keeping, maintenance of reflexive journal) and corroboration and consultation with others (e.g. participant collaboration and consultation, peer debriefing and auditing, peer debriefing and challenge).

Johnson and Bröms (2000) have written of the importance of maintaining balance in effective living systems (and other domains) and on that basis no single technique or source was “selected over others”. The intention was to undertake and evidence a range and balance of approaches to establish a reasonable level of trustworthiness in the research undertaken.

On this point, Sparkes (1998, p374) strikes a pragmatic note in observing that “methods or procedures should be put in place and recognised for what they are and the job they can do in specific contexts for certain purposes”

3.8 Reflective Account

The purpose of the methodology was to detail the overall philosophy and design intent of the research project (including the selection of applicable data collection and analysis techniques) and in so doing convey a degree of reassurance in the reliability and replicability of the plan. In summary, and in light of the demands of the research question the study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative methodology. The research was based on a single, instrumental case study, the Southern Warriors (pseudonym), a professional rugby union team classified as competitive elite (Swann *et al.*, 2015) who played in a top tier league. Data collection techniques included semi structured and informal conversational interviews, overt

participant observation (over the course of a season) and archival research. Data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Fundamental to the trustworthiness (Sparkes, 1998) of the research project, in addition to credibility, dependability and transferability – or lessons learnt (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) - was consideration of confirmability and the maintenance of a reflective journal. The purpose of the journal was to consider the role and impact of the researcher in the process and capture key adjustments to project implementation in the field in light of unforeseen problems (Nadin and Cassell, 2006).

An analysis of the researcher's journal for "interesting, unusual or perhaps significant" (Gray, 2009, p496) entries or patterns that were "relevant in terms of the broader study" (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p215) identified two general dimensions – self and fieldwork. In detail, the self-general dimension comprised two higher order themes – starting assumptions about leadership practice and starting assumptions about process interventions. These related to the impact of the researcher on the process. The fieldwork general dimension comprised two higher order themes – unforeseen problems and system entry and unforeseen problems and workable relationships. These related to adjustments (or reflections on) the implementation of the plan in light of organisational and relational realities. The reflective account (written in a blend of first-person narrative and third person perspective) was structured around these 2 general dimensions and (for each) the two related higher order themes (four in total). Relevant diary entries and journal notes were italicized to differentiate them from the surrounding narrative and having been transferred for authenticity may appear less fluent and rather abstract. The research implications of the starting assumptions and unforeseen problems were also considered.

3.8.1 Self and starting assumptions

Klenke (2008) has argued that all research was value laden and biased and Ahern (1999) that complete objectivity was impossible and that in response researchers are expected to reflect on their underlying assumptions and day to day approach. Ahern (1999) warned that it was not possible to set aside things (or manage inclinations) about which researchers were not aware. Therefore, in disclosing to the reader the approach to the research process the researcher must also be forthcoming about themselves and their (underlying) assumptions, values and beliefs (Schein, 2010). The challenge, and consequence, was to “understand the effect of one’s experiences rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate them” (Ahern, 1999, p408).

On reflection, I had two significant starting assumptions and influences regarding the research project that influenced my decision making and choices. One related to values and beliefs I held about the role, influence and impact of leadership in the sport domain and the other assumption was about the process of intervention (and inquiry) in organisational systems. Both sets of assumptions will be considered below.

Starting assumptions about leadership practice (and authoritative collaboration)

Allen (2008) suggested that the development of leadership ability and approach (as well as underlying assumptions) is a complex process and evolves over time based on significant childhood experiences, learned experiences as an adult and influential role models. Over time and on reflection (and in response to leadership development programmes) I have established that my key values are health, family and recognition (as an expert in my field). Reflecting on McGregor’s

(1960) theory of human behaviour my beliefs about the organisational setting are that people require clear boundaries, a focus on day to day implementation and considered interventions to maintain (and enhance) performance. McGregor (1960) described this as a Theory X approach, in effect people cannot be trusted and require a controlling style in response. At the same time, I also feel strongly (and increasingly) that active participation and shaping of organisational endeavour by employees and active consideration of their well-being and welfare maximises and sustains performance. McGregor (1960) would have described this as a Theory Y approach, in effect people can be trusted and respond best to a participative style. At the time of his death in 1964 McGregor was developing (and blending) a pragmatic and pluralist approach which was to be entitled Theory Z. Hirschhorn (2002) would summarise this pragmatic leadership approach or behavioural style as authoritative collaboration. The challenge in practice is finding the right balance (and emphasis) depending on both personal preference and the needs of the group (Goffee and Jones, 2006).

Reflecting on Erikson's (1959) stages of psychosocial development, the most significant and informative experiences of my life have been attending boarding school (defined by Erikson as school age 6 – 11 years and adolescence 12 – 18 years), living in Budapest for three years after leaving school and (much) later on getting married and having a family (defined by Erikson as young adult 19 - 40 years). Boarding school gave me feelings of competence and a strong sense of self-confidence. I responded well to the structure and discipline of the boarding school setting (and the numerous sporting opportunities) and the unconditional support of my parents. Living in Budapest and working as a sports coach (while living with my parents – my father was the air attaché at the British Embassy) enabled me to see at

first hand the working practices of senior diplomats which has been influential to my approach to organisational politics. Marriage and (four) children have broadened, balanced and refined my approach and view of life and emphasised the importance of trust and loyalty.

I don't have a single leadership role model (Schein, 2010) although I have been fortunate to have a range of influential line managers who collectively have been good at their jobs and good with people. My work experience spans 25 years in public and private sector sport facility management (my final position was Head of Leisure Services for a large local authority) then 12 years – to date - in academia with a particular interest in leadership and high performance teams (across international and national rugby union, rugby league, football, cricket, field hockey and ocean racing groups). All the teams and departments led by my influential line managers had a predominantly positive impact. They all provided appropriate authority and guidance and put people (and their welfare) at the heart of organisational activity. This balanced approach to “issues focused, and people centered leadership” that I have witnessed in successful sports teams has further grounded this pluralist approach. My predominant (and considered) approach to the leadership hallmarks of strategy and change would be emergent and incremental (i.e. pilot project innovations and calculated experimentation) - or what Watzlawick *et al.* (2011) described as the gentle art of reframing - as an antidote to the boom and bust (Friedman, 2007) of many dramatic organisational initiatives that I have experienced over the years.

Starting assumptions about process intervention (and skilled application of expertise)

Further to my values and beliefs about leadership in the sport domain my postgraduate education (in organisation consulting) at Ashridge Business School and subsequent experience in consulting interventions in organisational systems also shaped my starting assumptions about the research project. From a process perspective management consulting shares many similarities with academic research (O’Gorman and Macintosh, 2014; Block and Nowlan, 2011). Both seek to find an answer or deeper understanding of a problem or particular issue.

There are five phases (Block and Nowlan, 2011) in consulting: entry and contracting (initial contact with a client about the project); discovery and dialogue (producing a sense of both the problem and the strengths the client has); analysis and the decision to act (reporting the inquiry in appropriate fashion and selecting the best action steps or changes); engagement and implementation (carrying out the action planning if required); extension, recycle, or termination (and learning from engagement).

These phases broadly map the process of academic inquiry (O’Gorman and Macintosh, 2014) from entry and negotiation with a case study gatekeeper, to discovering and reviewing current knowledge thorough to data collection and analysis then discussing findings and identifying implications for practice (and topics of future interest and inquiry). The process of academic inquiry also terminates, and researchers reflect and learn from engagement.

While the processes share similarities the decisions on how to proceed in a consulting intervention are different and are typically (but not exclusively) made by the consultant based on the application of his or her expert judgement (Block and

Nowlan, 2011). The emphasis in a consulting intervention is to find the right solution to the right problem (Watzlawick *et al.*, 2011). The predominant organisational metaphor is machine - an organisation is a series of connected parts arranged in a logical order in order to produce a repeatable output (Morgan, 2006). Developments such as complexity theory (Stacey, 2011) and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005) however, are fundamentally challenging and broadening how consultants now view and intervene in organisational networks. With an academic inquiry decisions on how to proceed are collaboratively negotiated with a gatekeeper based on common interests. The emphasis is on exploring and evaluating theory, practice and the implications for the field. The predominant organisational metaphor is social network – an organisation has its own culture and subcultures defined by member's values, norms, beliefs and rituals (Morgan, 2006).

Starting assumptions and research implications (of engagement and collaboration)

Taken together my life experiences regarding leadership and interventions demonstrate a preference for the following values (health, family, recognition, trust, and loyalty), beliefs (application of expertise, identifying problems and solutions, structure and discipline) and assumptions (organisation viewed as connected parts with logical order). The resulting leadership approach leans towards authoritative collaboration (Hirschhorn, 2002), displays of competence and self-confidence, the application of political skills and a considered (emergent and incremental) approach to organisational strategy and change initiatives.

Although an honest account of my life experiences the narrative contains some contradictions. While there is a preference for clarity, structure and the confident application of expertise there is also an acknowledgement of complexity,

pluralism and the gentle art of reframing. The former (certainty) is shaped by significant childhood experiences and the later (messiness) by learned experiences as an adult (Allen, 2008). In addition, these views, traits and preferences as Kantor (1999) indicated can present as shades of colour from light (competencies) to shade (overcompensation). For example, a preference for clarity, structure and the confident application of expertise if not met can result in me becoming frustrated, arrogant and emotionally detached. An authoritative approach to leadership by others and radical approaches to strategy and change initiatives can result in me becoming defensive and resistant.

The challenge during the research project was to “understand the effect of (these) experiences rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate them” (Ahern, 1999, p408). I noted on 18th July (OB1) that it was *“easy to get drawn into content of session, step back and impartially observe process. Expressing opinion about leadership which maintains momentum and ebb and flow of conversation but isn’t strictly impartial”* and on 12th December (OB14) that I was *“not challenging their thinking enough or really listening enough, want to be liked, may turn them away, want things to fit and make sense”*

On the other hand, the benefits of my life experiences of leadership theory and practice and organisation interventions and inquiry was that “subjective awareness is beneficial to qualitative research” and that “preconceptions enable the identification of issues, situations and themes in common with broader human experience” (Ahern 1999, p408). The potential effect or consequences of these values, beliefs, assumptions and approach was the “imposition of (my) own definitions of situations upon participants” (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p21). I noted on 18th November (OB10) that I was *“getting drawn in, wanting to help, provide solutions,*

answers, add value, be recognised and accepted as an expert” and on January 26th (OB22) the “temptation to lead answers rather than facilitate sense making by reflecting back, summarising for clarification and confirmation”. The challenge was to remain as objective as possible and to act in good faith during the research process and on February 18th (OB26) I was aware that I was “overstepping mark, maintain distance, offering solutions but building quality of connection and trying to remain an impartial observer”

Reflective writing acknowledges “the emotional and personal presence of the writer” (Nadin and Cassell, 2006, p215) and encourages researchers “to strive not to be complacent and to continue to review and critique research practice” (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p506). The benefit of such a reflexive approach is that it provides “a greater understanding of the role and impact of the researcher and increased trustworthiness of the data” (Finlay, 2002, p531). Bryman (2012) indicated that the researcher is an active instrument during data collection and actively implicated in the construction of knowledge and, in response, my intention was to manage as best I could “personal history, research experiences and disciplinary allegiances” (Klenke, 2008, p17).

I managed these issues (as best I could) through regular engagement with supervisor debriefing and challenge as well as participant collaboration and sense making. Supervisor debriefing and challenge took place at six monthly intervals throughout the data collection and analysis process. There were also regular opportunities for formal written feedback and challenge on chapter drafts of the evolving thesis. Opportunities for participant sense making of emerging research findings were provided at a series of meetings with a representative sample of the consenting organisational community. Those consulted included the team captain,

the head coach, a member of the team leadership group and a representative player (n=4). Finally, an interim summary report of key findings (and implications) was provided to the head coach (and study gatekeeper) within three months of the conclusion of data collection.

3.8.2 Fieldwork and unforeseen problems

Harrison *et al.* (2017) defined and described the key features of a case study approach as an exploration of people's lives and context in a natural setting with lengthy researcher engagement and immersion in the field. Such complex exploration and sustained engagement, however well planned, is subject to unforeseen challenges which the researcher has to consider (Yukl, 2008). The case study at Southern Warriors involved 32 coaches and players and four different contexts – preseason preparation, practice activities, competitive fixtures (both home and away) and social situations. Interviews, conversations and observations of activities across the four contexts took place throughout the entire season on 36 separate one day occasions.

On reflection, I had two significant unforeseen problems (or more accurately, categories of problem) regarding the research project that I had to consider. One related to system entry (including access to the environment, not being a burden and managing non consenters) and the other related to workable relationships (including the political dimension, parallel processing and interpersonal conflict). Both categories of unforeseen problem will be addressed below.

Unforeseen problems and system entry (via connection and diplomatic negotiation)

Mitchell *et al.* (2014) and Nesti (2010) have indicated that elite team environments are difficult to enter because of the demands and dynamics of the setting. The process of gaining entry is predicated on four considerations - personal confidence, demonstration of competence, personal affability and collaborative approach (Woolway and Harwood, 2019). Personal connections or relationships (Critchley *et al.*, 2007), opportunity and luck (Conger, 1992) should be added to this list of factors.

Two professional rugby teams were approached to gauge interest in participating as case studies in the research project. These initial approaches were made via email and were selected on team location (and travel arrangements) relative to the university and existing professional relationships with the researcher. Both team head coaches had attended a national governing body coaching programme where the researcher had delivered a module on leadership. Following further explanatory and informal face to face discussions on the university campus one of the professional team head coaches consented to provide unrestricted access to the team setting for the duration of the season long case study research project.

Access to this elite team environment was therefore a combination of personal relationship, opportunity and luck as both coaches were known to the researcher, both teams were geographically convenient for the frequent observations and the (eventual) participating coach was new in post and open to a new approach and related initiatives. With regard personal affability there was also an element of luck rather than deliberate design that I connected with both coaches and vice versa

as otherwise the relationship would not have worked as well and the prospect of access to the group setting may have been compromised.

Therefore, while system entry via a gatekeeper was not an unforeseen problem it was a fortuitous solution and with the demands of high-performance sport and the implications for coach tenure (Bridgewater, 2010) could have become a challenge requiring navigation. My response was to actively maintain contact and dialogue with the other head coach. On reflection, this sounds rather transactional, but this relationship would have continued any way and we used humour to keep open the option to return to a conversation about the research project if circumstances changed. De Geus (2002) indicated that such an approach to scenario testing and planning (for both the best and the worst case) was sensible practice.

Following system entry, but on landing in the research setting, two potential problems emerged – one related to not being a burden (on the group and specifically the head coach and team captain) and the other on how to manage non consenters (those not voluntarily open to be included as active participants). On 4th July (OB1) I *“discussed the proposed work plan with Participant 2 (Head Coach) following conversation about the start to pre-season training. Captain yet to be appointed, had discussion of possible candidates”*. At this meeting, one of the other coaches (Participant 5) joined the conversation and, in humour, suggested that *“you need to be paying us a fee”* for access to the group setting. I took this as an attempt to connect rather than a confrontational comment, but my reaction was that I wanted to *“contribute and add value skilfully to the environment. Be positive and polite”* and not be a burden. Following on from this humorous comment, Participant 2 (Head Coach and gatekeeper) re-confirmed support of the project but was also interested in

“possible consulting interventions on leadership development”. An unforeseen, and early, issue therefore was the requirement to diplomatically navigate a path between the observational requirements of the research project and the anticipation (by some members of the coaching team) that I might intervene in the setting under observation. This dilemma encouraged me to re-state the purpose and boundaries of the research project (and the subsequent benefits and possibilities in terms of leadership development upon conclusion) in order to avoid an untenable quid pro quo. This stance was accepted by the Head Coach, partly, on reflection, because he had an academic background and was able to connect with the notion of maintaining a level of impartiality. In other circumstances this response might have been met with less favourable feedback.

A week later on the 11th July (OB2) I had a *“discussion with Participant 1 (the appointed Team Captain), introduction, scene setting, and established rapport”*. Again, with regard personal affability there was an element of luck rather than deliberate design that I connected with the team captain and vice versa, otherwise the relationship would not have worked as well, and the quality of exchange and data collection could have been less rich. At this meeting I noted that I was worried about the *“impact of the research process on captain’s performance”* and we agreed that this was a possibility as we were in uncharted territory and that we would continue to monitor the situation. I was left with the impression, in this setting, that I would have been told if there was a negative impact.

Having entered the setting and navigated potential issues with the head coach and team captain I then had to address one other unforeseen problem which was managing coaches and players who did not formally consent to participate in the process of data collection. The original (and proposed) number of 11 participants

was subsequently extended to 32 people in total as other coaches and players (following a team briefing on the purpose of the research) consented to take part in observations and the related informal conversations. These developments meant that 60% of the organisational community were eventually involved in the study.

However, the actions and interactions that involved the remaining players, coaches and support staff (n=22) that had not consented to take part could not be collected and analysed. This situation created an interesting practical and emotional challenge. At a practical level great care had to be taken not to include material related to the non-consenting participants. A register of names and photographs was created to act as a filtering mechanism and as the researcher became more familiar with the group this process of identifying nonconsenting participants became less laborious. At an emotional level, it did seem or feel like a rejection or split between participants and non-participants and I was not sure why the balance of the squad would not take part. As participation was voluntary this was not something I could pursue. Some players may not have wanted to read the information sheet and sign the consent form because of (in their eyes) the undue formality - or distraction - of the proceedings. For some, there may have been literacy issues. I worked hard to connect with the whole squad even though data could only be collected from some of the group. I noted on 11th December (OB13) at a team meeting that *“everyone seemed very welcoming and conversational, lots of greetings and handshakes. Conversations with people I may not have spoken to previously plus those I recognise, sense of banter”*.

Unforeseen problems & workable relationships (based on political sensitivity & balance)

Having negotiated entry to the organisation setting and potential problems related to the intervention expectations of the head coach, the impact of the research on the team captain and management of non-consenters three issues were identified relating to workable relationships – the political dimension (and navigating power dynamics), parallel processing (focusing on task and building relationships) and interpersonal conflict.

Sport in general, and high performance settings especially, are noted for a number of particular features including “irrational passions and emotional attachments” (Taylor *et al.*, 2015, p2) and “a symbolic significance in relation to performance outcomes, success and celebrating achievement” (Hoye *et al.*, 2015, p4). The Board of Southern Warriors while appearing considered and business like were prone to irrational and symbolic gestures which created the potential for a number of unforeseen problems for coaching team tenure and continuance of the research project. Two examples in particular reflected this uneasy relationship. I noted on 21st December (OB16) that I *“travelled with Participant 2 (Head Coach) to the training ground in Southern Warriors minivan. Had confidential discussion about board arrangements and the hiring of an external rugby consultant”*. The Board were reacting to a series of poor results by the team and the recruitment of a consultant was seen as undermining the Head Coach. More starkly, I noted on 15th February (OB25) that *“Board wanting to sack coach after record loss against Northern Celts”*. These events could have been problematic for the research project as the Head Coach was the study gatekeeper. The vulnerability and politics of this situation had encouraged me to build a network of relationships within the club hierarchy as a way of mitigating such an unforeseen problem or outcome. Again, De Geus (2002) would

have indicated that such an approach to scenario testing and planning (for both the best and the worst case) was sensible practice.

Klenke (2008, p20) observed that a researcher is considered to be a “passionate participant” in the unfolding and dynamic process of undertaking extended research. The challenge for such a “passionate participant” (Ibid, p20) is being close enough to connect with other participants and establish a working relationship yet not so close so as to unduly influence the unfolding inquiry and the work being undertaken. The challenge therefore as noted on 25th September (OB5) was to *“maintain objectivity and impartiality while building relationships and contributing to environment”*. What was unforeseen and recorded on 12th December (OB14) was that I was *“getting attached emotionally”* with many of the personalities and participants in the group. Although only an observer of the rewards and demands of professional sport I was experiencing many of the shared (positive and negative) experiences with the group. This attachment was both beneficial because it enabled me to build constructive working relationships but was problematic in that it could compromise impartiality. This surfaced in two ways – wanting to spend more time with participants I liked and less time with participants I didn’t like. The only way to manage this unforeseen problem was to recognise it (which I did through the reflective process) and then seek to actively manage the issue. On a more mundane note as recorded on 4th July (OB1) *“made deliberate choice about clothing – not university, not Southern Warriors, smart casual”* so as to present visually a degree of impartiality. This proved problematic and impractical on 2nd August (OB4) when I was *“issued with staff identity badge (stadium card with name and identify number) to wear and access Southern Warriors facilities”* and on 30th March (OB32) when I was *“issued with Southern Warriors squad pass to wear for national stadium fixture”*

The third and final workable relationships issue was interpersonal conflict. Just as De Rond (2008) had noted in his ethnographic study of the Cambridge University boat race crew the “irrational passions and emotional attachments” of sport (Taylor *et al.*, 2015, p2) created a strain on interpersonal relationships and presented unforeseen challenges. I noted on 16th December (OB15) after one fixture and a heated debate in the coaches meeting room that *“Participant 5 might need to apply the brakes at times and Participant 2 might need to get into someone’s grill (be assertive) at times”*. On 26th January (OB22) I took a lift home with Participant 2 where we discussed *“conflict in the team, considering other coaching options – also spending too much time on management issues”*. The challenge was that I was asked to mediate such a difference of opinion between coaches. I had also been *“asked to mediate a difference over the start and finish time of training between coaches and players”* previously on 18th July (OB3). Being asked to mediate conflict between participants in a setting I was observing was clearly problematic but on the other hand was taken as an indication of the working relationship I had been able to establish. As Fisher and Ury (2012) advocated my role was to reflect back what I was hearing and ask questions about people’s assumptions and motivation, to walk in the others shoes and to help identify common ground. As I noted on 14th February (OB25) *“this is not easy”*.

Unforeseen problems and research implications (for diplomatic and political skills)

Harrison *et al.* (2017) defined and described the key features of a case study approach as an exploration of people’s lives in a natural setting with lengthy researcher engagement and immersion in the field. Such complex and sustained

engagement is subject to unforeseen challenges which the researcher has to consider (Yukl, 2008). There were two significant unforeseen problems regarding the research project that had to be considered. One related to system entry (including access to the environment, not being a burden and managing non consenters). The other challenge related to workable relationships (including the political dimension, parallel processing and interpersonal conflict). I managed both of these issues (as best I could) through participant collaboration and consultation informally on a day to day conversational basis (with the head coach and team captain in particular) and formally through meetings with a representative sample of the consenting organisational community. Those consulted included the team captain, the head coach, a member of the team leadership group and a representative player (n=4).

Introduction to the combined results and discussion section

This combined results and discussion section of the thesis presents and describes the findings of the study and then discusses and evaluates these results in the context of the existing body of knowledge on the leadership role and influence of team captaincy in professional rugby union. The presentation and discussion of results is structured around four chapters – chapter 4: the professional rugby union context and expectations of leadership (study objective 1); chapter 5: the role and activities of the captain (study objective 2); chapter 6: the interpersonal style of the captain (study objective 3); chapter 7: the influence (or impact) of the captain on team performance and satisfaction (study objective 4).

More specifically, the chapters on professional context and team captain role, style and impact are structured in a consistent format. Each of these chapters begins with a visual analysis or hierarchy chart of raw data units, higher order themes and general dimensions. The general dimensions then provide the main headings for the presentation of relevant results with the higher order themes providing the sub headings for detailed description of findings underpinned by reference to participant quotes (P), observational records (O) and archival documents (A).

There were 32 participants (60% of the organisational community) including coaches, captains, members of the leadership group and squad players involved in the study through semi structured interviews and informal conversations – these participants were coded P1 to P32. There were 36 one day observations in the team environment over an 11-month period including preseason preparation, training practice, competitive fixtures (home and away) and social situations – these

observations were coded O1 to O36. Finally, there were 155 archival documents collected from the organisational setting related to corporate strategy, operational planning, performance analysis and community interaction – these archives were coded A1 to A155.

Thematic analysis was based on familiarisation and active reading of each individual data collection source (interviews, observations and archival documents) which were then colour coded to identify raw data units of direct relevance to the research focus and the four study objectives (team captain context, role, style and impact). Equal weighting was applied to each source. Following this individual colour coding collective and cumulative colour coding (of all common raw data units for each objective) was followed by a search for broader or higher order themes then further refinement (and synthesis) into general dimensions.

Following the visual presentation and detailed description results were then evaluated in the context of the existing body of knowledge and the extent to which study findings confirmed, clarified or challenged (and developed) current understanding and the key themes identified in the literature review were discussed.

CHAPTER 4: THE WIDER CONTEXT AND EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL RUGBY UNION

Presentation of results

4.1 Visual analysis and hierarchy chart of the professional rugby context

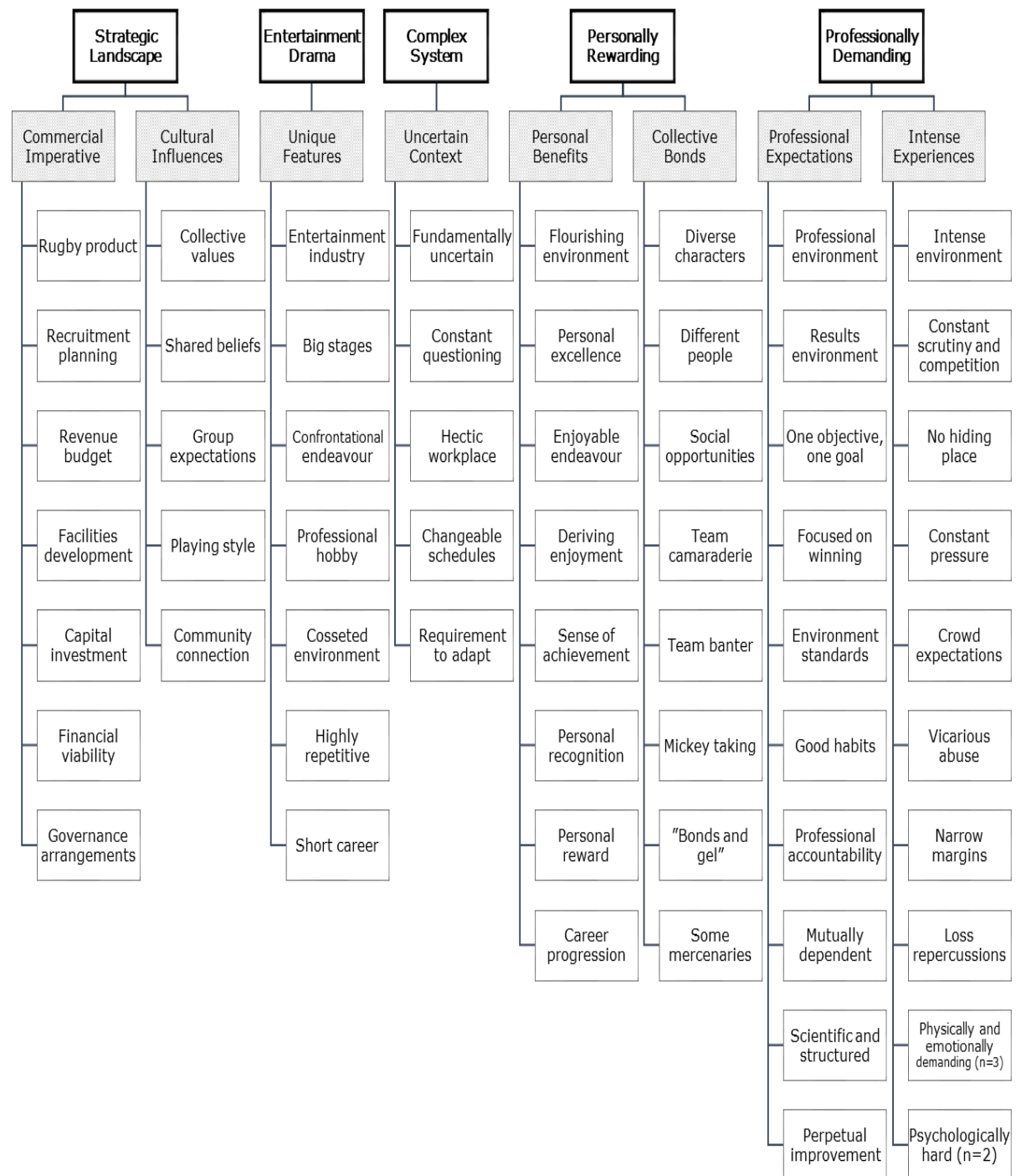


Figure 4.1 – The Professional rugby context

4.2 Strategic landscape

The first general dimension and notable feature of the professional rugby context was the strategic landscape comprising the two higher order themes of commercial imperatives and cultural influences. In effect, these findings indicated that the case study organisation was both a business that sought to be commercially viable but also a club that sought a distinct culture and identity.

The commercial imperative was considered to include firstly - rugby product, recruitment planning (or people resources) and maximising income; secondly – revenue budget, facilities development, capital investment and financial viability (or financial resources) and controlling costs and thirdly - governance arrangements or setting direction, monitoring performance and providing support (O10, O14).

The rugby product was the overall commercial brand (or offering) reflected primarily in the “playing style and game plan of the team” (P2) which in turn was intended to attract and maximize sponsorship deals, facility gate receipts, merchandise sales and food & beverage takings (O10, O14). Related to the development of playing style and execution of the game plan of the team was a proactive approach to team cycles and succession planning including the development (through academy arrangements) and recruitment (through agent negotiations) of playing talent (O10, O14).

The captain, leadership group and wider playing squad responded to such commercial realities by focusing on process (e.g. detailed preparation, match day routines, game plan roles). However, these commercial demands and realities were ever present and did reach the surface most notably during one half time talk in the changing rooms towards the end of the season. The players were impelled to improve their second half performance by the team captain because “we’re playing

for our f*****g contracts, we're playing for our wives and kids, we're playing to put food on the f*****g table" (P14).

While the rugby product and team playing style were intended to maximise income (and brand loyalty) it was also apparent that significant emphasis was placed on financial viability by carefully controlling related costs (including player contracts) through the production and monitoring of a revenue budget (O10). At one-point players were asked to undertake basic cleaning and maintenance duties around the club changing and training facilities because of cash flow constraints (O3). While the detailed funding arrangements (including national governing body support and owner investment) for the case study club were beyond the direct remit of this study it was clear that budget constraint was perceived to be a challenge for "recruitment, retention and team performance" (P2). In addition to the day to day revenue budget it was also the case that facility development through capital investment was another important commercial activity in the long-term viability and sustainability of the club. In this regard the club changing and training facilities were rather dated (and dilapidated) and other, more advanced (and contemporary) facilities owned by local stakeholders (e.g. schools and colleges) were often used.

Governance arrangements or setting direction, monitoring performance and providing support were led by a management board (O14). There was no evidence of an overarching and coordinated direction of travel and documented strategy for the different strands of the club including the rugby department although mention was made of a "strategic vision" (P2). However, this strategic vision – at a commercial level - was never elaborated or expanded upon. The link between the board (and strategy) and the Head Coach was the Director of Rugby who provided "debriefings after board meetings" (P2).

On one occasion it became apparent that the board felt uneasy about the perceived disconnect between the anticipated rugby product and the realised team playing style and proposed “the hiring of an external rugby consultant” (P2) to critique arrangements. This was considered without consultation with the Head Coach. On another occasion following a series of poor team – or “rugby product”- performances (and in reaction to media pressure) the board intended to “dismiss one of the coaching team” (P2). This was discussed and strongly resisted by the Head Coach. Ultimately neither intervention came to fruition, but both demonstrated the ongoing commercial pressure of the professional context and, at times, the rather reactive governance arrangements on rugby playing matters.

The second higher order theme was cultural influences. Cultural influences were considered to include firstly - collective values, shared beliefs and group expectations; secondly - playing style and thirdly - community connection. Cultural influences set the tone for anticipated behaviours by all players (including the captain) within the group environment, during competitive fixtures and in relation to community stakeholders.

Collective values were initiated by a pre-season PowerPoint slide presentation given by the Head Coach to the entire squad (O3). During this presentation players were encouraged to “leave their mark” (P2) by “buying into” (P2) a series of shared beliefs and group expectations. The leave your mark values, captured on posters and banners in the environment (A1, A2), were adapted by the Head Coach from an article by Johnson, Heimann and O’Neill (2000) on a wolf pack analogy and team dynamics. Player or wolf values included hunt, play, rest and voice while squad or pack values included co-operate, share, teach and respect (A1). Players were also expected to “know their jobs, be disciplined, demonstrate

good habits and be open to honest feedback” (P2). Part of their role was to “deal with emotion and manage public perceptions” (P2).

Mindful of the broad collective values established, the playing style of the team was based on a series of specific competitive principles (A119 - 122) that in turn were refined by performance and competitor analysis (A138 -142). The competitive principles related to defence, attack, contact area and units (forwards and backs) with a focus on attitude and accuracy (A119 - 122) and were practised during the week then subsequently executed through a series of tactics, calls and codes depending on particular zones or field position.

The third cultural influence was the importance and significance of the club’s connection to the local community and in turn how these “public perceptions” (P2) and interactions were fostered and managed. Competitive fixtures provided opportunities for the captain to communicate directly to supporters (though the match day programme) and share reflections on previous performances and expectations for future performances. The same programme also enabled a range of squad players to share personal thoughts and insights and build connections with the audience (A128, A130, A131, A133, A134 and A137). Furthermore, competitive fixtures provided opportunities for a local community match day mascot and guard of honour, local community charity collections and local community entertainment acts (O6, O10, O15, O22, O28 and O35). The club also ran a range of “community initiatives and events” (P2) and selected players were expected to attend corporate hospitality events to “build relationships and links” (P5).

4.3 Entertainment drama

The second general dimension and notable feature of the professional rugby context was entertainment drama, or the provision of entertainment and the sense of drama associated with the sport comprising a higher order theme (or collection) of unique features.

The unique features were considered to include firstly – the entertainment spectacle and confrontational (or gladiatorial) endeavour of professional rugby; secondly – the route and pathway into the sport and thirdly – the highly repetitive routines and relatively, short career span.

Professional rugby union was perceived to be “an entertainment industry” (P9) where players were “fortunate enough to get paid and play on the big stages” (P2). Home attendance for the case study club were typically in the region of 6,500 spectators per game (O6, 10, 15, 22, 28 and 35). One away fixture was played in front of circa 36,000 people (O32). The game was noted for its “energy and aggression” with the emphasis on “physicality and intimidation otherwise you lose” (P5). Such confrontational principles were reflected in the playing style and language chosen for game plans (A119 – 122).

Although the players were professional athletes “everybody who’s involved in this professional rugby team would play rugby even if they weren’t paid for it - it is a hobby, people get paid to do their hobby” (P5). Professional sport therefore provided a relatively, but not exclusively, unique opportunity to progress and transition from enjoyable pastime to well-paid employment. Some players were noted to have progressed in a more managed and relatively cosseted fashion “since they were 17, through the academies, age grade, turned to professional rugby. Never done a day’s work, never been short of money, never made lunch, given everything” (P5).

While competitive fixtures provided highly visible and often dramatic entertainment for spectators the hours and days of unseen preparation (A3 – 118; A123 – 127) were highly repetitive – “what’s hard about it is you’ve got to do it every week, every week’s hard (P3.). As another player confirmed “when it’s going well it’s amazing, when you’re playing in front of 20,000 people, brilliant that’s what it is about but they’re only small things out of probably 80 per cent of the time where you’re physically tired from training, you’ve just been beaten or you’ve been dropped from the team or you’re injured, so many negative aspects as well” (P9). As a consequence of the physical confrontation and repetitive training professional rugby was only “a career for ten, 15 years if you’re lucky” (P11).

4.4 Complex system

The third general dimension and notable feature of the professional rugby environment was the complex, uncertain and dynamic nature of the context and the demands on players to adapt to circumstances.

While mention has already been made of the highly repetitive, even mundane, routines and heavily structured features of the club setting paradoxically the domain was also fundamentally uncertain with players frequently concerned and unsettled about a loss of form or “confidence in your abilities”, “lack of selection”, “getting injured at some stage”, or “running out of contract” leading to “horrible worry and constant depression” (P1). Consequently, there was a disruptive and “constant questioning of yourself” (P11).

In addition to the personal uncertainties listed previously there were also inherent complexities associated with the workplace “because we’re in a large group obviously as a team, 40 odd players and then within that there’s subunits as well so it’s pretty hectic” (P9). As a consequence of the nature of the context players “need

to adapt to survive or you're gone" (P7). Such routine adaptations included coping with the day to day uncertainties of the job and the workplace but also more fundamental adaptations such as "changing playing positions, I had to change positions this year and I had to adapt to survive, it's one of those things (P7).

4.5 Personally rewarding

The fourth general dimension and notable feature of the professional rugby context was the personal rewards and interpersonal relationships generated by the profession comprising the higher order themes of personal benefits and collective bonds.

Personal benefits included firstly – the opportunity to flourish and excel; secondly – seeking enjoyment through playing professionally and thirdly – a sense of achievement and recognition leading to career rewards and progression opportunities. Professional rugby "enables you to become the best you can be in your position; I think it enables (you) to do something you enjoy and there's a lot of things to aim for" (P1).

The consensus amongst participants was that professional rugby - and professional sport more widely - should be "somewhere where people can flourish and improve as a person as well as a professional player" (P11). This required a delicate balancing act between the professional and commercial demands of sport as well the personal and developmental needs of the players. Professional rugby provided opportunities for "personal excellence" and mastery (P11).

In response to these demands "you've got to enjoy it - in this environment it can break you easily and I think mentally it can wear you down if you're not enjoying it" (P9). Finding and deriving enjoyment from playing professionally (and working

with other professionals) was both an important day to day coping mechanism and longer-term strategy for sustaining motivation and performance.

Thirdly, because of opportunities to flourish in the environment and derive enjoyment from playing, professional rugby was “something that gives you, I don’t know, a huge sense of achievement” (P2). “When you play well... getting that recognition is such a good feeling, you know? That you’ve felt like you’ve achieved something yourself” (P4). In addition to a sense of achievement and recognition professional rugby also provided opportunities “to make a way of life for yourself, earn a living and eventually play for your country if you’re playing a professional sport” (P4). By way of example, at the time of the study it was indicated that leading professional rugby players were earning up to £300,000 per annum (O7) and the case study squad contained eight international rugby players (A128 – 137).

The second higher order theme was collective bonds. Collective bonds were firstly - the diversity and richness of the playing group; secondly - the opportunities for interaction and humour and thirdly – the degree of camaraderie and cohesion (generated by a diverse group with shared interests in regular contact with each other). As one participant remarked “I think the social side of rugby you can’t compare it to any other sports, that camaraderie, that team atmosphere” (P1).

Firstly, players “get to work with a lot of different people from different places in the world, different cultures” (P11) and “you get so much camaraderie from that - it’s so diverse and you’re forced to get along with so many different people” (P8).

Secondly, and drawing on this diversity, the environment created many opportunities for interaction, “team banter and mickey taking” (P8). These opportunities included both professional situations such as playing and “training every day” (P6) and social situations where “the boys have got a chance to interact,

socialise, do things that are not rugby orientated” (P3). It was observed that while “team banter and mickey taking” (P8) actively contributed to the positive development of team cohesion it was also often used to either hide and deflect true (hurt) feelings or provide a safe vehicle for their true (assertive) expression (O3).

Thirdly, and based on the many opportunities for interaction and humour, the professional context was notable for a sense of “camaraderie - I love all the boys...that’s one of the main things that you have to enjoy” (P4). However, the camaraderie was more than just bonhomie but went to the heart of effective and sustainable performance. “A rugby player has to be about friendships and bonds and gel because if you have a bunch of 15 machines then it won’t work” (P7).

However, it was also the case that not all players subscribed to the notion of camaraderie and “you’re always going to have some players who show some rivalry, bitchiness, jealousy, whatever you want to call it” (P1). Furthermore, some players were more mercenary or singular (rather than collective) in their focus. One example was a player who “would leave the field as a sub or injured, he’d get changed and go home before the game had finished. He said, I don’t get paid for sitting around watching the game, I get paid for playing it” (P5).

4.6 Professionally demanding

The fifth and final general dimension and notable feature of the professional rugby context was professional demands comprising the higher order themes of professional expectations and intense experiences. Professional expectations included firstly – a focus on results and winning; secondly – environment standards and personal accountability; thirdly – mutual dependency and shared responsibility.

There was a focus within the professional environment on results and winning “it’s a results environment - you’re either winning or you’re losing” (P9). Therefore

“whatever your motivations are you get paid to go out there and do a job by someone” (P1) and “if you're not playing well, there's no point being on the field” (P10). In addition, while players “compete with other players to get a place at the end it's about one objective” (P7) and aiming for one common goal or result. “Being a sports athlete is very demanding if you don't push yourself to achieve goals” (P7).

As part of the pursuit of results notable emphasis was placed on high standards, “good habits” (P3) and personal accountability. In a “workplace where discipline is the foundation creating good habits forms the basis of achieving any sort of performance” (P2) and “if you've got good habits, then you'll have a good team” (P3). To reinforce these “little habits” (P3) operational house rules were established in a pre-season team meeting (O3) and subsequently enforced through a series of fines (O4). These fines, of varying amounts, were imposed for breaches such as late arrival or absence, inappropriate clothing or loss of clothing, loss of player's diary or manual.

These standards were supported by a structured and scientific approach to both preparation and performance with an acknowledgement that “the sports science is better, there is a better understanding of how long we need to be on the field, how long we should be training for” (P9). Ultimately standards and habits were reliant on levels of personal accountability for performance and “from a cultural point of view you can't let people down day to day in the working environment” (P9). Furthermore “in this elite environment one missed tackle costs you a game - you have to take responsibility” (P1).

There was an acknowledgement that in achieving results and seeking wins that individual effort and personal accountability had its limits and that mutual dependency and shared responsibility held the promise of greater rewards. “If you

haven't got that tight-knit group, you don't play for each other on the field and those little instances, those 1%s on the field where you put your body on the line for your mate...if you don't have that then you're not going to perform as well as you could do" (P4). Furthermore, it was noted that "if you've got a good team spirit, I think you've got 90 per cent of a good team" (P3). Conversely, it was recognised that with the prevalence of performance analysis and emphasis on individual statistics that "people quite often chase their own performance targets and the selfishness of individuals can cost the team" (P1).

It was also recognized that in seeking winning results that "personally accountable" athletes (P1) and "mutually dependent" teams (P4) needed to actively innovate and evolve and that while "you've got to be ruthless, you can't stifle that progression, that improvement - it's that delicate balance" (P1).

The second higher order theme was intense experiences. Intense experiences included firstly – physical and emotional demands of playing (including the repercussions of losing); secondly – constant internal scrutiny and thirdly – external media and public expectations.

Professional rugby is "physically and emotionally demanding and psychologically hard" (P9). "The challenge is maintaining fitness due to the physical demands of the game – it's a ten-month season with no weekend breaks" (P2). Furthermore "what's hard about it is you've got to do it every week and every week's hard" (P3) leading one participant to observe that "the only downside for me is the mental rollercoaster" (P11). In addition to training and playing there is a significant amount of mundane travelling to and from competitive fixtures (OB7, 17, 31, 32). As a consequence of these cumulative physical and emotional demands professional rugby is typically only "a career for ten, 15 years if you're lucky (P11).

The most notable demand appeared to be competitive fixtures. Ultimately “you’re only judged by what you do on the weekend” (P2) and “there is a lot of pressure on everything you do, especially when it comes to games” (P6). Not only did participation in competitive fixtures create particular demands – “it’s such an emotional rollercoaster” (P2) – but the consequences and repercussions of losing provided “the biggest negative for me and you just don’t switch off “(P8). “You don’t appreciate playing so much if you’re not winning week in week out” (P11).

The professional context was also notable for the constant level of scrutiny and surveillance of player training and performance – “you’re constantly under pressure training...you’ve constantly got to perform, you’ve constantly got people chasing at your heels and you’re always being videoed” (P4). All training sessions (O1-5, 8, 9, 11-14, 16, 18-21, 23-27, 29, 30, 33, 34 and 36) and competitive fixtures (O6, 7, 10, 15, 17, 22, 28, 31, 32 and 35) were video recorded and analysed. In addition, players wore GPS tracking systems to monitor work rate and movement. This led players to conclude that “it’s such an intense environment and it’s a cut-throat environment, you are always being watched and in constant competition with someone who’s in your position” (P1).

Performance analysis data (A138 – 142) following competitive fixtures typically ran to 20+ double sided pages focusing on overall team performance against playing style expectations and game plan tactics through a series of graphs and tables. Top performers were singled out for tackles, tackles missed, clean outs and carries in a league table. The summary performance and key decision-making options of the half backs were also highlighted. Finally, each player had a profile page of individual performance indicators (n=42) with a concluding section for “work ons” (A138 – 142). This information was readily and publicly available in the team

room and supported by illustrative video clips at computer stations (O1-5, 8, 9, 11-14, 16, 18-21, 23-27, 29, 30, 33, 34, and 36).

In addition to constant internal scrutiny players had to cope with and manage external expectations from both the public and media. While some thought “it’s a positive to play in front of so many people, like six or seven thousand here, that’s added massive pressure which some guys think is a negative” (P8). Such circumstances were considered relatively unique “when you actually play, and you’ve got X number of thousands of people watching you, judging you, in a normal workplace you don’t get that” (P6). Such judgements sometimes extended beyond the players and became vicarious abuse because “if you had a bad game, I’d worry what my parents would feel, what my girlfriend would feel, when they hear people slagging you off” (P6) in public.

Apart from the judgements of spectators during games and comments in other public situations the mainstream media and social media created a level of expectation. “You turn the news on, and Team X lost at home, you go on the internet, Team X poor or something, in the paper or on the TV, you couldn’t not look at it, you want to hide from it. That’s one of the worst things for me, that’s one of the biggest negatives for me” (P8). In coping with these expectations one coach observed that “as a player, I lived in a bubble, I didn’t read the press, ever” (P5).

In conclusion, the study identified five notable findings or general dimensions of the professional sport context – the wider (largely off field) strategic landscape and considerations (including commercial imperatives and cultural influences), the relatively unique features and (largely on field) dramatic entertainment context of high-performance sport, the complex and dynamic systemic nature of professional sport, the day to day professional demands of preparation and performance on

players and, finally the personal (and collective) rewards of a professional sport career.

Discussion of findings

The wider context and expectations of leadership in professional sport, as identified in the literature review and based on the current body of knowledge, were primacy of winning, playing competence (being good at your role), significant relationships (working well with others) and wider purpose (establishing a powerful cause and connecting to the community). There was notable congruence (or confirmation and clarification) between firstly, the study findings on strategic landscape (including collective values and shared beliefs) and current knowledge regarding wider purpose and secondly, between study findings on professional demands (including results environment, professional expectations and intense experiences) and current knowledge regarding primacy of winning, playing competence and significant relationships. There was a level of insight with regard the study findings on (mundane) behind the scenes aspects of the sport entertainment drama, the adaptive requirements of players to complex and dynamic systemic demands and finally, the personal rewards of promotion opportunities (to other clubs) and career progression (to the international stage).

4.7 The wider strategic landscape and considerations

The study found that, at a strategic level, rugby was considered to be a commercial product that generated income, required marketing and incurred costs. In this regard income streams were to be diversified – media rights, sponsorship deals, facility gate receipts, merchandise sales, food & beverage takings - and maximised and budget expenditure regularly monitored and prudently managed

(including most notably people or player resources). Such cost control had to be balanced with the need to recruit, remunerate and retain the best possible playing (and coaching) talent. The Pro-Prem League (pseudonym) had a salary cap to contain squad costs, ensure a degree of competitive parity (and entertainment drama for stakeholders) and protect the long-term financial sustainability of the sport. However, consistent implementation of the salary cap has been problematic because of the competing agendas and different philosophies of club boards and investors. Lebed and Bar-Eli (2013, p161) confirmed that team sports at an elite club level manage the sport product as a “branding process”. The branding process sought to invest in talented “superstars”, market to the “widest possible circle of consumers” and “spur spectator attendance”. It was also the case that in order to balance revenue budgets and develop training and playing facilities that clubs had to attract sponsors and other “financial investment” (Lebed and Bar-Eli, 2013, p161). Hoyer *et al.* (2015) and Taylor *et al.* (2015) confirmed that brand loyalty was a unique feature of the sports sector.

The study clarified that maintaining financial viability (and avoiding potential insolvency) in an increasingly competitive external environment and sport sector landscape (Rayner, 2017) was a strategic priority and day to day operational consideration for a professional rugby club. However, Hoyer *et al.* (2015) and Taylor *et al.* (2015) cautioned against a sole concentration on commercial activity as one of the enduring and powerful features of the sector (and its appeal) was the role of irrational passions, tradition and nostalgia not simply a profit motive.

The importance of governance arrangements and setting longer term direction, monitoring ongoing performance and providing support (and recognition) to the coaching and playing staff were found to be further important findings in the

professional setting. Lebed and Bar-Eli (2013, p151) referred to such arrangements as the “internal complexity of an elite sport club” which was influenced by four environmental considerations – physical, social, menacing and supporting. The physical environment (by way of example) comprised facility quality and weather conditions; the social environment - national governing body (NGB) relationships, market forces and media scrutiny; the menacing environment opposing teams and finally, the supporting environment shareholders, sponsors and fans. These environments had an influence on governance arrangements which in turn had an influence on “coach(s), team and athletes” (Lebed and Bar-Eli, 2013, p154) including the team captain.

The study found that, at a cultural level, collective values, shared beliefs and group expectations were an important consideration and (varying) influence on day to day actions, interactions and reactions particularly in training and competition but also in social situations (including travelling and mealtimes). In effect, cultural values became the anticipated benchmark for routine behaviours and habits which leaders (including the team captain) were expected to role model. Steffans *et al.* (2014) drew attention to the leadership influence of the captain in developing team identity and wider purpose and the capacity to build – or create and manage - a shared social identity. This shared sense of identify and belonging (Ruggieri, 2013) to the group was developed through coaching staff and athlete leadership behaviours. As a positive consequence of these endeavours’ players attributed a notable uniqueness to the team and this impacted on collective confidence, effort and performance (Gundlach *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Fransen *et al.*, 2015b).

Brown and Arnold (2019) in their recent study of an English professional rugby union club confirmed that a family culture, honest and fear free environment

and a collective cause and related goals were an important source of connection with the club and important steps for developing bonds between players. Some of the issues highlighted by Brown and Arnold (2019) were problematic in practice as it was observed that certain players moved from club to club in a mercenary fashion (and singular pursuit of personal success), were on short term (or development) contracts, responded fearfully to the demands of competing and some were reluctant to challenge coaches (OB 1- 36).

The study clarified current understanding by emphasising the specific role of playing style (predicated typically on attacking flair or defensive discipline) both as a manifestation of cultural values and beliefs and a source of social (group) identity and uniqueness. In addition, the nature and quality of connection to the community (for example local causes, groups and activities) was also identified as an important expression and representation of cultural beliefs and wider purpose.

4.8 The dramatic entertainment context of professional sport

The study found that one of the unique features of professional rugby was the entertainment spectacle and confrontational (or gladiatorial) endeavour performed in front of large crowds and even larger television audiences. Rayner (2017, p156) confirmed that “rugby union is now part of the entertainment business” and Lebed and Bar-Eli (2013, p152) that professional competition “is similar to military battle”.

However, away from the entertaining (and uncertain) competitive confrontation the study highlighted a more mundane perspective with regard the route and pathway into the sport, the highly repetitive preparation routines and typically, the short career spans of professional rugby players. Collectively, these findings painted a grainier picture of professional sport behind the stage curtain of the entertainment spectacle. While many players on the roster transitioned from

amateur rugby or were recruited from other professional clubs several players in the case study squad were developed from a relatively young age through a talent identification pathway. Brown and Arnold (2019, p74) noted that decreasing external player recruitment and developing internal talent was a sound way of “maintaining academy player motivation and continuity”. Some study participants observed, however, that players on such a pathway could be detached from typical life experiences and responsibilities and became dependent on instruction rather than self-managing. This had implications for the quality of leadership decision making and influencing authority as players were unable to react to complex and unpredictable game situations as these skills had not been appropriately developed.

While the dramatic entertainment context of professional sport was highly visible the study observed that this was underpinned by hours of more discreet and rigorously planned, structured and repetitive practice routines, travel arrangements and hotel visits. The physical (and emotional) demands of professional rugby performance, repetitive training schedules and the related lifestyle arrangements were identified by study participants as the main reasons for the relatively short career span (typically 10 years) of competitive athletes.

4.9 The complex and dynamic systemic nature of professional sport

The study found that participants experienced the professional rugby context and profession to be both dynamic and uncertain and that this required them to respond to this systemic complexity through a combination of resilience and adaptive practice. It was observed that some players were more resilient and adaptive than others and were at ease in fluid situations while others were more at ease with clear structure and regular routines (OB1 – 36).

While the case study context appeared to be well-planned and structured around daily (documented) training and competition schedules it was also the case that these arrangements were subject to change at relatively short notice. These changes could have been the result of insufficient planning (and consideration of a range of scenarios) or a reflection of the fluid dynamics inherent in attempting to shepherd a squad of 40 professional players and 14 coaching and support staff through various activities and around a range of locations. Bar-Yam (1997, p5) confirmed that team sports comprising a set of individuals in relationship with each other and interacting with the outside world created uncertain and unpredictable behaviours and what he described as “emergent complexity”.

Participants also considered a career in professional rugby to be a fundamentally uncertain process as ongoing tenure and job security was dependent on a range of delicately balanced variables which could be undermined by unpredictable events such as loss of playing form and confidence, getting injured, not being selected and non-renewal of playing contract. More widely, uncertainty of outcome was considered to be one of the defining features of the competitive sports sector (Hoye *et al.*, 2015; Taylor *et al.*, 2015).

Participants responded to these dynamic and uncertain circumstances through a combination of resilience strategies and, more noticeably, adaptive practice. Morgan *et al.* (2013) in their study of international rugby players considered such resilience strategies included the presence (and development) of social identity, positive emotions, team learning, transformational leadership and shared team leadership. It was observed that the case study team had developed collective values, shared beliefs and group expectations and as a consequence had established a degree of social identity (using a wolf pack analogy). It was observed

that while many players connected with the wolf pack identity and responded to the collective beliefs and expectations that some were more cynical and reluctant to embrace the analogy and related messages (OB1- 36). There was also evidence of transformational leadership behaviour and shared leadership responsibilities. Participants talked openly of the need to adapt playing style and even playing position to meet the changing demands of the environment.

4.10 The day to day professional demands of preparation and performance on players

The study found that the professional (and contextual) demands of rugby union materialised as professional expectations and intense experiences. Professional expectations included a focus on results and winning, environment standards and personal accountability (for them) and finally, mutual dependency, delegation and shared (leadership) responsibility.

The most noticeable leadership theme across studies by Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012), in the context of professional sport, was the emphasis on winning or “the primacy of winning” (Camire, 2016, p123). The authors noted that the challenges and demands of professional sport established a level of pressure (to win) and an expectation of personal accountability (for winning). Participants confirmed that professional rugby union was a results environment focused on winning and the achievement of tangible objectives and goals.

By way of clarification, it was also the case that participants actively developed good habits and routines or a focus on process (rather than just focusing on outcomes). Further still, participants recognised that beyond a simple focus on winning (and results) and day to day attention to good habits and processes that the

team needed to progress and improve and that this required an openness to learning (from loss) and being prepared to innovate and evolve as a group. This sporting triumvirate (results, process and innovation) was considered – and recognised - to be a delicate and difficult balance by the case study participants.

With regard accountability for high standards and good habits in a performance environment – or as one participant described it, doing your job - Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) indicated that the professional setting placed particular expectations on the playing competence and standards of the team captain as well as their tactical understanding and decision making. It was anticipated that the team captain would be the best player on the field in their position and while many study participants confirmed this assumption a number also challenged it's currency by emphasising the role modelling influence of work ethic and commitment in training and competition not just technical competence. This finding indicated that at a professional rugby club level the captain could be the best player but may not be and that this could be mediated by their notable work rate and sacrifice in the group environment. At an international level however Johnson *et al.* (2012) noted that technical mastery (being the best player in your position) was considered to be a precursor for consideration as captain or indeed a member of the supervisory leadership group.

The third professional expectation - or as another participant described it, working well with others - was for mutual dependency, delegation and shared (leadership) responsibility. Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) indicated that the professional setting emphasised the importance of the relationship between the captain and the senior players or

leadership group. The leadership group performed an important supervisory role, particularly if team performance fell below expectations, was a vehicle for working closely together and providing mutual support for the efforts of the captain and an opportunity to present different (challenging) perspectives. The leadership group also served an important organisational (not just group) function by facilitating and demonstrating a level of formal strategic and operational alignment between the coaches and senior players (including the captain). Such alignment was sensible practice for those responsible for setting direction but as Binney *et al.* (2012, p203) noted “the dirty little secret of strategy is that it’s only clear with hindsight”. Further still, it was also the case that strategy requires consideration of “alternative ideas, skills and ways of seeing issues” (Binney *et al.*, 2012, p222) and that strict alignment (or blind compliance) could be counterproductive to organisational effectiveness and health (Pascale *et al.*, 1997).

The study found that the professional demands of rugby union materialised, secondly, as intense experiences and included the physical and emotional demands of playing (including the repercussions of losing), constant internal scrutiny and finally, external media and public expectations. Participants noted that playing professional rugby was physically, emotionally and psychologically demanding. The profession was frequently described as a mental or emotional roller-coaster. Much of the professional rugby player’s endeavour was unseen, mundane and repetitive and they were frequently judged only by how they performed at the weekend in competitive fixtures. Losing such games made it difficult for players to switch off. Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) confirmed these participant experiences of the physical and emotional demands of sport. Aman *et al.* (2009) described playing professional sport as a risk to well-being and that

player's frequently played in pain. In reflecting and managing these demands players often "defined the body as machine" (Aman *et al.*, 2009, p662).

The study found that the professional context was notable for the constant level of scrutiny and surveillance of player training and performance. All training sessions and competitive fixtures were video recorded and analysed. In addition, players wore GPS tracking systems to monitor work rate. Voluminous team and individual performance data was generated and this information was readily and publicly available in the team room and supported by illustrative video clips at computer stations. There was little, if any, mention in the team captaincy and athlete leadership literature about such levels of (internal) performance management scrutiny and how this might influence and impact day to day behaviour. In this regard the study identified this constant level of scrutiny as a significant issue in the professional context.

In addition to constant internal surveillance the study found that players had to cope with and manage external expectations from both the public and media. Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) confirmed that mainstream media scrutiny and social media attention were part of the wider challenges and demands of professional sport for all athletes. However, public expectations and related behaviours emerged as a significant issue for players which attracted little, if any, attention in the team captaincy and athlete leadership literature. Playing in front of large live audiences (circa 6500 per home game) created both a positive and motivational source of encouragement for some players but also a negative, judgemental and critical (even abusive) source of pressure for others. In addition, some participants noted that this criticism transferred to exchanges with players (and even family members) away from the stadium and in social situations.

4. 11 The personal (and collective) rewards of a professional sport career

The study found that the rewards of a professional sport career were identified by participants as personal benefits (for the player) and collective bonds (being part of a group). Personal benefits included the opportunity to flourish and excel, seeking enjoyment through playing professionally and a sense of achievement and recognition leading to career rewards and promotion. Such progression was typically a consequence of positive work experiences and important mentors but also opportunity and luck (Conger, 1992)

The consensus amongst participants was that the professional rugby environment was somewhere where people should be able to improve and flourish as both a person and a player. Deriving enjoyment from playing professionally was important for sustaining motivation and performance. Professional rugby also provided opportunities for recognition and celebration of achievements which in turn could lead to improved contract arrangements, rewards and extensions and career promotion opportunities at club level and up to international selection. Brown and Arnold (2019) confirmed that player development (and flourishing) and facilitating enjoyment were important for thriving in professional rugby. Kidman (2001, p38) confirmed “the importance of the whole person not just the rugby player” and Hodge *et al.* (2014, p64) that “better people make better All Blacks”. The study clarified the potential afforded by the professional rugby setting for players to secure (job) promotions and improve remuneration based on their playing performance and team impact. It was also the case that such promotions and remuneration relied on the financial health and commercial reality of the professional game including the discipline of salary cap arrangements (Rayner, 2017).

In addition to the singular rewards of being a player in a team participants identified a number of collective benefits of being in a team as a player. These

benefits were grouped under the heading collective bonds and included the diversity and richness of the playing group (described by a participant as different people, places and cultures), the opportunities for interaction and humour (described by one participant as team banter and mickey taking) and the degree of camaraderie and cohesion (described by another participant as bonds and gel).

Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) confirmed the presence and importance of cultural diversity (of both international coaches and players) in a professional rugby club setting and noted that this presented both a challenge and opportunity in terms of different approaches and perceptions. Brown and Arnold (2019) also confirmed that opportunities for interaction between players and establishing bonds with other players were important for thriving in a professional rugby setting.

4.12 (Implications and) expectations of leadership

Binney *et al.* (2012, p56) defined context as the wider environment but also “the business situation and the organisational culture”. The study found that the “real world” professional sport context was a complex ecosystem of competing and sometimes contradictory organisational tensions. The first general dimension of strategic landscape made apparent that commercial viability and the business profit motive had to be delicately balanced with collective and relational values connecting players to the club, each other and the community. The second general dimension of entertainment drama clarified that the confrontational and gladiatorial spectacle of competitive fixtures was only possible as a direct consequence of unseen, repetitive and mundane training routines. The third general dimension of complex system made mention of the heavily structured features of the club setting but highlighted the uncertain and dynamic nature of the workplace (and a professional sport career) and in response the need for players (and teams) to evolve and adapt to these

shifting patterns. The fourth general dimension of professional demands highlighted the extreme expectations placed on players by themselves, coaches and stakeholders (including spectators and the media) and the intense rollercoaster experiences that resulted. The study found, in particular, that public expectations and related critical (even abusive) behaviours emerged as a significant issue for players. The final and fifth dimension of personal rewards including individual benefits and team camaraderie provided some balance, contrast and (enjoyable) relief from the professional pressures previously outlined.

Lebed and Bar-Eli (2013, p115) proposed that there is a “context dependent relationship between leadership and success” and Binney *et al.* (2012, p55) that “context shapes the nature of leadership that is provided – and it largely determines the results”. In “recognising the importance of context, successful leaders begin to see where and how to focus their efforts” (Binney *et al.*, 2012, p56). Such efforts would include consideration of leadership role and tasks, influencing style and behaviour as well as reflection and evaluation of impact and consideration of development needs and activities. Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) confirmed that professional sport was demonstrably different to other playing environments with players paid to compete and win. This context established pressure on the captain whose role was to make sure, as far as possible, that the team won. In responding to this pressure, the leadership style and actions of the captain were shaped in several ways. These actions included establishing a sound working relationship with the coach, delegating duties to trusted senior players (and potential leaders) and maintaining a healthy perspective - “just relax and play the game” (Camire, 2016, p126). It was indicated that the pressure of the role could lead to a more conservative style or risk averse approach to decision

making (Camire, 2016; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016 and Johnson *et al.*, 2012). While leaders should be actively cognisant of the challenges and opportunities of context and mindful of shared goals and the “common good” (Lebed and Bar-Eli, 2013, p115) they also have a degree of agency and should foster the “capacity to articulate aspirations and the self-belief to want to put them into practice” (Binney *et al.*, 2012, p59). As Shaw (2002) indicated leadership - and team captaincy - is an unfolding encounter and delicate balance between context, intention and chance.

CHAPTER 5: THE LEADERSHIP ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE TEAM CAPTAIN

Presentation of results

5.1 Visual analysis and hierarchy chart of team captain role and activities

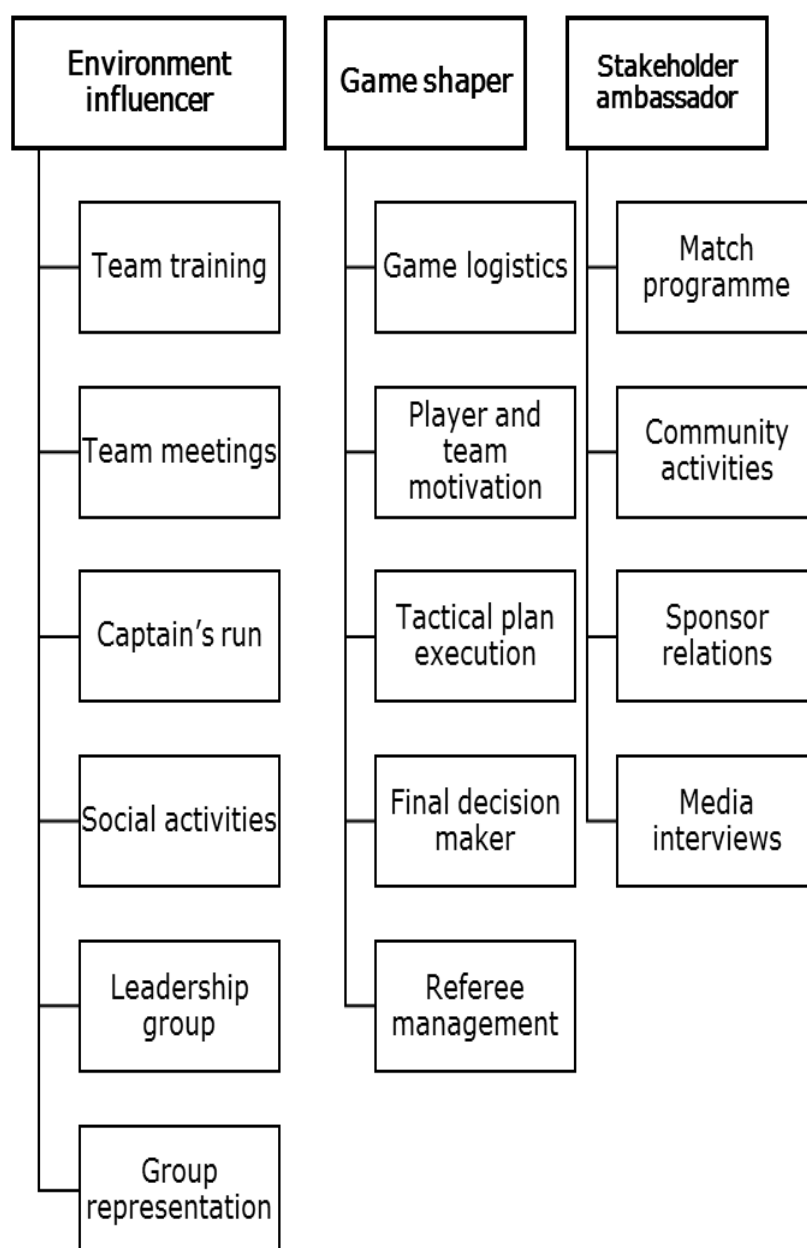


Figure 5.1 – Team captain role and activities

5.2 Environment influencer

The first general dimension reflecting the team captain's role and activities in the professional rugby context was environment influencer comprising six higher order themes. These six themes fell into three distinct groupings. Firstly, the role of the captain was to attend and actively participate in (physical, technical and tactical) team training and team meetings (verbal discussions and debriefs) as well as lead the captains run (a pre-competition ritual and rehearsal of a game plan). Secondly, the role of the captain was to actively participate in social activities (away from training but with the team) and to be present and engaged in social exchange at team meals (training day breakfast and lunch plus post competition dinner). Thirdly, the role of the captain was to operationally manage the squad (in the training environment and during competitive fixtures) through a supervisory leadership group as well as representing the team in discussions and negotiations with coaches. In effect, these findings indicated that the role of the captain was to influence the wider preparation and performance environment (and build cohesion) through engagement in a range of sporting, social and supervisory activities.

The first environment role of the captain was to attend and actively participate in team training and team meetings as well as lead the captains run. Team training and team meetings were a daily routine in the professional rugby case study organisation. Training was typically (as described by the case study organisation) high intensity on Mondays and Wednesdays and medium to low intensity on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Fridays were high intensity if there was no weekend competitive fixture or focused on the captains run which was a medium to low intensity rehearsal of a game plan if there was a competitive fixture (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

More specifically, team training took place between 9am and 3pm with team breakfast from 11am -12noon and team lunch from 2.30pm – 3pm. There was a whole squad meeting after breakfast from 12noon – 1pm. After 3pm there were some short individual review meetings and brief media interviews as required (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

Training took place on both a traditional grass surface and a modern 3G astro-turf playing surface and in a dated and rather dilapidated weight training and multi gym facility. Meals were taken in a modern cafeteria style venue which was part of on-site corporate hospitality facilities. The whole squad meeting took place in a dated and rather old fashioned team room (which doubled up as members lounge bar) with desks and chairs, video analysis stations and a player's relaxation area with a table tennis table (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

From 9am – 11am forwards and backs were split into tailored activities involving speed work, weight training, technical and tactical training. These training sessions started with separate debriefs and reviews in the team room for forwards and backs. Players arrived early for the 9am start in order to undertake well-being and hydration questionnaires with the strength and conditioning coaches and receive protective strapping (for contact training) from the physiotherapy team (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

After breakfast at 12noon the whole squad meeting was an opportunity for further debrief and review (of current preparation and previous performance as well as administrative and wider organisational issues) followed by discussion of the team opportunities and opposition threats for the next upcoming competitive fixture. After the meeting and before lunch at 2.30pm the whole squad took part in warm up

routines followed by collective drills on defensive and attacking patterns of play. Forwards and backs then split into separate units for tailored technical and tactical preparation before re-joining as an entire squad for some final and collective match condition training routines (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

The captains run was a final group ritual before competitive matches when the announced team wearing match shirts rehearsed final calls and patterns of play against bibbed opposition. This activity typically took place in the stadium on the first team pitch (O21; O23; O24; O25; O27; O30). As one player summarised “you come out for a ten-minute, twenty-minute walk through of the game plan - that's when you kind of switch on for the game the following day, that's the captain's run basically” (P8). While the usual weekly pattern and training load was preparation (including captain's run) from Monday to Friday, with competitive games on Saturday and a squad rest day on Sunday it was also the case that different league and cup competition schedules meant this typical routine, and the turnaround between games, had to be adapted and adjusted on a pro rata training load basis on a number of occasions. (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

The second environment role of the captain was to actively participate in social activities and to be present at team meals (i.e. training day breakfast and lunch plus post competition dinner) and engaged in informal conversations and social exchange. The training day breakfast and lunch involved only the Southern Warriors squad (in playing kit) and coaching staff and these exchanges were generally light-hearted and humorous although sometimes technical and tactical issues were discussed. The post competition dinner combined the Southern Warriors

squad and staff (in more formal wear) with players and coaches from the opposition team as well as match officials. Board members and organisation managers would also sometimes attend these events. Again, exchanges were generally good humoured (amongst a community of practice) but sometimes debate continued, typically, with officials over certain law interpretations and game decisions (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). Social activities included a range of recreational events and activities organised by the players which enabled them to relax away from the rugby environment and get to know each other personally. It was noted that “getting the boys together out of the environment” (P10) was an important activity and responsibility and that “generally a captain should always be out when the boys are out - he’s the leader of the group on and off the pitch” (P11). The team captain of Southern Warriors took an active role in social activities although one participant observed that he had played with one captain who was “not really interested in that side” and had “left it to others to organise” (P11).

The third environment role of the captain was to broadly, manage (and supervise) the squad through a leadership group as well as specifically, representing the team’s interests with coaches (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). While the leadership group was present and active it was not always used as a formal vehicle for collective bargaining or consultation with the coaching team. The leadership group was comprised of the appointed team captain (a back row forward) plus five other senior and experienced players – two forwards (a hooker and second row) and three backs (two scrum halves and a centre). Two of the six players were full internationals and three had represented more than one professional club. Selection to the leadership group was based on informal conversation and negotiation between the team captain and coaching team based

on their quality (and team position) as a player and qualities (and role modelling) as a person. The leadership group performed three main functions – facilitating strategic and cultural alignment (a shared common direction and anticipated set of behaviours) between the actions of the playing squad and the expectations of the coaching team, providing the captain with a manageable span of supervisory and operational control for a match day team of 23 players and wider squad of 40 players and finally, providing a collaborative and supportive yet critical (and honest) circle of trusted advisors to the team captain (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). Again, while the leadership group was present and active the lack of a formal brief and terms of reference sometimes impaired collective and co-ordinated endeavours.

In representing the playing group it was noted that “a captain should always put the team before himself and go between the players, the coaches, the management” (P6), they should be a “voice for players” (P11) and “push for better things within the environment” (P3). Such things included feedback on training workload and timings and improvements to the quality of training facilities. In undertaking this representative role it was important that the captain was able to establish “good rapport with the coach” (P9) but also, alternatively, be prepared to be an “advocate for coaches” (P11) club vision and playing style with the squad (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). This pluralist role, acting as a voice for the squads concerns **and** a vehicle for the coaches’ vision was not straightforward and required the development and use of political skills to build coalitions and consensus. The case study organisation did not evidence formal team captain self-appraisals or 360 appraisals with selected stakeholders to identify specific requirements (such as political skills) for training or development.

5.3 Game shaper

While the first general dimension identified the role of the captain in influencing the wider preparation environment through engagement in a range of sporting, social and supervisory activities the second general dimension focused on the captain's role in shaping (narrower) game day performance. The second general dimension of game shaper comprised five higher order themes which again fell into three distinct groupings – firstly, pre-game logistics (and timekeeping); secondly, player motivation, tactical plan execution and final decision maker and thirdly, referee manager.

The first (pre) game role of the captain was to arrive on time at the match day stadium with the other players, typically 90 minutes before kick-off, wearing the prescribed pre-match apparel - sponsors shirt, hoody and tracksuit bottoms. The typical pre game routines and activities then followed a similar pattern - the example given below assumed a kick-off time of 7.30pm (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35).

Time	Process description and commentary
6 - 6.20pm	Team meeting (in squad room) with coaches to discuss key game plan moves and calls. <i>Generally calm and focused mood but with some rallying calls.</i>
6.20 - 6.50pm	Players own time for relaxation, reflection and informal conversation. <i>Players read through match day programme.</i>
6.50 - 7.20pm	Team warm up exercises and game plan rehearsal (on pitch) supported by coaches. <i>Players told to "get their heads on"</i>
7.20pm	Team return to changing room to re-hydrate and put on match shirts. <i>Tension bubbling beneath the surface.</i>
7.25pm	Replacements (n=8) and coaches leave changing room. <i>Departing shouts of support and encouragement.</i>
7.25 - 7.27pm	Final team huddle (n=15), captain and team leaders provide motivation and instruction. <i>Blend of clear tactical instructions and highly charged call to arms</i>
7.30pm	Players enter pitch through guard of honour and fireworks. <i>Kick off, match begins.</i>

Figure 5.2 – Pregame routines and activities

The second game role of the captain was player motivation, tactical plan execution and final decision maker. With regards motivation, it was stated that “you’ve got to know your teammates and the individuals” (P9) and select the appropriate motivational strategy. “Some people need a good punch in the face before they go and play. They do, there are certain players who need a right good kick up the arse. If you hit him round the head before he goes out and plays, he’ll go and play awesome” (P9). While some players responded to deliberate confrontation and physical challenge as a source of motivation others preferred a quieter, more considered approach that channelled performance anxiety and encouraged confidence (O4).

While a differentiated approach to motivation was recognised (and often more evident in training O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36) it was also the case that such nuance and tailoring during competitive fixtures was frequently subordinate, in the time available, to general rallying calls. The nature and volume of such calls often reflected the personality and preferences of the team captain on that day and others in leadership roles as well as the demands of the situation (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). As one participant observed “sometimes it’s about the head and sometimes it’s about the heart” (P5).

Motivational interventions and interactions took place in five main contexts (four staged and one more fluid) – pre-game in the changing rooms prior to players undertaking warm up exercises and game plan rehearsal on the pitch; just prior to kick off during the final team huddle in the changing room; at half time as players reflected on the first half and prepared for the second half; post-game as players shared final reflections on the game (and individual) performance. Language focused on the broader principles of playing with “pride and honour”, the relational process of

being a “privileged” part of a “band of brothers, in it together, about us” and a task focus on “the present, the challenge, delivering, putting things right, proving people wrong” (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). The fifth and more fluid context was “a nod, a wink, a slap, a word” (P1) during a game as individual and team endeavour unfolded and during breaks in play or when “giving the boys a talking to under the posts” (P1) when points had been conceded.

With regards tactical plan execution there were two related perspectives – strategic and operational. Strategically the “coach lays out the scope the captain has” (P11) within the boundaries of a game plan and “coaches often pre-empt or rehearse decisions leaving maybe a handful of important captaincy decisions “(P5). Such rehearsals or scenarios form part of training and preparation. It was also the case that while the “coach lays out the scope the captain has” (P11) devising, rehearsing and refining the game plan in training or considering “options, priorities, codes and calls” (P1, P2) was often a collaborative and consultative process with the captain, senior players and key decision makers such as the scrum half and fly half (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). During a game coaches took a strategic position, often in the stand, above the pitch, with a panoramic view of proceedings. This strategic coaching viewpoint was supported and complemented by a small team of performance analysts providing real time data collection and analysis with, typically, four computer screens of various visual feeds and angles as well as referee microphone audio (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35).

Operationally, the captain was expected to be a “good decision maker on the field” (P9) and the one “who gets the final say” (P10). This included “decision making on the field like whether to kick for goal, whether to kick for the corner, whether to play with the wind or against the wind, just constantly making decisions” (P9). It was

also the case that off the field before the game, at half time and post-match in the changing room that the captain provided “specific technical and tactical instructions; pointers and observations” (P10). In these endeavours the captain was supported by the formal leadership group and informal team leaders and role models who were able to offer particular technical and position specific expertise as well as tactical experience and insight (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35).

While player motivation, tactical plan execution and final decision maker were identified as game shaper roles it was also the case that motivation, execution and decision making roles were fundamentally part of the wider training and preparation environment as the team was expected to train with, as far as possible, comparable physical intensity and tactical insight as they intended to play in a match setting (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). The emotional intensity of playing live in front of a large stadium audience could not be replicated and was part of gaining valuable (and unique) playing experience. It was the case that some younger players (and those on development contracts) were exposed to these experiences and selected fixtures in a structured and targeted way.

A notable feature of the professional context and the (third) role of the captain within that domain was managing the referee, in particular, during a game but also at the pre-game introductions (typically to the forwards) when expectations and rule interpretations were clarified and at the (more informal) post-match dinner to reflect on incidents and issues in the game. Part of the performance analysis team’s preparations and briefing for the next competitive fixture was a short biography of the match referee including an indication of their game law interpretations and focus areas (A138 -142). Participants confirmed that it was the captains “job is to get to know the ref and build rapport with the ref” (P5) and on the basis of a relationship

decide how best “to talk to the ref” (P9) to clarify rules and challenge decisions. The intention behind such endeavour (and interpersonal influencing) was to maximise team performance and competitive advantage (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35).

5.4 Stakeholder ambassador

While the first general dimension identified the role of the captain in influencing the wider preparation environment through engagement in a range of sporting, social and supervisory activities and the second general dimension focused on the captain’s role in shaping (narrower) game day performance the third, and final, general dimension of stakeholder ambassador considered the (broad) role of the captain in building a connection and relationship within the local community and with club sponsors and media outlets.

An important consideration in the professional rugby club context as well as the club’s purpose and organisational culture was “public perceptions” (P2) and how to “build relationships and links” (P5). One of the specific roles and responsibilities of the captain as part of community and fan engagement was a leadership column (along with a photograph of the captain) in the match day programme. The column typically reflected on previous team performances and outlined ambitions for the current game and the remainder of the season. The column was intended to share the thoughts and ideas of the captain from their own unique leadership perspective (A128; A130; A131; A133; A134; A137).

The programme also reflected, as part of a wider strategy, a range of deliberate engagement activities with local public and not for profit organisations including sports clubs, primary and secondary schools, further and higher education institutions, charities and community groups. Engagement with small to medium enterprises and large for-profit businesses was also evident in the match day

programme (A128; A130; A131; A133; A134; A137). Engagement and support in the local area was typically represented by visits to the community at external locations and visits from the community to the club (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). The captain was expected to be an active participant – “where there’s supporters, I try and talk to them and engage” (P5) - in such community activities as the senior leadership representative of the players (A128; A130; A131; A133; A134; A137) and an important club role model.

In the professional rugby context, the rugby product and commercial brand (or offering) was reliant on attracting and maximising sponsorship deals, facility gate receipts, merchandise sales and food & beverage takings (O10, O14). As part of sponsorship deals and arrangements selected players were expected to attend corporate hospitality facilities before, during and after competitive matches to meet and entertain sponsors. Players were identified in advance for attendance and involvement in such relationship building and their responsibilities and dress code detailed on the appropriate daily schedule. Some players were more socially comfortable and actively engaged than others in such sponsor relations and conversations, but all attended and took part (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). Again, as the senior leadership representative of the players and an important club role model the captain was expected to be an active participant in such activities (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35).

In addition to a lead role in liaison with community groups and corporate sponsors the captain was commonly a frequent interview invitee and participant with media outlets for thoughts and reflections on team performance and club issues. These interviews (which were typically rather brief) were with television and news media and normally took place after the game as part of reflection on the team's

performance. Sometimes the interview took place (again, briefly) at half time as the captain made his way off the pitch to the dressing room. On other occasions, the captain was approached in advance for interviews prior to an important upcoming fixture for their opinion (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). Once again, as the senior leadership representative of the players and an important club role model the captain was expected to be actively involved in such activities (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35).

5.5 Other captaincy role and activity issues

5.5.1 Dynamic and interrelated roles

While the chapter opening visual analysis and hierarchy chart of the team captain's roles and activities identified and presented three discrete and linear activities (wider preparation environment influencer, focused competitive game shaper and outreach stakeholder ambassador) the responsibilities and tasks of the captain in practice were more fluid and interconnected. In this regard the model at Figure 5.3 provided a more applied visual summary of these dynamic and interrelated roles as observed in the field (O1 – O36).

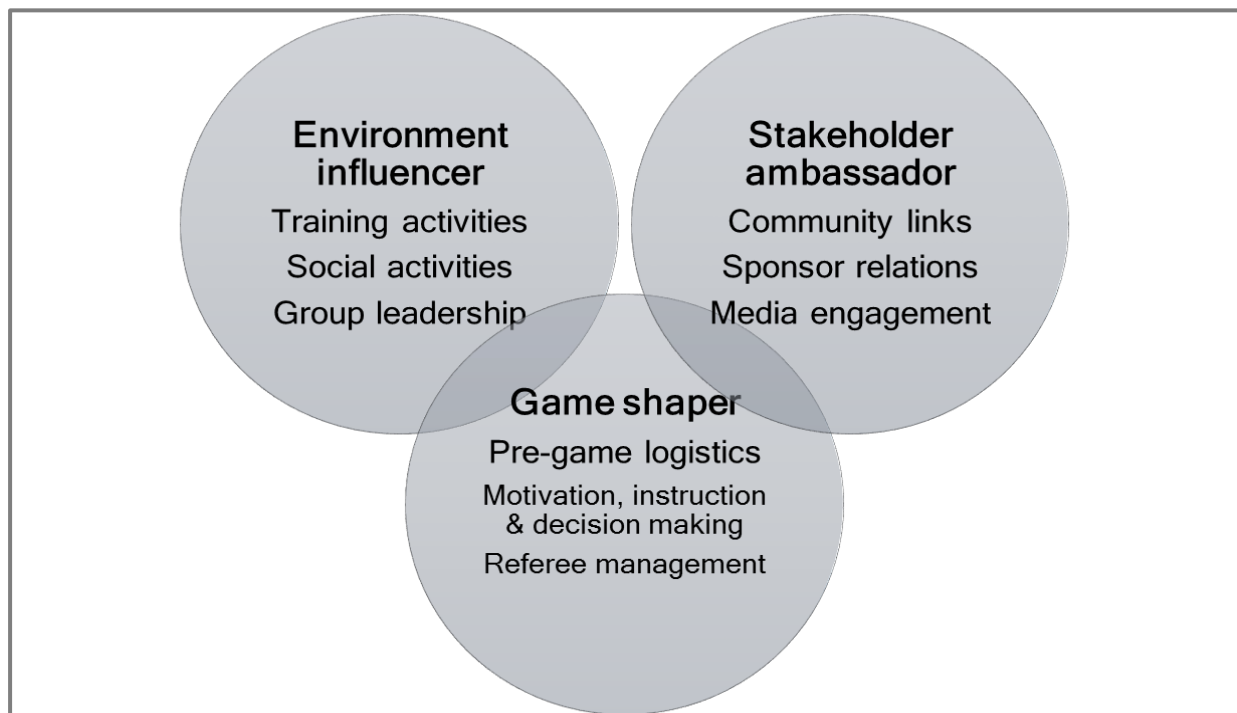


Figure 5.3 – A dynamic role perspective

5.5.2 The role of custom and practice

Although interviews, observations and relevant archival records had established a set of clear but connected tasks that were undertaken through notable intervention or “significant moments” (P1) and subtle input or “little habits” (P3) it was also the case that no related archival records such as a job description or person

specification for the team captaincy role existed in the case study organisation. In effect, the role of captain was one of custom and practice and social learning rather than deliberate and documented organisational design. Players and coaches considered such job design practices as rather bureaucratic, appeared to have no clear list of role priorities (or relative importance) and were notably more concerned with how things were done (leading by example through actions) rather than what the captain was expected to do (in theory) on a regular basis (P1- 11; O1 – O36).

5.5.3 Location and situational context

While player motivation, tactical plan execution and final decision maker were primarily identified as game shaper roles for the team captain it was also the case that motivation, execution and decision making roles were fundamentally part of the wider training and preparation environment as the team was expected to train with, as far as possible, comparable physical intensity and tactical insight as they intended to play in a match setting (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

5.5.4 Formal and shared role of leadership group

An important role of the captain was to manage (and supervise) the squad through a formally appointed leadership group (including the captain) of six players (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). This leadership group performed three main shared functions – facilitating strategic and cultural alignment, providing the captain with a manageable span of supervisory and operational control and finally, providing a collaborative and supportive yet critical circle of trusted advisors to the team captain (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21;

O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). The role of the leadership group was also one of custom and practice and social learning rather than deliberate and documented organisational design. The case study organisation did not evidence formal terms of reference for this crucial middle management role.

5.5.5 Informal and individual role of peer influencers

Operationally, the captain was expected to be a “good decision maker on the field” (P9) and the one “who gets the final say” (P10). It was also the case that off the field before the game, at half time and post-match in the changing room that the captain provided “specific technical and tactical instructions; pointers and observations” (P10). In these endeavours the captain was supported by the formal leadership group and informal team leaders and role models who were able to offer particular technical and position specific expertise as well as tactical experience and insight (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). Motivational interventions and interactions” (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35) as well as the organisation and engagement with social activities (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36) were also supported by selective (rather than selected) informal team leaders or peer influencers with particular professional expertise or personal charisma.

Discussion of findings

The study identified three notable findings or general dimensions related to the role and activities of the team captain – environment influencer, game shaper and stakeholder ambassador. The environment was influenced through training activities and preparation, social activities and team building and shared (and formal)

group leadership and supervision. Games were shaped through pre-game logistics; motivation, instruction and decision making and referee management. Liaison with stakeholders was developed through community links, sponsor relations and media engagement.

The role and activities of the team captain, as identified in the literature review and based on the current body of knowledge were task leader (providing instruction), motivational leader (maximising effort), social leader (building relationships) and external leader (group representation). The original task and social roles identified by Rees and Segal (1984) were subsequently developed to include the external role by Loughhead *et al.* (2006) and then, finally, the motivational role by Fransen *et al.* (2014). These four main roles were underpinned by fourteen discrete and related activities (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014).

Task and motivation roles (n=6) presented in the literature (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014) were confirmed by the game shaper role identified in the study. Social roles (n=4) presented in the literature (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014) were confirmed by the social activities' category (in the environment influence role) identified in the study. External roles (n=4) presented in the literature (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014) were confirmed by both the stakeholder ambassador role and group representation category (in the environment influence role) identified in the study. In summary, all 14 roles from the literature (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006; Fransen *et al.*, 2014) were confirmed by the study findings.

5.6 Game logistics and referee management

The study identified two new activities (or definitions) from the professional sport context - game logistics and referee management. The professional sport

context was found to be complex and changeable and this could unsettle schedules and game logistics (including travel and match day arrangements). Lo *et al.* (2019) confirmed that travel arrangements and match locations had to be successfully managed to minimise the impact on rugby team performances. Good preparation habits and match day routines were identified as important team captain and leadership group responsibilities in consultation with club management. MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002, p570) identified game officials and rugby referees as “influential populations”. Fransen *et al.* (2019, p6) advocated that team captains should have “contact with referees” and Dupuis *et al.* (2006) that team captains should build relationships with match officials. However, the study found that professional team captains went beyond having contact and building relationships to actively researching referee personalities and decision-making preferences to manage an influencing relationship with match officials.

5.7 On and off field roles

While clearly identified and distinct the environment influencer, game shaper and stakeholder ambassador roles in the study were also dynamic and interrelated. In particular, it was noted that players were expected to prepare and train with a degree of physical and tactical intensity anticipated in competitive fixtures. Nicholls *et al.* (2009) confirmed that professional rugby union players experienced stress and used similar coping strategies across both training and match contexts. On this basis many of the task instruction, player motivation and leadership decision making activities required in game situations were also rehearsed and present in the wider environment and preparation activities. With regard location and situational context Fransen *et al.* (2014) indicated that task and motivation functions were on field roles

and social and external functions were off field roles. In contrast, the study challenged this perspective and indicated that task and motivation roles were both on field (competitive fixture) and off field (wider preparation) activities in the professional setting.

5.8 Role priorities and relative importance

It was also found that the study population sample (of professional rugby players) placed greater significance on how captains led in practice rather than what their role should be in theory (or on paper). However, this created a paradox as effective organisational practice is predicated on both disciplined implementation (Kaplan and Norton, 2005) and considered analysis and thoughtful planning (Porter, 2004). Brown-Johnson *et al.* (2019) argued that well defined roles were key to effective implementation in a team setting. In order to lead well in practice, the captain needed both a well-defined role on paper and to then effectively act out (and be evaluated against) those responsibilities.

When considering role priorities and relative importance it was argued in the literature that the most significant leadership role was task instruction followed by motivational endeavour then social concern and finally, external representation (Fransen *et al.*, 2014). Shawn Burke *et al.* (2019, p724) in their study of extreme team environments identified the “top five team leadership functions” as supporting social climate, solving problems, structure and planning, sense making and monitoring the team. Hoye *et al.* (2015) prioritised the activities in the following order - structure and planning (vision and strategy), supporting social climate (culture), monitoring the team (performance management), solving problems (influencing and motivating others), and sense making (facilitating change). While it was useful to

have a sense of priority the responsibilities and tasks of the captain in practice were more dynamic and nuanced (as reflected in Figure 5.3) and in this regard setting priorities (and relative importance) was a more fluid undertaking.

5.8 Revised athlete leadership definition

Finally, while the appointed captain and leadership group exerted formal authority it was also the case that individual peer leaders exerted informal influence through proficiency and personality. “The totality of research evidence supports the assertion that team leadership is critical to team outcomes” (Stagl *et al.*, 2007, p172) and “effective team processes” (Shawn Burke *et al.*, 2019, p717). Such team leadership was provided both individually and collectively and both formally and informally (Shawn Burke *et al.*, 2019) through the designated captain, the recognised (senior players) leadership group (Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Brown and Arnold, 2019) and influential peer leaders.

Some studies had challenged the current significance or historical myth of the team captain (Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Grant and Cotterill, 2016) with informal leaders “often perceived as better leaders than the team captain” (Leo *et al.*, 2019, p2). This challenge could be based on a “lack of understanding of the (team captaincy) role”, because “the wrong individuals are being selected” (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016, p2) or because following appointment captains are not benefitting from ongoing skill development and continued organisational support (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016). Equally, it could be a positive reflection that influence is being effectively exerted by “leadership distributed throughout the team” (Shawn Burke *et al.*, 2019, p725).

However other studies have indicated that “the multifaceted role” (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p164) of team captain is an important source of leadership (Kozub and Pease,

2001; Loughhead and Hardy, 2005) and that “good captaincy can have a marked impact upon performance” (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016, p1). Shawn Burke *et al.* (2019, p727) also observed that “very few leadership functions are enacted solely through informal sources” and that formal leaders (and team captains) are important enablers and promoters of “a climate where the source of leadership is allowed to flow from all members in the team”

In summary, there was notable congruence (or confirmation and clarification) between firstly, the study findings on the roles and activities of the team captain and secondly, between study findings on the supervisory role and span of control provided by the leadership group and current knowledge regarding the common functions of team leaders and the formal influence of senior players in the leadership group.

In conclusion, there was a level of insight (and development of the body of knowledge) regarding two activities of the team captain (game logistics and referee management) and the location (or context) for two of the captain’s responsibilities (task and motivation are both on pitch (game) and off pitch (training) roles). Finally, on the basis of the study findings the existing definition of athlete leadership as “an athlete occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of members to achieve a common goal” (Loughhead *et al.*, 2006) has been revised for the rugby union domain. This revised definition reflected the role of the designated captain, influential peer leaders and the recognised (senior players) leadership group. Athlete leadership was defined as “an athlete occupying a formal or informal role with individual or group responsibilities within a team, who influences members to achieve a common goal”.

CHAPTER 6: THE LEADERSHIP PROCESS AND INTERPERSONAL STYLE OF A TEAM CAPTAIN

Presentation of results

6.1 Visual analysis and hierarchy chart of team captain leadership process & interpersonal style

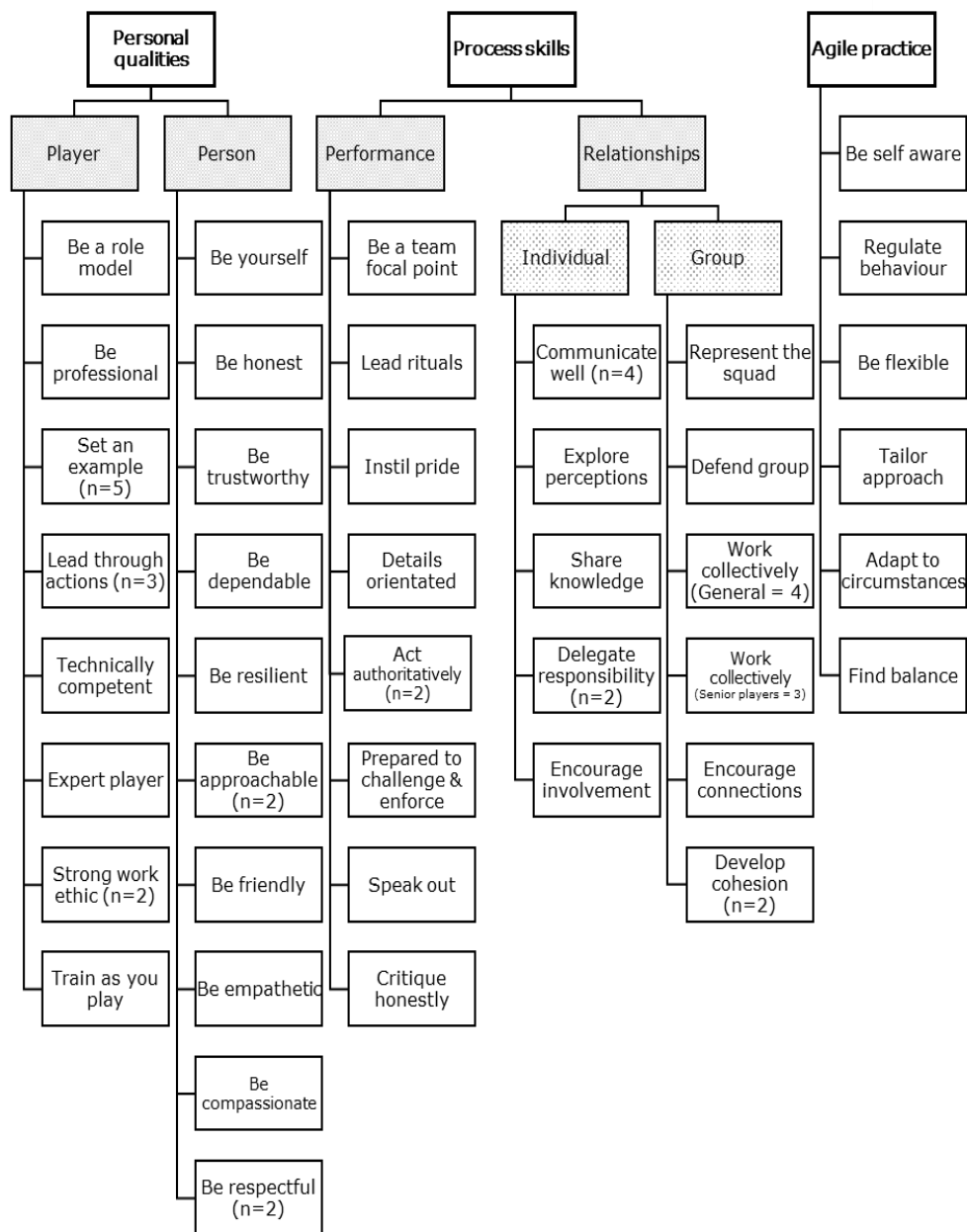


Figure 6.1 – Team captain interpersonal style

The visual analysis and hierarchy chart presented at Figure 6.1 indicated that the team captain leadership process & interpersonal style was based on three general dimensions – personal qualities, process skills and agile practice. The first general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was personal qualities comprising the two higher order themes of player and person. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal and professional qualities of the team captain (and who they were as both person and player) were an important source of influence and power.

The second general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was process skills comprising the two higher order themes of performance and relationships. The relationships theme in turn comprised two sub themes – individual relationships and group relating. In effect, these findings indicated that the team captain influenced others by getting the job done (performance focus) and by getting on with others (relationship facilitator).

The third general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was agile practice. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities and process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership influence and effectiveness.

As the visual analysis and hierarchy chart suggested leadership style was a blend and balance of acting authoritatively, involving others and working collectively although the emphasis was on a participatory and relational style.

6.2 Personal qualities

The first general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was personal qualities comprising the two higher order themes of player and

person. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal and professional qualities of the team captain (and who they were as both person and player) were an important source of influence and power.

The player theme was considered to include firstly – being an expert (and valued) player who was technically skilled; secondly – being a professional role model who set an example and led through their (values and) actions; and thirdly – sustaining (and valuing) a strong work ethic and training (with similar intensity) as they played.

The captain was expected to be an expert (and valued) player who was technically skilled and who led and contributed to the team effort through this expertise. Some participants indicated that the captain should be “technically the best player in their position” and the “first name on the team sheet” (P17). Others argued however that “your best rugby players may not be the best leaders” (P7). In light of this observation a number of participants indicated that “you don’t have to be the best, best player but somebody who’s more professional” (P3) or “someone who’s highly regarded and highly respected, not necessarily the best player on the field or the highest paid player, just someone who’s got those qualities and someone you respect” (P6).

While there were mixed views on whether the captain had to be the best technical player in their position or a highly regarded professional in their role it was agreed that, whatever standard that might be, “you’ve got to be at the top of your game” (P7), have to be prepared to “fight for your position” (P1) and in doing so sometimes “need to be a bit selfish” (P1).

In this regard, while a level of technical playing expertise was anticipated it was also expected that the captain would translate latent talent into realised practice

by being a professional role model who set an example and led through their (values and) actions. The captain has “got to be respected and a lot of that can be respect for his actions, not just for his words” (P3). As another participant observed “you can say what you want in the changing rooms, you can say what you want in the meeting room but if you don't lead by example then there's no point, no one will listen to you” (P8).

It was noted that the example the captain set and the actions they undertook were contextualized and shaped by the values of the team and in this regard the leader was “a cultural role model” (P7). In the case study organisation, these were the player or wolf values of hunt, play, rest and voice and squad or pack values of co-operate, share, teach and respect (A1). In practical terms, players were expected to “know their jobs, be disciplined, demonstrate good work habits and be open to honest feedback” (P2).

In addition to playing talent and practical example the leadership process and professional influence of the team captain was sustained through a strong work ethic. The captains “got to show that he is emptying the tank, so to speak, every game for the team, for the badge and if he's missing tackles, he's not working hard, you're like, well why am I doing it if the captain's not doing it? (P8). However, the captain's work ethic was not just restricted to competitive fixtures because “you train as you play, so even in training, you've got to be that leader” (P4). As one captain confirmed “I 'd like to appear on the field as much as possible training wise and just be ahead of the class, top of the class, leading by example there and on the pitch” (P1).

The second higher order theme of the personal qualities general dimension after professional player was personal attributes. The person theme was considered

to include firstly (and broadly) – being yourself; secondly (and more specifically) – being honest, trustworthy, dependable and resilient and thirdly (with others) – being approachable, empathetic, compassionate and respectful.

Participants recognized that “personal beliefs and upbringing have a massive influence” (P17) and that it was important to acknowledge and accept these personal influences on leadership assumptions and approach. As one leader recognized “I’m not gonna be a ranter and a raver, I’m not gonna try and scream at people and slap people ‘round the back of the head, because I hate that being done to me for starters” (P1). Another participant recognized that “I don’t like shouting at players. I think encouragement for me, works better than having a good old go at someone” (P4). Others recognized that being yourself based on their beliefs and upbringing was different and for them authentic practice was notably more “authoritative, intense, giving orders” (P11). The caveat to authenticity, or simply being yourself regardless, for those in team leadership roles was the mutually collaborative endeavour of “achieving your goals so they can achieve theirs” (P7). This meant that in addition to acknowledging and accepting personal preferences it was also important to skillfully manage and, as appropriate, temper personal tendencies to achieve the wider needs of the group. In this regard “balance is key” (P1). However, it was also the case that when under stress team leaders were observed to revert to natural inclinations (and approach) rather than consider more widely (and skillfully) the needs of the group (O1-36).

The study found that a small number of personal traits were recognized as noteworthy for effective team leadership - being honest, trustworthy, dependable and resilient. As one participant summarized the team captain is “somebody you can express an opinion to and know they’re going to listen and be honest, somebody you

can trust, somebody you can go to talk to and know that the coach is not going to find out about it, somebody who you can suggest something to and know that something might get done about it, I think they're the three key ones... someone to talk to, someone to trust, someone to depend on" (P9). In addition, participants noted the demands of professional sport and the risks of loss of playing form and confidence, getting injured, not being selected (and ultimately, non-renewal of playing contract). One captain indicated such eventualities were amplified for the team leader because "I feel as though I can't say anything cos, I'll look like a right prick on the side shouting, 'come on, get in there' when I'm not doing it myself. What they'll have is an opportunity to take the piss" (P1). In this regard resilience was also considered to be a significant personal trait.

In addition to personal authenticity and certain personal traits the third and final set of attributes related to interpersonal qualities recognized as important in relationship with others. More generally, one participant indicated that the "captain is not there to be liked, he's there to do a job but if he's liked the job's easier and then people respect him" (P11) and another that the captain's "got to be somebody who you warm to as well" (P5). More specifically the team leader's "got to be approachable and listen to what the boys have got to say" (P10), they have to be "someone who has compassion" (P5) and who is able to "talk to players with respect" (P7). In summary, the important interpersonal attributes included being approachable, empathetic, compassionate and respectful. Conversely, and by way of reflection on the importance of personal traits and interpersonal qualities it was found that the threat of losing the dressing room (and the goodwill of players) was caused by a "lack of respect I think in the end, dishonesty maybe, I suppose they're the two key words" (P9).

6.3 Process skills

The second general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was process skills comprising the two higher order themes of performance and relationships. The relationships theme in turn comprised two sub themes – individual relationships and group relating. In effect, these findings indicated that the team captain influenced others by getting the job done (performance focus) and by getting on with others (relationship facilitator)

The performance theme was considered to include firstly – being a team focal point; leading rituals, attending to details and instilling pride and secondly – being an authority figure who was prepared to speak out, critique honestly, challenge and enforce.

The study found that while “you need separate leaders on the field” (P7) “you can’t have everybody having a view on it” (P5) and “you need one guy to control it all” (P6). In that regard, the “captain’s a focal point” (P7) who “has to make the final call” (P2). This focus for decision making and setting direction could also extend beyond the players on the field with one participant observing that “I’ve played in games where you get messages from the sideline coming on but at the end of the day it’s the captain’s decision” (P6).

As a team focal point or catalyst, the captain was also expected to take a prominent role in leading team rituals and attending to performance related details. Team rituals included training routines and team meetings (typically Monday to Thursday), captain’s run (typically Friday), pre match warm up, half time talk and the post-match meal (typically Saturday) (O1-36). Performance related issues were shaped by general playing principles and approach (including attitude and game management) as well as detailed game plans outlining specific team tactics and

goals including attack, defence, backs, forwards, kick off, contact area, line out and scrum (A119-122).

While the captain was expected to be a team focal point through leading rituals and attending to performance tasks, he was also expected to instigate and instill emotion and pride when “you put your jersey on and represent something” and by showing “that you can be, you know, the best opposition, the best as a team” (P3).

As well as being a performance focal point the team captain was also anticipated to be a team disciplinarian or “someone who’s got authority” (P11) that ensured performances were kept on course. In exercising authority, the captain had “to be loud, confident and get everyone on the same book” (P4). They were expected “to openly and honestly debate and critique” (P5) to maximize performance “as well as tell people if they’re not pulling their finger out” (P7).

In addition to speaking out and providing honest critique it was also found that the captain had to be prepared to exercise authority by saying “this is what we’re doing” (P5), “we do it this way” (P6) and “be the guy who will enforce” (P7). Demonstrating authority was not just restricted to the playing squad as in addition “to proving he can do it on the field and lead them off the field he might have to have a couple of fights with us (the coaches) in order to prove he’s the boy” (P5).

Although being a team focal point and authority figure was a recognized and important leadership process and interpersonal style in a high-performance environment the appointed team captain noted pragmatically that “some people have a problem with authority” (P1) and that sometimes “things don’t always go your way”. (P1). More broadly, the same participant reflected that a “lot of it (performance) is

down to hindsight” (P1) and subsequent sense making rather than deliberate plans and preparation.

The second higher order theme of the process skills general dimension after performance focus was relationships building. This relationships theme in turn was considered to include two sub themes - individual relationships and group relating. While the study so far has found that being a technically sound player who authoritatively focuses the group on performance tasks are important aspects of leadership process and influence the relationship theme (in conjunction with personal attributes and qualities) draws attention to the currency of getting on with and bringing out the best in others. The first sub theme, individual relationships entailed communicating well, exploring perceptions, sharing knowledge, delegating responsibility and encouraging involvement.

Participants observed that the team leader has “got to be a good communicator” (P3) who “speaks common sense” and “asks questions” (P7). “Common sense” (P7) was defined as authoritative discussion regarding “technical” (P2) and “tactical” (P11) rugby issues. Part of good communication was also choosing the moment and “speaking at the right time” (P7) whether collectively in front of the whole squad or more discreetly and informally on an individual basis. Further still it was found that communication skills extended beyond simple instructions, information and verbal exchange but were also concerned more subtly with “perception and body language” (P2). It was interesting that while players placed great (and collective) emphasis on actions and not words “you can say what you want but if you don't lead by example then no one will listen to you” (P8) they also clearly, and paradoxically, valued a captain who was a “good communicator” (P3).

While it was acknowledged that sometimes the captain “needs to be a bit selfish” (P1) to pursue their own potential as a player, participants valued “someone who has knowledge that he can share” (P5). In addition to sharing knowledge, players valued a captain who shared responsibility. “It’s difficult this is, there’s 40 people in a squad, I’m sure like in business there’s not one person who’s got to manage 40 people, I’d have thought there would be eight people to manage 40 people, do you know what I mean it’s very, very difficult but that’s the job of a leader within the team to delegate responsibility” (P9). It was noticeable that while “sometimes you have to put up with people (P22) and “some people have a problem with authority” (P1) the captain would, on occasion and as appropriate, delegate specific responsibility for “someone to have a quiet word with them, whoever's close to them friendship wise, if someone's close to them just have a little word in their ear” (P10). Finally, individual relationships, in addition to good verbal and non-verbal communication, sharing of knowledge and responsibility, had to consider that “definitely you can be direct but not all the time. On certain things, it's like anything, you are being nice and asking for people's opinions” (P6) and encouraging involvement.

The second sub theme (after individual relationships) was group relating. Group relating entailed working collectively, encouraging connections and developing cohesion and finally, representing and defending the squad.

It was noted that with regard approach to the game (including preparation and competition) that a “lot of it is player led in rugby” (P8) and that “collective captaincy” (P17) is a feature of the domain. Pragmatically, part of the rationale for a collective ethos is because “my career can be dictated by the eight men in front of me, or the goal kicker who misses a kick from a penalty” (P9) or indeed any other player on the

pitch. There appeared to be four reasons why, although the “captain’s a focal point” (P7) who “has to make the final call” (P2) working collectively was the case in professional rugby union – technical aspects, tactical decision making, communication systems and pressure management.

Firstly, the game has become much more technical so “it’s very important (to encourage collective leadership) because of the amount of technical aspects that go into the game (P2)”. “In the last ten years it’s not so much one captain on the field now, you’ve got two or three or four or five captains, there’ll always be like a captain of the scrum and there’ll be a captain of a line out and then you’ll have a defensive captain” (P6).

Secondly, while the game has become more technical it has also become more complex and therefore having “four or five (tactical decision makers) to spread the load out on the rest of the team” (P11) and distribute expertise around the team and pitch was important.

Thirdly, “the pitch is wide and big and they’re playing on big stadiums so for a (effective) communication system to work on the field there needs to be a number of people to provide leadership” (P2) and establish a dispersed and effective communication network.

Fourthly, “it’s so hard for one person to do everything, there’s too much pressure on his shoulders. He’s a focal point to speak to the referee and things but then you need someone to help him out or a group of players to help him out to make his job easier” (P7) If “the captain’s never on his own. That’s good leadership, I think. Having a good circle around them” (P3).

In the context of the case study organisation the role of the captain was to manage (and supervise) the squad through a formally appointed leadership group

(including the captain) of six players (O1- 36). The team and squad under observation appeared content with the title of leadership group as the description of the vehicle for providing “collective captaincy” (P17). Some observed that “I don’t like to call it a senior players group cos it can be a feedback group, cos you can have... one year in, a new kid in, who might (contribute) good things” (P3) and that “to be a leader you don’t have to be a senior player” (P7). However, it was also the case that “on the field they (the team captain) come to a couple of senior players, and just have a little chat, shall we go for three points here for post or shall we go for the corner” (P8).

Collective working was underpinned by encouraging connections and developing cohesion. One participant commented that “until you’ve sweated and bled on that field as a team you haven’t got that – whatever that connection is. We’re soldiers together” (P5). In addition to encouraging strong connections between the players selected on the field the team captain and leadership group also had “to deal with the lads who aren’t getting in the team as well” (P9) and develop cohesion amongst the wider squad. While encouraging connections and developing cohesion were based on the team captain and leadership group building a collective purpose and social identity there were also signs of rudimentary and informal political activity as those in leadership roles developed supportive networks and working coalitions within the group (O8) that enabled power to be exercised. It has already been identified that the case study organisation did not evidence formal team captain self-appraisals or 360 appraisals with selected stakeholders to identify specific requirements (such as effective political skills) for training or development.

The second sub theme (after individual relationships) of group relating was therefore based on working collectively (in general) and through a leadership group

(in particular) as well as encouraging connections and developing cohesion – primarily through collective purpose and (shared) social identity. However, there was one additional aspect or notable activity which was representing and defending the squad. “As a leader you’ve got to put your team almost ahead of yourself which is difficult to do. You’ve got to put your team’s thoughts to the coach - that’s difficult because your relationship could strain between captain and coach. It’s tough isn’t it, it’s a difficult role as captain” (P9).

6.4 Agile practice

The third general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was agile practice. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities and process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership influence and effectiveness. While the team captain was able to exercise a notable level of agency by being authentic and focusing on process it was also the case that they were required to display adaptability (and change approach and course) in the complex and dynamic domain of professional sport. Agile practice was considered to include firstly – being self-aware; secondly – the ability to regulate behaviour, be flexible, tailor approach and adapt to circumstances and thirdly – the ability to find (and strike) a balance.

A senior member of the coaching staff commented that the team captain was “very self-aware of the way they are around individual people and in groups of people” (P2) and, as a consequence “they’re very measured in the way they speak and with their actions” (P2). Being aware of “feelings are a huge part of it” (P9) and one participant drew attention to the “importance of emotional intelligence” (P2). Being aware of self, others and surroundings provided leaders with the opportunity to

then choose how to act or adapt (O1 - 36) or as one participant expressed it “I think the captain needs to be able to regulate himself” (P2).

It was noted that in different situations “you have to have the ability to be flexible. If the shit hit the fan, everyone just looked to him (the captain) and he'd always say "Boys, calm the fuck down" or if we needed to, "Come on boys, for fuck's sake, pull your head out of your arse" (P1). Adaptability was not just restricted to particular situations and scenarios but also to different players and personalities. “I think everyone responds to leadership in different ways, in the team environment every day, so you get to know players responses to how you approach them and how you motivate them, you know? It varies from player to player – whether you need to just have a quiet word or whether you need to really shout at them” (P4).

While it has already been mentioned that the team captain was able to exercise (and was expected to exercise) a level of agency and authority through detailed preparation, documented game plans and a performance focus the coaching team created space for agile practice through a dynamic set of playing principles and by rehearsing different scenarios in training (O3). However, not every eventuality could be accounted for and in such situations “sometimes it’s just intuition” (P9).

Overall, through being “very self-aware of the way they are around individual people and in groups of people” (P2) and having “the ability to be flexible” (P1) the team captain was expected to act and adapt but also to maintain, where possible, a delicate balance. “There are different types of leaders and balance is key. It’s a very emotive environment, rugby (some) get very aggressive and very hyped up for a game, and then there's other boys who are less...emotive... And I think that that's the

difference, you see - finding that balance, and going around to these players and saying the right things...trying to get the best from them” (P1).

Discussion of findings

The study identified three notable findings or general dimensions of the team captain leadership process and interpersonal style - personal qualities, process skills and agile practice. The first general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was personal qualities comprising the two higher order themes of player and person. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal and professional qualities of the team captain (and who they are as both person and player) were an important source of influence and power.

The second general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was process skills comprising the two higher order themes of performance and relationships. The relationships theme in turn comprised two sub themes – individual relationships and group relating. In effect, these findings indicated that the team captain influenced others by getting the job done (performance focus) and by getting on with others (relationship facilitator).

The third general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was agile practice. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities and process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership influence and effectiveness.

Team captain leadership process, as identified in the literature review and based on the current body of knowledge, appeared to be based around three broad concepts – personal qualities and expectations (who you are); relational endeavour

and communication (how you work with others); reflective learning and flexibility (how you adapt) (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Ishak, 2017; Holmes *et al.*, 2010).

More specifically studies advocated firstly, that athlete leader's personally role model expected behaviours (such as being honest, positive and considerate), lead by example and demonstrate a strong work ethic. Secondly, athlete leaders were expected to relate to others and act, as far as possible, in a trustworthy and respectful manner. Thirdly, athlete leaders were adaptable and open to learning from different situations and experiences (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Ishak, 2017; Holmes *et al.*, 2010).

The most consistent and powerful leadership theme across all studies was leading by example. As Dupuis *et al.* (2006, p72).observed "it all comes back to leading by example. The one quality of a good team captain is leading by example".

In the professional sport setting the view was that the process and style of athlete leadership, or how leaders effectively influence others in professional sport (Camire, 2016; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Kirk, 1992; Johnson *et al.*, 2012) reflected many of the personal and interpersonal qualities and adaptive practices indicated in the mainstream sport setting. Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016), Kirk (1992) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) proposed that personal (being true to oneself, work ethic and leading by example) and interpersonal (communication, collaboration, conflict resolution) qualities and adaptive practices (being open to learning and evolving) were also important in the professional domain.

However, Camire (2016), Cotterill and Cheetham (2016), Kirk (1992) and Johnson *et al.* (2012) indicated that the professional setting emphasised firstly, the playing competence of the captain (how good you are) and secondly, the particular

importance of the relationship between the captain and the senior players or leadership group (who you work with). A third theme in the professional setting was the leadership influence of the captain in developing team identity and wider purpose (what we stand for) or what Steffans *et al.* (2014) described as the capacity to build - or create and manage - a shared social identity.

In summary, the collective view of studies in the sport setting and professional domain indicated that the leadership process and influencing style (and effectiveness) of the captain was a blend of five key dimensions (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Camire, 2016; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 2010; Ishak, 2017; Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Kirk, 1992). . The five dimensions were personal qualities (role modelling predominantly positive behaviours), playing competence (being the best player in their position), relational endeavour (collaborating formally and informally with others, in particular, the coach and leadership group), team identity (developing a shared and unique purpose) and adaptive practice (learning and adjusting to different circumstances).

There were a number of shared insights between the study findings and the current literature. The personal qualities of the team captain as a player and person in the study were broadly similar to the playing competence and personal qualities (of authenticity and approachability) identified in the literature. The process skills of the team captain focused on performance and building individual and group relationships - including the leadership group - in the study were, again, broadly similar to team performance (based on identify and functioning), relational endeavour and collective leadership identified in the literature. Finally, the agile practice of the team captain identity in the study was, once again, broadly similar to adaptive practice identified in the literature. In effect, the research results confirmed that team

captain leadership process and interpersonal style in the professional rugby union domain were reflective of the current (and wider) body of knowledge and understanding. While confirmatory, this congruence was still noteworthy as research and insight on team captaincy and athlete leadership in the professional domain has been relatively limited.

However, there were also a number of considerations that required clarification, and which had implications for current thinking and future practice. The first related to whether the personal or professional qualities of the team captain were the most important source of influence and power. The second related to which leadership style was the most effective in both getting the job done and getting on with others. The third related to the inherent paradox of evolving and adapting to changing circumstances in the context of a highly structured and disciplined approach to winning.

6.5 The personal qualities of the team captain

The study found personal traits recognized as noteworthy for effective team leadership included being honest, trustworthy, dependable and resilient while interpersonal attributes included being approachable, empathetic, compassionate and respectful.

The sport leadership literature indicated that personal qualities of authenticity and interpersonal qualities related to approachability and role modelling predominantly positive behaviours were important (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Camire, 2016; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 2010; Ishak, 2017; Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Kirk, 1992).

Hamburger (1983) in a military study on the characteristics of successful combat leaders in extreme performance and physically confrontational contexts identified terrain sense (situational awareness), confidence, audacity (considered risk taking), tenacity and common sense. More widely (in mainstream organisational leadership literature), Northouse (2013) identified five major leadership traits – personal self-confidence, intelligence and determination as well as interpersonal integrity and sociability.

It has been acknowledged that “athlete leader character impacts the team” (Bucci *et al.*, 2012, p253) and that some coaches “don’t think that everybody can become a leader” (Bucci *et al.*, 2012, p253). Hamburger (1983, p1) went further and indicated that “in no case did a unit in combat overcome the (character) deficiencies of its leader”.

Both the study and the literature identified the importance of particular (and ideal) personal and interpersonal traits and characteristics as a starting point and indication of potential for effective leadership. While the literature identified these as pre-requisites whose absence might not be overcome that was not a clear or explicit finding, but an implication or anticipation, in the current study.

Some participants indicated that the captain should be “technically the best player in their position” (P17) although others noted however, that “your best rugby players may not be the best leaders” (P7). If the captaincy selection criteria was playing competency and “first name on the team sheet” (P17) rather than personal character this could create a dilemma or negative impact on performance (Slatter and Lovett, 1999) unless any perceived interpersonal shortcomings were complemented by the traits and characteristics of others in the leadership group or wider squad.

Goffee and Jones (2006) went further than this pragmatic compromise and stated that the ideal combination (and recruitment rationale) for effective leadership (and an effective leader) was a blend of both personal authenticity and professional skills. As several participants observed in this study the team captain was somebody who's "going to be honest, somebody you can trust, somebody you can go to talk" (P9) **and** "somebody who you warm to as well" (P5). In this scenario, the captain was "someone who's highly regarded and highly respected, not necessarily the best player on the field or the highest paid player, just someone who's got those qualities and someone you respect" (P6). This finding indicated that leadership has currency and value in its own right and could be considered to mitigate limitations in individual technical expertise by contributing more widely to the collective effort (and success) of the group.

6.6 The interpersonal process skills of the team captain

Leadership style and approach was a blend of acting authoritatively and enforcing compliance balanced with involving others and working collectively although the emphasis (based on an analysis of key themes) was on a participatory tone and relational style.

In a typical scheduled week players spent 36 hours (or 90% of their time) in team training, team meals, team meetings and the captain's run (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36). During typical competitive fixture players spent 4 hours (or 10% of their time) in preparation, competing and the post-match meal (O6, O7, O10, O15, O17, O22, O28, O31, O32 and O35). Geier (2016) indicated that in extreme performance contexts where time was short and a successful outcome important – such as competitive fixtures - that a transactional (or

authoritative and enforcing) leadership style was appropriate. Study findings confirmed this directive stance in the literature. In the wider preparation and build up to competition (where players spent 90% of their time) the emphasis was on a blend of relational endeavour, competence - supportive behaviour, collective or shared leadership and a transformational style (Duguay *et al.*, 2019; Fransen *et al.*, 2018; Morgan *et al.*, 2013). Again, study findings confirmed this democratic stance in the literature.

There were, however, two variations or refinements that emerged from the study. Firstly, that while a directive style was both appropriate as a leader and even anticipated by players under competitive pressure that an authoritative approach based on mutual respect, rather than an autocratic one based on individual disregard, was more effective and engaging (O6, O7, O10, O15, O17, O22, O28, O31, O32, O35). Secondly, that while the wider preparation and training process and leadership style was supportive and participatory it was also the case that the squad sought to replicate the physical confrontation of competitive fixtures in selected high intensity contact training sessions in order to prepare as well as possible. This endeavour also extended to the leadership and tactical demands of the competitive arena. As one participant observed “you train as you play, so even in training, you’ve got to be that leader” (P4) and that included adopting (and practising) an authoritative style (O1-5; O8-9; O11-14; O16; O18-21; O23-27; O29-30; O33-34; O36).

6.7 The contextual agility of the team captain’s style

The study found that the personal qualities and process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership

influence and effectiveness in the complex and dynamic domain of professional sport. In practice this meant that leaders were expected to be flexible, tailor their approach and adapt to circumstances (P1; P4). This agility was facilitated, to an extent, by rehearsing different scenarios in training (O3) but “sometimes it’s just intuition” (P9). The literature confirmed that athlete leaders were expected to be adaptable and open to learning from different situations and experiences and, consequently, vary their leadership approach (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Ishak, 2017; Holmes *et al.*, 2010).

However, a paradox emerged from both the study and the literature regarding the contextual agility of the team captain’s style. Firstly, the captain was expected to act authoritatively and enforce compliance (P7; P11) and display authority, exert control and re-enforce messages (Camire, 2016; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Kirk, 1992 and Johnson *et al.*, 2012). There was also a focus within the case study organisation on results and winning “it’s a results environment - you’re either winning or you’re losing” (P9) which was confirmed by the literature as a contextual emphasis on winning or “the primacy of winning” (Camire, 2016, p123). In summary, the team captain was expected to act with authority to win games at (typically) the weekend based on significant resources allocated to performance analysis and professional preparation during the week. These expectations (and pressures) were noted to lead to a more conservative style or risk averse – not risky or adaptive - approach to decision making (Camire, 2016).

In resolving these tensions between - in summary – clear planning, authority and focus on outcomes and complex circumstances, adaptability and focus on process the team captain was expected to deal with problems and resolve conflicts (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016). However, beyond exploring perceptions (P2) the

study found little, if any evidence, of how interpersonal conflicts and differences were resolved. Indeed, there were examples between coaches and between players of where conflict was regularly avoided (O1 – O36). While Fisher and Ury (2012) acknowledged that avoidance was a legitimate conflict strategy its value lay in sporadic and targeted use. The implication of the study, therefore, was that greater practical consideration needed to be given to how interpersonal difference and conflict was approached and managed within professional team settings. Such endeavour could ease – but not resolve – the tensions between authority and adaptability and encourage risk awareness rather than risk avoidance. The case study organisation did not evidence formal team captain self-appraisals or 360 appraisals with selected stakeholders to identify specific requirements (such as conflict management skills) for training or development.

CHAPTER 7: THE INFLUENCE OF THE CAPTAIN ON TEAM PERFORMANCE AND SATISFACTION

Presentation of results

7.1 Visual analysis of the captain's influence on team performance and satisfaction

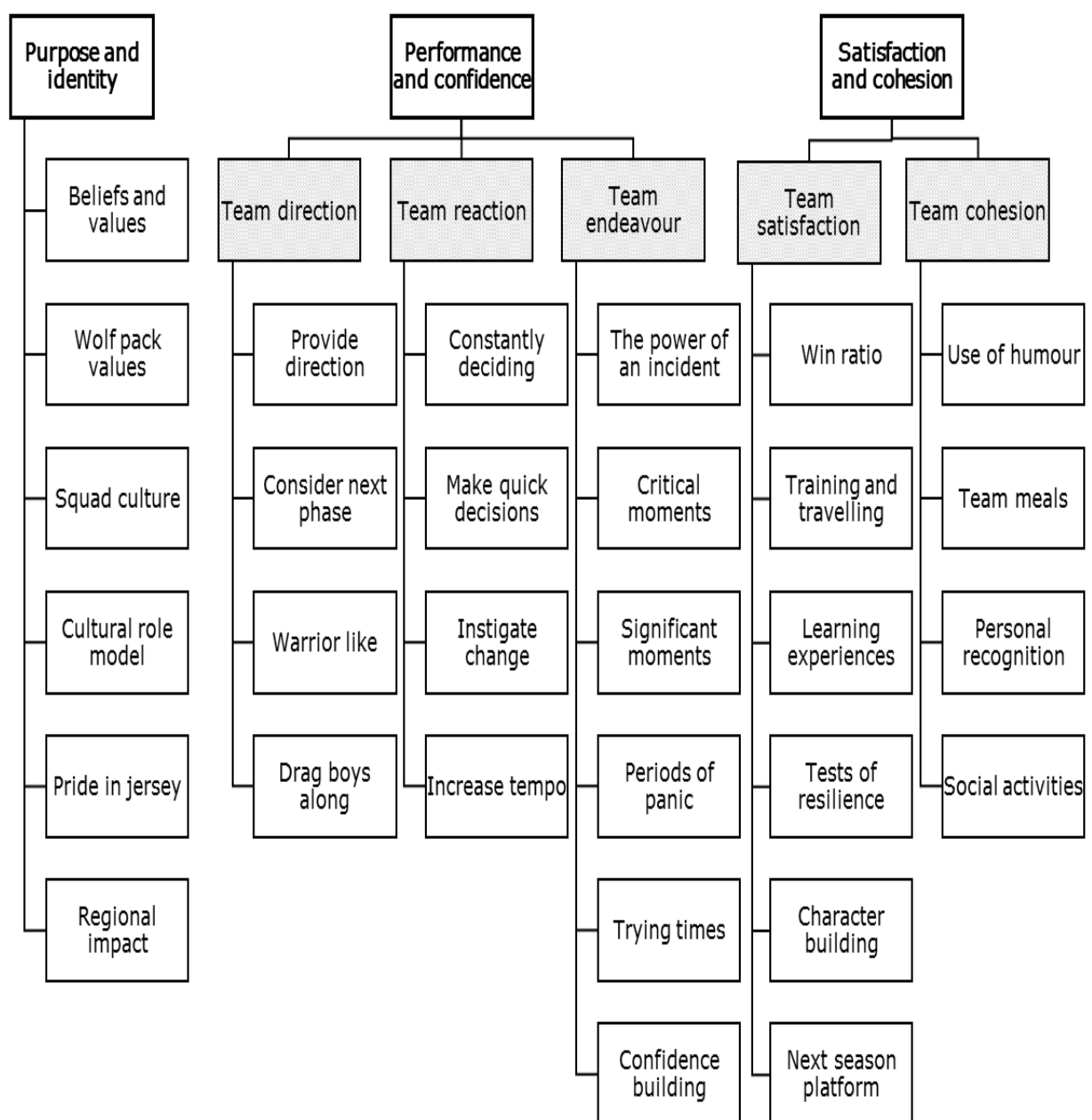


Figure 7.1 – Team captain influence on team

By way of introduction and context for the presentation and discussion of findings associated with the impact of the captain on team performance and satisfaction in this chapter previous findings on the related and underpinning concepts of leadership role and leadership process are briefly summarised below.

The study had previously identified three notable findings or general dimensions related to the role and activities of the team captain – environment influencer, game shaper and stakeholder ambassador. The environment was influenced through training activities and preparation, social activities and team building plus shared (and formal) group leadership and supervision. Games were shaped through pre-game logistics; in game motivation, instruction and decision making plus referee management. Liaison with stakeholders was developed through community links, sponsor relations and media engagement. The team captain's capability and efficacy in the role (and related activities) was influenced primarily by job clarity, relevant experience and leadership group support.

Furthermore, the study had identified three notable findings or general dimensions of the team captain leadership process and interpersonal style - personal qualities, process skills and agile practice. The personal and professional qualities of the team captain (and who they are as both person and player) were an important source of influence and power. The team captain influenced others by getting the job done (performance focus) and by getting on with others - both individually and collectively - (relationship facilitator). The personal qualities and process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership influence and effectiveness. Leadership style and approach was a blend of acting authoritatively and enforcing compliance balanced with involving others and working collectively although the emphasis (based on an analysis of key themes)

was on a participatory tone and relational style. The team captains conduct and efficacy with others was shaped primarily by the nature (and quality) of the leadership process and appropriate choice of interpersonal style.

In the professional sport context, the role and activities of the team captain (their capability) and leadership process and interpersonal style (their conduct) – as summarised and outlined above - influenced and impacted the group in three ways - purpose (and identity), performance (and confidence) and satisfaction (and cohesion). The visual analysis and hierarchy chart presented at Figure 7.1 displayed and demonstrated these general dimensions and related higher order themes.

The first general dimension was the influence of the captain on team purpose (and identity). In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities of the team captain (including their beliefs, values and cultural role modelling) had a perceived influence on squad culture (or environment), pride in the jersey and even wider community or regional impact.

The second general dimension was the influence of the captain on team performance (and confidence) comprising three higher order themes of team direction, team reaction and team endeavour. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities, (performance and relational) process skills and agile practice of the team captain had a perceived influence on the agreed direction of the team (game plan) at critical moments and its ability to react to circumstances (game scenarios) during periods of panic. A further, positive consequence was the impact on (particularly younger and less experienced) player's confidence and self-efficacy.

The third, and final, general dimension was the influence of the captain on team satisfaction (and cohesion) comprising two higher order themes of team satisfaction and team cohesion. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal

qualities and (performance and relational) process skills of the team captain had a perceived influence on the level of group satisfaction (and learning) and squad social interaction and cohesion.

7. 2 The influence of the captain on team performance and satisfaction.

The captain's philosophy had "a positive impact" on players (P23) and "lifted the whole region" (P17). Participants also commented on the impact of the captain's personality and conduct describing him as "a real gentleman with a strong set of beliefs and values" (P15) that were "influential to squad culture" (P17).

It was reported previously that the team captain was expected to be "a cultural role model" (P7). In the case study organization, these cultural values had been shaped by the wolf pack credo (Johnson *et al.*, 2000). The wolf pack credo was based on a series of individual expectations and collective endeavours (A1, A2) that had been interpreted and adapted to the case study environment. The individual expectations were to play and practice; to hunt and compete; to rest and recover and voice feelings and thoughts (A1, A2). In practical terms, players were expected to "know their jobs, be disciplined, demonstrate good work habits and be open to honest feedback" (P2). The collective endeavours were to co-operate with others; share affection; teach and mentor the young and respect elders and authority figures (A1, A2). The combined and cumulative impact of these expectations and endeavours was to encourage and develop individual accountability/personal responsibility; positive interdependence; face-to-face interaction; teamwork skills and group processing (Johnson *et al.*, 2000). The anticipated outcome was to "leave your mark." (A1, A2) on a game, on the club and on the sport in terms of leadership impact on others and leadership legacy for others (O1 – O36).

The captain, in this setting, was considered to have had a direct and positive influence on the philosophical purpose and cultural identity of the team instilling pride when “you put your jersey on and represent something” (P3).

With regard team performance and confidence, the team captain was perceived to have a direct impact on team direction (strategic management) as well as team reaction (change facilitation). Concerning team direction, one participant confirmed that “captains make a difference because with the nature of the physical battle professional sportsman want to look to somebody just to give them the direction to move onto the next phase” (P2) as planned with another observing that the captain was a “warrior” who “drags the boys along” (P17). More specifically, it was felt that the captain was “constantly making decisions on the field, whether to kick for goal, whether to kick for the corner, whether to play with the wind or against the wind, whether to talk to the ref at this stage, whether not to talk to the ref because he’s having a bad five minutes” (P9). In these circumstances “you need that one player to look up to, you need one person to make a quick decision, then you go to your captain” (P4). With regard team reaction (and as a response to the ongoing decision making process), “people will look to you as a group of leaders if you’ve just gone behind by three points, they kind of look to the leaders, so they have to be the ones to instigate that little change, get the tempo up” (P8).

Performance related interventions (in response to team endeavour associated with maintaining team direction or facilitating team reaction) were particularly noticeable and valued “during periods of panic, where a decent captain provides logical direction” (P13) to have a “positive impact in trying times” (P5). One participant described such interventions as “the power of an incident that could change the momentum of a game” (P22). It was also the case that during such

“critical moments” (P2) or “significant moments” (P9) the team captain was noted for transferring “confidence (in particular) to the younger and less experienced players” (P11).

Team satisfaction was notably difficult during the season under observation as the win ratio of the team was 31% - over 60% would be considered a high win ratio (Bridgewater, 2010). The win ratio of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team was calculated at 85 to 87% (Johnson *et al.*, 2012). There were a number of contextual reasons for this level of performance including competitor advantage, commercial pressures, financial investment, board governance and player recruitment. This meant that feelings of performance satisfaction within the squad, where winning was widely acknowledged as the key (if oversimplified) indicator of success, were often muted over the course of the 32-game season (O1 – O36).

The relatively low win ratio and muted feelings were often reframed as “learning experiences” (P1) “tests of resilience and personal character” (P5) or “something to build on for next season” (P3). Players were also encouraged to try and “enjoy yourselves” (P5). In this regard, the team captain was able to minimise – or contextualise - dissatisfaction rather than increase satisfaction. This dissatisfaction with competitive performances also seeped into dissatisfaction with coaches regarding training arrangements and organisation and with other players regarding training commitment and intensity on occasion (P11). It was also observed a number of times that the routines and rituals of training, playing and (in particular) travelling (O7, 17, 31, 32) – against the backdrop of a poor seasons performances – rather than providing structure, success and satisfaction created and exacerbated a sense of repetitiveness with bland cycles of “ordinariness and sameness” (P17).

While the study found that overall performance satisfaction was impacted or suppressed by the relatively poor win ratio (31%) and the influence of the captain was to try and reframe the experiences or “take the positives” (P1) the cohesion of the group and interpersonal dynamics remained, paradoxically, largely strong and stable (O1 – O36).

Training, playing and travelling were often peppered with examples of “banter and taking the p***” (P1) to lighten the mood, the squad interacted well during the frequent training and post competition meals and there was a range of social activities and events to build cohesion (O1 – O36). In team meetings birthdays were recognised and celebrated and good or notable performances highlighted and applauded (O1 – O36). The team captain had an active role and direct impact on these cohesive activities and interventions.

In summary, as one participant noted “the captain makes a difference – 100%” (P9). While not as absolute the findings of formal interviews and informal conversations (P1 – P27) and observations throughout the season (O1 – O36) as presented above indicated a clear qualitative perception and consensus that the capability and conduct of the team captain had a direct (and in this case, generally positive) impact on team purpose and performance and helped mediate or mitigate team satisfaction during a challenging season.

It has already been noted that the case study organisation gathered a significant amount of performance analysis data (A138 – 142) with a small team of performance analysts providing real time data collection and analysis during games with, typically, four computer screens of various visual feeds and angles as well as referee microphone audio (O6; O10; O15; O22; O28; O35). Analysis reports typically ran to 20+ double sided pages focusing on overall team performance against playing

style expectations and game plan tactics through a series of graphs and tables. Top performers were singled out for tackles, tackles missed, clean outs and carries in a league table. The summary performance and key decision-making options of the half backs were also highlighted. Finally, each player had a profile page of individual performance indicators (n=42) with a concluding section for “work ons” (A138 – 142). This information was readily and publicly available in the team room and supported by illustrative video clips at computer stations. (O1-5, 8, 9, 11-14, 16, 18-21, 23-27, 29, 30, 33, 34, and 36). It was also the case that training, and preparation sessions were also recorded for subsequent analysis by the coaching team (O1-5, 8, 9, 11-14, 16, 18-21, 23-27, 29, 30, 33, 34, and 36). However, there were no performance indicators or performance analysis directly related to the role and influence of the team captain on important game characteristics and variables during competitive fixtures in order to evaluate and review leadership practice and efficacy.

Discussion of findings

7. 3 The adaptive leadership role

The study found that leadership efficacy was underpinned by team captain capability based on role clarity, experience and leadership group support as well as team captain conduct based on personal qualities and interpersonal style, leadership process (performance focus and relationship building) and situational agility. The nature and quality of team captain capability and conduct in turn influenced and impacted the group in three ways - purpose (and identity), performance (and confidence) and satisfaction (and cohesion).

Fransen *et al.* (2016) confirmed that high quality athlete leadership facilitated a stronger sense of team purpose, higher commitment to realising performance goals and greater confidence in the team's abilities. Molan *et al.* (2019) confirmed that leadership in elite sport is an important variable that has significant influence and Wigert and Maese (2019) that effective leadership can account for significant variance in a team's level of engagement. The benefits and positive impacts of athlete leadership included enhanced role clarity, communication, team performance, cohesion and individual satisfaction (Crozier *et al.*, 2013).

In defining high quality athlete leadership studies confirmed that such athlete leaders demonstrated a range of positive traits, attributes and behaviours or personal qualities, leadership skills and appropriate interpersonal style. Conversely, an absence of these traits, attributes and behaviours might have "detrimental consequences" (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016, p117) and undermine leadership influence on team performance and satisfaction.

High quality athlete leaders were noted for having a close personal connection with colleagues and for being accepted by peers (Fransen *et al.*, 2015a; Moran and Weiss, 2006). They demonstrated high skill levels, a strong work ethic (Wright and Cote, 2003), fostered goal attainment (Price and Weiss, 2011) and had advanced tactical knowledge (Wright and Cote, 2003). They were also noted for building rapport with teammates (Wright and Cote, 2003) and developed a shared team identity (Steffans *et al.*, 2014).

One high quality behaviour which was a notable finding in this study was agile practice which recognised that the personal qualities and process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership influence and effectiveness. While the team captain was able to exercise a notable

level of agency by being authentic and focusing on process it was also the case that they were required to display adaptability (and change approach and course) in the complex and dynamic domain of professional sport. Such agile practice was considered to include being self-aware; being able to regulate behaviour, being flexible, tailoring approach and adapting to circumstances.

In defining the four key roles of athlete team leaders (task, motivation, social and external) the current literature makes only relatively brief and broad mention of agile and adaptive practice when advocating that team captains should “adjust them (tactics) if necessary” (Fransen *et al.*, 2014). The ability to react, “to instigate that little change, to get the tempo up” (P8) particularly “during periods of panic” (P13) in order to have a “positive impact in trying times” (P5) was found to be “critical” (P2) and “significant” (P9) in this study. In that regard it was appropriate for any future definition to consider a fifth, discrete role of adaptive leader alongside the four currently established roles of task, motivation, social and external. More specifically this new or extended contemporary leadership role would fit in the current taxonomy between the task and motivational roles (See Figure 7.2).

Leadership role	Definition
Task leader	A task leader is in charge on the field; this person helps the team to focus on our goals and helps in tactical decision-making. Furthermore the task leader gives his/her teammates tactical advice during the game.
Adaptive leader	The adaptive leader is able to change approach on the field; this person helps the team react and respond to different or unexpected game scenarios. An agile leader is flexible and able to tailor their approach and team response to changing circumstances.
Motivational leader	The motivational leader is the biggest motivator on the field; this person can encourage his/her teammates to go to any extreme; this leader also puts fresh heart into players who are discouraged. In short, this leader steers all the emotions on the field in the right direction in order to perform optimally as a team.
Social leader	The social leader has a leading role besides the field; this person promotes good relations within the team and cares for a good team atmosphere, e.g. in the dressing room, in the cafeteria or on social team activities. Furthermore, this leader helps to deal with conflicts between teammates besides the field. He/she is a good listener and is trusted by his/her teammates.
External leader	The external leader is the link between the team and the people outside; this leader is the representative of the team to the club management. If communication is needed with media or sponsors, this person will take the lead. This leader will also communicate the guidelines of the club management to the team regarding club activities for sponsoring.

Figure 7.2 – Adaptive leadership role (Based on Fransen *et al.*, 2014)

7.4 Leadership impact on team purpose and culture

The study found that the personal qualities of the team captain (including their beliefs, values and cultural role modelling) had a perceived influence on squad culture (or environment), pride in the jersey and even wider community or regional impact.

The literature confirmed that leaders are perceived to be important cultural architects (Railo, 1986) and role models (Bucci *et al.*, 2012) and a “crucial component to the effective functioning of the team” (Eys *et al.*, 2007, p281). The

literature also confirmed that effective athlete leaders (both formal and informal) in the team environment had a positive impact on identification (Fransen *et al.*, 2014).

The study found that the personality and conduct of the team captain were “influential to squad culture” (P17) and in this example described the captain positively as “a real gentleman with a strong set of beliefs and values” (P15).

Chidester *et al.* (1991) found in their study on personality measures that influence team performance that, conversely, where captains were personally arrogant, egotistical and boastful as well as interpersonally passive aggressive or dictatorial their flight crews, operating under high pressure conditions, made the most errors.

In this regard, therefore, both this study in the professional rugby domain and the current body of (wider) knowledge confirmed and clarified that team leaders were important cultural architects and positive role models who had an impact on team identity and purpose. It was also the case that an arrogant and autocratic approach could be counterproductive to effective group functioning and increase performance errors.

7.5 Leadership impact on team performance and confidence

The study found that the personal qualities, (performance and relational) process skills and agile practice of the team captain had a perceived influence on the agreed direction of the team (game plan) at critical moments and the group’s ability to react to circumstances (game scenarios) particularly during periods of panic. A further, positive consequence was the impact on (particularly younger and less experienced) player’s confidence and self-efficacy.

Hogan *et al.* (1994, p449) confirmed that “the key to a leader’s effectiveness is his or her ability to build a team” and that this effectiveness is predicated on

addressing problems (task focus) and team maintenance (relationship focus) relative to the group context and the team lifecycle. Other studies confirmed that athlete leadership was an important source of collective efficacy with a particular and specific emphasis on task focus behaviour and in game motivation (Fransen *et al.*, 2012) and that effective athlete leaders (both formal and informal) in the team environment had a positive impact on confidence (Fransen *et al.*, 2014).

In this regard, therefore, both this study in the professional rugby domain and the current body of (wider) knowledge confirmed and clarified that in order to maximize performance and build confidence that team leaders had to delicately balance game plan direction with game scenario reaction and task focus with team maintenance. The literature drew attention to the mediating effect of group context which in the competitive performance domain participants described as being mindful of the “clock and the scoreboard” (P1). There was, however, little evidence that the case study organization had actively considered the different stages - forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning - of the team development lifecycle (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977) and how this might be reflected in a more nuanced and targeted leadership approach.

7.6 Leadership impact on team satisfaction and cohesion

The study found that the personal qualities and (performance and relational) process skills of the team captain had a perceived influence on the level of group satisfaction (and learning) and squad social interaction and cohesion. The literature confirmed that effective athlete leaders (both formal and informal) in the team environment have a positive impact on satisfaction (Eys *et al.*, 2007) and cohesion

(Vincer and Loughhead, 2010) and that cohesion, related to quality of leadership, has a strong relationship with success (Carron *et al.*, 2002).

It has already been noted that team satisfaction was muted during the season under observation because win ratio – the key (if oversimplified) indicator of success (Bridgewater, 2010) - was relatively low at 31%, even though there were a number of contextual reasons for this level of performance. Campo *et al.* (2019) also identified high anxiety and anger as emotional responses to poor performance. The positive impact of the captain under these difficult circumstances was to try and reframe the group experience or “take the positives” (P1), to reframe a loss or series of losses as “learning experiences” (P1), “tests of resilience and personal character” (P5) or “something to build on for next season” (P3). In this regard, therefore, the role of the team captain was to minimise or contextualise dissatisfaction - and “take the positives” (P1) - rather than increase satisfaction in the absence of winning.

One of the issues with professional sport – and related to this the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with performance - was the dominant and narrow narrative of winning (Bridgewater, 2010). The commercial reality of high-performance sport, the gladiatorial expectations of spectators and the competitive nature of professional athletes suggested that this was likely to remain a simple, powerful and motivating measurement (Hoye *et al.*, 2015). There were however wider consequences for the governance of sport, duty of care to athletes and post career transitions (Grey-Thompson, 2017). MacLean (2001) has argued more widely for consideration of not just results but also the nature and quality of (participative) group processes and (a safe) organisation environment as indicators of leadership effectiveness and impact. Carless and Douglas (2011) have also drawn attention to three alternative stories or conceptions of success - technical and tactical mastery of

the sport based on effort and application, friendships through sport based on relationships and connections on the athlete's career journey and finally, memories of sport based on shared experiences and self-discovery.

Carron *et al.* (2002) have argued that cohesion, related to quality of leadership, has a strong relationship with success. On the contrary, the cohesion of the group and interpersonal dynamics remained largely strong and stable (O1 – O36) in the context of the rather narrow definition of success as expressed by the teams 31% win ratio over the course of the season. In this regard, there was a sense of siege cohesion as the group sort to establish a degree of grounded stability and protect themselves from board, spectator and media scrutiny (O1 – O36).

7.7 Reflections on the measurement of leadership impact

Hogan *et al.* (1994, p494) stated that “effectiveness concerns judgements about a leader's impact on an organisation” but that “effectiveness is often hard to specify and frequently affected by factors beyond a leaders control”. Williams *et al.*, (2017) indicated that in individual sports performance may be quantified directly but that in team sports performance might be inferred. “Nevertheless, effectiveness is the standard by which leaders should be judged” (Hogan *et al.*, 1994, p494). In this regard, Hogan *et al.* (1994) identified three approaches to the judgement of leadership impact – stakeholder evaluation, practice examples and direct evidence.

7.7.1 Stakeholder evaluation

It has been argued that the means through which leadership impact occurs are less well understood (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016) while other researchers suggest that there are in fact common ideas in theory (Gosling *et al.*, 2008), some

leadership rules in practice (Ulrich *et al.*, 2009) and that there are things (we know) that leaders do well (Owen, 2009). High quality leadership has been defined in this study on the basis of team captain capability including role clarity, experience and leadership group support and team captain conduct including personal qualities and interpersonal style, leadership process (performance focus and relationship building) and situational agility.

Leadership impact on stakeholders (players) has been evaluated and validated from participant perspectives and researcher observations in the field. It was found that team captain capability and conduct influenced and impacted the group in three ways - purpose (and identity), performance (and confidence) and satisfaction (and cohesion).

The study advocated consideration of a new leadership role (and definition) of adaptive leader and that in the face of poor performance the impact of the team captain on satisfaction was to contextualise the frequent losses as a learning experience and platform (to minimise dissatisfaction). Related to satisfaction the study also advocated a broader and more balanced narrative around indications of success (beyond just winning) in elite sport. In the absence of sustained success the study identified siege cohesion as a collective and galvanising response to poor performance.

During the discussion of results it was identified that an arrogant and autocratic leadership style could be counterproductive by increasing error count and that consideration of the different phases of the team development lifecycle could lead to more nuanced and effective leadership interventions.

7.7.2 Practice examples

Effective leadership has been consistently recognised as one of the key contributory factors in positive organisational and sport team performance and best practice initiatives (Bennis, 2003; Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2014). Alternatively, ineffective leadership has been clearly recognised as one of the key contributory factors in corporate distress and dysfunctional professional relationships (Slatter and Lovett, 1999; Slatter *et al.*, 2006).

Studies on distressed organizations and corporate failure draw attention to a range of causal factors with the role of poor leadership – or more specifically autocratic rule – as common in many failing firms. In their studies on derailed (Van Velsor *et al.*, 2010), dysfunctional (Kets De Vries, 2001) and destructive (Padilla *et al.*, 2007) leadership researchers identified three common themes of poor practice – lack of competence (an inability to get the job done), lack of collaboration (an inability to get on with others) and lack of flexibility (an inability to adapt to circumstances). Poor leadership interventions and impact on antecedents and critical events was also discovered to be a notable cause of collective sport team collapse within a competitive game context. Taken together these findings emphasize the importance of professional competence, collaborative working and adaptive practice to maximise the perceived influence and impact of leaders.

7.7.3 Direct evidence and on field evaluative indicators

The study had identified several complex variables associated with the professional sport context including commercial pressures, governance challenges, unique levels of passion and attachment, dramatic (and highly pressurized) entertainment and the increasing demands (and consequences) of preparation and

performance on players. Leadership influence in the professional sport domain was a dynamic interplay of different factors in the field setting including opportunity and luck (Allen, 2008). Pearce and Conger (2003) described leadership “as a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups”.

It was observed during the study that while leadership influence was both a dynamic concept in a complex sport it was also paradoxical. It was noted that a team could lose despite having an accomplished captain and then win in spite of having an inept captain. The judgement of accomplished or inept was shaped by the presence and quality of team captain capability based on role clarity, experience and leadership group support and team captain conduct based on personal qualities and interpersonal style, leadership process (performance focus and relationship building) and situational agility. The first scenario of a losing team and accomplished captain illustrates the complex and varied range of factors required to achieve a winning outcome and the second scenario of a winning team and inept captain the extent to which others (including the leadership group) can compensate for the poor performance of a team captain.

Attempts at statistical measurement have indicated that an effective team manager in the professional football domain could have an impact equivalent to 10 points difference in league position (Muehlhauser *et al.*, 2018) but without identifying the underpinning qualities that might constitute such an effective approach. Social Network Analysis has indicated (and measured) the quantity of connections between players and those in leadership positions but not the relational quality (nor influence) of those connections (Fransen *et al.*, 2015a).

In order to assess or measure the perceived influence and impact of leadership practice researchers have developed a number of instruments (or scales,

questionnaires and inventories). The measurement focus of the instruments is on what leaders do (role) and how (style) to be perceived as effective. Overall, role dimensions consider activities such as training and instruction, feedback, support, group representation and group identity. Style dimensions consider two main approaches – a goal orientation (authoritative, instrumental, task) and relational orientation (democratic, expressive and social). A danger with such measurement tools is that they polarize responses and choices and may not reflect the nuance and pragmatism of adaptive and applied practice. Loughhead *et al.* (2014, p591) suggest that “To date, there is no gold standard inventory that measures athlete leadership behaviours” and has called for the specific “development of an inventory to measure athlete leadership behaviours” based on “strong theoretical frameworks”. (Loughhead, 2017, p60)

The case study organisation gathered a significant amount of quantitative performance analysis data with detailed reports focusing on individual performance indicators such as tackles, tackles missed, clean outs and carries along with overall team performance against playing style expectations and game plan tactics presented through a series of graphs and tables.

However, there were no performance indicators or performance analysis directly related to the role and influence of the team captain on important game characteristics and variables during competitive fixtures in order to evaluate and review leadership practice and efficacy. In part this reflected the complexity of the game, the dynamic nature of leadership and the accuracy (and validity) of establishing such a simple connection between the two.

Nevertheless, as Hogan *et al.* (1994, p494) advocated “effectiveness is the standard by which leaders should be judged” so Figure 7.3 provided a framework of

key evaluative indicators linked to the three on field leadership roles of task, adaptive and motivational.

Leadership role	Definition and evaluative indicators			
Task leader	A task leader is in charge on the field; this person helps the team to focus on our goals and helps in tactical decision-making. Furthermore the task leader gives his/her teammates tactical advice during the game.			
	Evaluative indicators	(T1) Focuses attention on game plan goals	(T2) Makes tactical game plan decisions	(T3) Gives tactical game plan instructions
Adaptive leader	The adaptive leader is able to change approach on the field; this person helps the team react and respond to different or unexpected game scenarios. An agile leader is flexible and able to tailor their approach and team response to changing circumstances.			
	Evaluative indicators	(A1) Solves unexpected problems	(A2) Takes calculated risks	(A3) Interacts with match officials
Motivational leader	The motivational leader is the biggest motivator on the field; this person can encourage his/her teammates to go to any extreme; this leader also puts fresh heart into players who are discouraged. In short, this leader steers all the emotions on the field in the right direction in order to perform optimally as a team.			
	Evaluative indicators	(M1) Demands higher levels of effort	(M2) Provides positive encouragement	(M3) Keeps players calm under pressure

Figure 7.3 - On field evaluative indicators (Adapted from Fransen *et al.*, 2014)

This data could be captured via video and audio and coded for occurrence and frequency then explored further through selected post-match interviews with players. This data could inform leadership role appraisal and development. Further still, data on leadership role occurrence and frequency could be mapped with critical game incidents to explore underlying relationships and components of effectiveness. This approach could provide an important contribution to the body of knowledge in evaluating team captain leadership impact and influence during a game.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The conclusion is structured around three sections – **implications of findings, contribution to the body of knowledge** and **study limitations and reflections**. The overall aim of the study and research question was to understand the leadership role and influence of team captaincy in a professional rugby union environment and evaluate the implications for future practice. Five related research objectives were established. The (previous) presentation and discussion of results considered and answered objective 1: the professional rugby union context and expectations of leadership; objective 2: the role and activities of the captain; objective 3: the interpersonal style of the captain; objective 4: the influence (or impact) of the captain on team performance and satisfaction. The intention of study objective 5 was to evaluate the implications of these research findings on the practice (and development) of team captaincy. This concluding evaluation is introduced and presented below and includes a summary and recap of each chapter's findings, the subsequent implications for team captaincy practice, consideration of transferability to other settings and reflection on the theoretical (approach and) implications of the study. The conclusion also identifies original contributions (emerging from the study findings) to the team captaincy and athlete leadership domain then finally, study limitations and reflections including future avenues of inquiry and closing thoughts on the PhD journey.

8.1 Evaluation of the implications of the research findings

There were four key implications of the research findings for the effective practice of team captaincy. With regard the **professional context**, which was found to be a complex ecosystem, team captains should benefit from working consistently

and collaboratively with a formally established supervisory leadership group. A revised athlete leadership definition was proposed to reflect these group responsibilities. With regard the **team captaincy role**, team captains should be selected against an agreed and clear criterion. A new taxonomy was proposed to reflect the importance of the adaptive leadership role. With regard **team captaincy style**, the personal leadership skills of the team captain should be clearly specified and formally developed. It was proposed that leadership (not just technical expertise alone) has collective value as an organisational currency in its own right. Finally, with regard **team captaincy impact**, team captains should be formally appraised against role objectives and regularly self -evaluate their own practice. It was proposed that a framework of key indicators linked to the on field leadership roles of task, adaptive and motivational could be used to evaluate team captain impact and influence during a game. Each of the key implications was explored below through a summary of chapter findings and insights, relevant participant validation quotes, reflections on the current body of knowledge and finally, implications for team captaincy practice.

8.1.1 The professional context

Professional rugby union was found to be a strand of the live entertainment industry requiring commercial practices and governance arrangements off the field. The entertainment spectacle on the field was both technically and tactically subtle yet direct in its confrontational and gladiatorial endeavour. Players undertook many hours of repetitive training in preparation for competition. There was a strong sense of mutual accountability for standards of training and preparation as well as a collective and competitive focus on winning. Players were subject to a range of

intense physical demands and emotional pressures, constant internal scrutiny and external media and public critique. Career spans were typically short requiring preparation for subsequent employment while still playing.

Although a highly structured and repetitive environment the complexities of the game, the demands of the sport (including the uncertainty of injury, loss of form and non- selection) and the logistics of organising a large squad of players and support staff also fostered a relatively fluid and dynamic (even unsettling at times) work context where players had to adapt to circumstances and develop resilience. While overtly a commercially motivated enterprise playing (and watching) rugby was also a notably emotional and passionate endeavour and organisational culture, group values and individual beliefs expressed through player welfare, team playing style and community relationships were fundamentally important. The sport provided individual players with a number of positive and enjoyable opportunities to flourish, achieve and be well rewarded. More widely, powerful and lifelong bonds were created through shared experiences, interpersonal interactions and group camaraderie.

In summary, the professional rugby context was notable as a commercial (and confrontational) entertainment spectacle that required demanding (physical and emotional) endeavour and the development of personal accountability and collective camaraderie. An important delegated role of the captain in this professional context was to manage (and supervise) the large squad through a formally appointed leadership group (including the captain) of six players. This leadership group performed three main shared functions – facilitating ongoing strategic and cultural alignment, providing the captain with a manageable span of day to day supervisory

and operational control and finally, providing a collaborative and supportive yet critical circle of trusted advisors to the team captain.

Participants observed that “a support network or a structure where there’s support for that leader is crucial” (P2), that the “leadership group is the heartbeat of the team” (P13) and that “having a senior player group is essential to be able to air any views about the environment and the training and to be able to provide constructive feedback up to the coaches” (P1). Further still having a “senior group of players that the coach can liaise with and deliver messages down through this group creates a sense of clarity and consistency” (P17.) “People are designated in certain areas which they are strong at in order to give the captain honest feedback and contribute to meetings” (P17).

While the captain was notably supported by the formal leadership group informal team leaders and role models who were also encouraged to offer particular technical and position specific expertise as well as tactical experience and insight. Motivational interventions and interactions as well as the organisation of and engagement with social activities were also supported by selective (rather than selected) informal team leaders.

On the basis of the study findings the existing definition of athlete leadership as “an athlete occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of members to achieve a common goal” (Loughead *et al.*, 2006) had been revised for the rugby union domain to reflect the role of the designated captain, influential peer leaders and the recognised (senior players) leadership group. Athlete leadership was therefore defined as “an athlete occupying a formal or informal role with individual or group responsibilities within a team, who influences members to achieve a common goal”.

There was limited literature on the selection and development of team captains. Loughhead *et al.* (2014, p594) indicated that “considering the relative infancy of research into athlete leadership it is not surprising that few studies have been conducted to ascertain how to develop athlete leaders”. Arrangements are mixed at best with little evidence of formal selection criteria and appointment (role), guidance and training on behavioural expectations and standards (style) or subsequent review of leadership practice (impact) and performance (Voight, 2012; Gould *et al.*, 2013). Cotterill and Cheetham (2016, p6) confirmed that there are a “lack of development opportunities” and what examples exist are at “sub-elite and non-professional levels” with “nothing relating to elite groups”

Gould *et al.* (2013) identified a list of best coaching practices (n=10) for developing team captains and these appeared to group around three themes – culture, role and process. Cultural practices included an intentional coaching philosophy and trusting motivational climate for leadership development. Role practices included establishing a clear definition of leadership role and responsibilities and exploring skill transference to other walks of life. Finally, process practices included the provision of ongoing support for leadership development, tolerance of mistakes and regular feedback meetings. These practices were subsequently acknowledged by sportscoach UK in a research summary publication on developing team captains. However, the context for this research was the high school domain based on interviews with sports coaches not the professional or elite level of sport.

Cotterill and Fransen (2016) called for the development of a conceptual framework to both address selection and development issues in practice and form the basis for further and much needed research in this area. In organisational

settings such frameworks exist and could be adapted to sport settings mindful of current and applied initiatives in leadership development emphasising personality profiling, applied case studies and scenarios, work-based experiences, mentoring schemes, reflective practice and formal appraisals (Marturano and Gosling, 2008).

As advocated by Cotterill and Fransen (2016), Tarkington *et al.* (2019) proposed a conceptual framework or process map (with five phases) and list of (eleven) related practical strategies for developing sport team captains as formal leaders. The map and strategies, rather like Gould *et al.* (2013), appeared to group around three themes – culture, role and process. Following the fostering of team culture, coaches focused on determining the role and tasks of the team captain then identifying and selecting the captain including consideration of personal characteristics and span of control. Finally, process issues included developing, supporting and mentoring the team captain (and encouraging self-reflection) as well as evaluating performance (through an annual appraisal) and reinforcing expectations. While an empirically informed framework the context for this research was collegiate sport based on interviews with sport coaches and the authors acknowledged the need for future research “particularly within diverse sports contexts and settings” (Tarkington *et al.*, 2019, p147). This included the professional or elite sport context and rugby union setting.

The literature review also indicated that the professional context established pressure on the captain whose role was to make sure, as far as possible, that the team won. In responding to this pressure, the leadership style and actions of the captain were shaped in several ways. These actions included establishing a sound working relationship with the coach and delegating duties to trusted senior players (and potential leaders) (Camire, 2016, p126).

Lewis (2003) indicated that contemporary organisations should consider the formal establishment of a consultative forum – or leadership group - to facilitate debate and discussion around important issues. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) argued that such an approach can lead to access to a wider range of relevant information and facilitate greater ownership and better execution of decisions. In a case study on the All Blacks by Johnson *et al.* (2012) development of the formal leadership group was considered a significant influence on the team's high (85-87%) winning ratio.

In particular the practical implications of the advocacy of Lewis (2003) for the elite sport context are twofold. Firstly, the agenda or meeting topics for the leadership group could include wider discussion (and role modelling) around the performance expectations & environment including team philosophy and standards. Secondly, there could be more focused or detailed consideration of technical and tactical planning including game review and preparation.

Such a consultative forum (involving leading players and the Head Coach or the wider coaching team) could be organised on a weekly basis and may also occur once pre-season in preparation and once at the end of the season on reflection. The leadership group (ideally of up to six people – Carron *et al.* (2005) - in total including the captain) could be selected by the Head Coach or appointed by the squad as appropriate. **An indicative terms of reference for a team leadership group to support the team captain in the professional rugby context can be found at Appendix D.**

8.1.2 Team captaincy role

The study found that the role of the team captain was based on three key dimensions – environment influencer, game shaper and stakeholder ambassador.

The team captain influenced the wider squad environment through active engagement in preparation activities and social events and through the delegated span of control provided by the leadership or senior players group. Games were shaped through attention to pre-game logistics, in game motivation, instruction and decision making as well as referee management and rapport. Stakeholder liaison was undertaken through community links, sponsor relations and media engagement.

While the identified roles and activities of the team captain (wider preparation environment influencer, focused competitive game shaper and outreach stakeholder ambassador) were presented as discrete and linear activities the responsibilities and tasks of the captain in practice were more fluid and interconnected. In addition, while player motivation, tactical plan execution and final decision maker were primarily identified as game shaper roles for the team captain it was also the case that motivation, execution and decision making roles were fundamentally part of the wider training and preparation environment as the team was expected to train with a level of intensity and insight as close as possible to the match setting.

In defining the four key roles of athlete team leaders (task, motivation, social and external) the current literature made only relatively brief and broad mention of agile and adaptive practice when advocating that team captains should “adjust them (tactics) if necessary” (Fransen *et al.*, 2014). The ability to react, “to instigate that little change, to get the tempo up” (P8) particularly “during periods of panic” (P13) in order to have a “positive impact in trying times” (P5) was found to be “critical” (P2) and “significant” (P9) in this study. In that regard it was appropriate for any future definition to consider a fifth, discrete role of adaptive leader alongside the four currently established roles of task, motivation, social and external. More specifically

this new or extended contemporary role would fit in the current taxonomy between the task and motivational roles.

The study found that the role of captain was one of custom and practice and social learning rather than deliberate and documented organisational design. It was found that “from previous experience a clear description of duties and expectations had not happened. Having this criteria of what is expected, the type of skills that are deemed most important on and off the field would be beneficial to the player to know what is expected and would help the coach to monitor the captain’s effectiveness” (P1).

Loughead *et al.* (2014) proposed consideration of the type(s) of leadership role that should be recruited and/or advanced and the conclusion of Eys *et al.* (2007) was that a balance of roles (e.g. task, social and external) within the environment should be encouraged to optimise team performance. It was possible that an athlete leader could fulfil all three leadership roles.

With regard the nature of the recruitment and selection process (and the potential impact on group performance) Loughead *et al.* (2014, p595) indicated that “coaches should seek out the perspectives of athlete followers in selecting leaders as well as consider how well athlete leaders will work alongside coaches and their vision for the team”.

Taylor *et al.* (2015) argued for a transparent process for the selection of those in leadership positions. This encouraged the organisation to formally think through and clarify the key requirements and expectations of the leadership role and then undertake the recruitment of the most appropriate individual to the post. In particular they argued for making explicit the duties and responsibilities (of the captain), the knowledge and skills needed and the performance indicators upon which the post

holder's leadership efforts can be formally reviewed (Taylor *et al.*, 2015). Such a selection process could be undertaken pre-season by the Head Coach (in consultation with the coaching team) for the formal appointment of the team captain. However international duties or injuries, for example, may require the application of the selection process in season to other candidates required to lead the team in the captain's absence. **An indicative job description for a team captain in the professional rugby context can be found at Appendix E.**

8.1.3 Team captaincy style

The study found that the style of the team captain was based on three key dimensions – personal qualities, process skills and agile practice. The first general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was personal qualities comprising the two higher order themes of player and person. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal and professional qualities of the team captain (and who they are as both person and player) were an important source of influence and power. The second general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was process skills comprising the two higher order themes of performance and relationships. The relationships theme in turn comprised two sub themes – individual relationships and group relating. In effect, these findings indicated that the team captain influenced others by getting the job done (performance focus) and by getting on with others (relationship facilitator). The third general dimension and notable feature of team captain interpersonal style was agile practice. Agile practice was considered to include being self-aware, having the ability to regulate behaviour and adapt to circumstances and pragmatically, to find (and strike) a balance. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities and

process skills of the team captain had to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise leadership influence and effectiveness.

A member of the coaching team observed that “teaching them part of leadership would be good, the profile of rugby is changing and it’s getting bigger and the demands on the players are getting more, they need to understand what they’re going through and how they need to behave within the environment “(P2). Other participants observed that “I have never had a plan for leadership. It is something that could be developed and there is a lack of work in these types of areas. More focus is put on skill development in rugby and things like leadership skills are neglected” (P17) and “it would be extremely beneficial to the individual and therefore the team to have a development plan to improve and support the captain” (P1).

The study also found that greater practical consideration needed to be given to how interpersonal difference and conflict was approached and managed within professional team settings. Such endeavour could ease – but not resolve – the tensions between authority and adaptability and encourage risk awareness rather than risk avoidance. There was also little evidence that the case study organization had actively considered the different stages - forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning - of the team development lifecycle (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977) and how this might be reflected in a more nuanced and targeted leadership approach.

Finally, the study found that leadership had currency and value in its own right and could be considered to mitigate some limitations in individual technical expertise by contributing more widely to the collective effort (and success) of the group. As participants observed ““your best rugby players may not be the best leaders” (P7) and the captain should be “someone who's highly regarded and highly respected, not

necessarily the best player on the field or the highest paid player, just someone who's got those qualities and someone you respect" (P6).

Related to this finding regarding leadership currency was consideration of which leadership style was the most effective in both getting the job done and getting on with others. A directive style was both appropriate as a leader and even anticipated by players under competitive pressure but that an authoritative approach based on mutual respect, rather than an autocratic one based on individual disregard, was more effective and engaging. While the wider preparation and training process and leadership style was supportive and participatory it was also the case that the squad sought to replicate the physical confrontation of competitive fixtures in selected high intensity contact training sessions in order to prepare as well as possible. This endeavour also extended to the leadership and tactical demands of the competitive arena. As one participant observed "you train as you play, so even in training, you've got to be that leader" (P4) and that included adopting (and practising) an authoritative style.

Loughead (2014) indicated two main considerations in the blended design of development initiatives for athlete leaders – the provision of naturally occurring leadership development opportunities (applied, on the job learning) and the targeted educational development of leadership practice (academic, workshop-based learning).

Grandzol *et al.* (2010) undertook a season long review of collegiate sport team captains who were provided with practical opportunities to demonstrate and develop their leadership practice. The findings indicated that leadership qualities can develop naturally when captains are afforded such opportunities, but it was less clear whether this on the job learning optimised the leadership skills of the participants.

The implication of this study emphasised the importance of an underpinning conceptual framework and reflective practice activities to guide and review skill development. Another study by Voelker *et al.* (2011) drew attention to the role of formal training in athlete leadership development programmes but emphasised the importance of recruiting or selecting the right athletes who are motivated to improve their leadership practice.

Cotterill (2016) undertook a formal leadership development programme intervention with a national governing body targeting elite professional cricketers (n=16). The intervention followed three iterative phases – assessment, education and application. The assessment phase included player profiling (and self-awareness) using the Myers Briggs Type Inventory. The education phase included leadership workshops and skill transference (n=8) including topics such as the role of the captain, effective communication and making decisions under pressure. The application phase included leadership opportunities in competitive matches (n=5) where the skills learnt could be applied in practice. While this research was based in the elite professional context “captaincy varies significantly depending on the sport” (Cotterill, 2013, p126) and the study concluded that the design of future programmes could seek to learn from practices in rugby (Cotterill, 2016).

Loughead *et al.* (2014) drew attention to organisational structure and which athletes should be identified for development training – those with identified leadership qualities (e.g. the team captain and leadership group) or those with, as yet unfilled, leadership potential. The answer to this was likely to rest on the philosophy of the coaching team and whether they preferred hierarchical arrangements (a select few leaders) or a flatter structure (wider team member development).

Loughead *et al.* (2014) also drew attention to the intended purpose of selection and development and whether this was to balance leadership skills and styles within the group or to reinforce the leadership philosophy of the coaching team. Loughead and Hardy (2005) indicated that a compensation approach could be beneficial where coaches and athlete leaders are able to provide a complementary range of leadership behaviours. However, Schein (2010) indicated that the recruitment and promotion of role models with similar approaches (to the coaches) was a powerful way of reinforcing the culture of an organisation.

Shen (2005) advocated the formal analysis and review of the leadership skills of those in positions of responsibility. This encouraged organisations to support the ongoing professional and personal development of both individual leaders and leadership as a collective capability. In particular, Shen (2005) argued for undertaking an individual training needs analysis and then establishing specific goals underpinned by the design and implementation of an appropriate skill development programme. In addition, the programme could be evaluated to assess its effectiveness. Such a development process for the team captain could be undertaken and agreed pre-season by the Head Coach (or a delegated member of the coaching team). Other candidates required to lead the team in the captain's absence could also be included in the training needs analysis and skill development programme. **An indicative person specification for a team captain in the professional rugby context can be found at Appendix F.**

8.1.4 Team captaincy impact

The study found that the impact of the team captain was based on three key dimensions – team purpose, team performance and team satisfaction. The first

general dimension was the influence of the captain on team purpose (and identity). In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities of the team captain (including their beliefs, values and cultural role modelling) had a perceived influence on squad culture (or environment), pride in the jersey and even wider community or regional impact. The second general dimension was the influence of the captain on team performance (and confidence) comprising three higher order themes of team direction, team reaction and team needs. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities, (performance and relational) process skills and agile practice of the team captain had a perceived influence on the agreed direction of the team (game plan) at critical moments and its ability to react to circumstances (game scenarios) during periods of panic. A further, positive consequence was the impact on (particularly younger and less experienced) player's confidence and self-efficacy. The third, and final, general dimension was the influence of the captain on team satisfaction (and cohesion) comprising two higher order themes of team satisfaction and team cohesion. In effect, these findings indicated that the personal qualities and (performance and relational) process skills of the team captain had a perceived influence on the level of group satisfaction (and learning) and squad social interaction and cohesion.

Team satisfaction was notably difficult during the season under observation as the win ratio of the team was 31%. The relatively low win ratio and muted feelings were often reframed as "learning experiences" (P1) "tests of resilience and personal character" (P5) or "something to build on for next season" (P3). Players were also encouraged to try and "enjoy yourselves" (P5). In this regard, the team captain was able to minimise – or contextualise - dissatisfaction rather than increase satisfaction. While the study found that overall performance satisfaction was impacted or

suppressed by the relatively poor win ratio (31%) and the influence of the captain was to try and reframe the experiences or “take the positives” (P1) the cohesion of the group and interpersonal dynamics remained, paradoxically, largely strong and stable. Carron *et al.* (2002) had argued that cohesion, related to quality of leadership, has a strong relationship with success. On the contrary, the cohesion of the group and interpersonal dynamics remained largely strong and stable, as indicated, in the context of the rather narrow definition of success as expressed by the team’s 31% win ratio over the course of the season. In this regard, there was a strong sense of social cohesion or siege cohesion as the group sort to establish a degree of grounded stability and protect themselves from board, spectator and media scrutiny.

One of the issues with professional sport – and related to this the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with performance - was the dominant and narrow narrative of winning (Bridgewater, 2010). The commercial reality of high-performance sport, the gladiatorial expectations of spectators and the competitive nature of professional athletes indicated that this was likely to remain a simple, powerful and motivating measurement (Hoye *et al.*, 2015). There are however wider consequences for the governance of sport, duty of care to athletes and post career transitions (Grey-Thompson, 2017). MacLean (2001) has argued more widely for consideration of not just results but also the nature and quality of (participative) group processes and (a safe) organisation environment as indicators of leadership effectiveness and impact. Carless and Douglas (2011) have also drawn attention to three alternative stories or conceptions of success - technical and tactical mastery of the sport based on effort and application, friendships through sport based on

relationships and connections on the athlete's career journey and finally, memories of sport based on shared experiences and self-discovery.

The study also found that there were no performance indicators or performance analysis directly related to the role and influence of the team captain on important game characteristics and variables during competitive fixtures in order to evaluate and review leadership practice and efficacy. A framework of key indicators linked to the on field leadership roles of task, adaptive and motivational was proposed to evaluate team captain impact and influence during a game (as part of a wider suite of formal evaluative activities).

A team captain observed that "I have done my best to prepare for the training sessions and games to enable me to speak appropriately at the right time, however, I probably underestimated the amount of reflection which would have helped me improve" (P1). Other participants observed that there is "no formal leadership evaluation" (P11) and "rarely do I evaluate my leadership skills and there is nobody really in the environment to talk regarding this issue" (P17).

Loughead *et al.* (2014) identified a number of implications for the future selection and development of athlete leaders. They advocated the use of leadership profiling in the selection process, a blended approach to development incorporating both experiential learning and workshop education and finally, individual coaching sessions and performance appraisals. The ongoing involvement, support and mentoring of coaches was seen as essential to the efficacy and effectiveness of any selection process and development approach.

MacLean and Chelladurai (1995) indicated that leadership performance should be formally evaluated on a regular basis in order to provide constructive feedback and identify development opportunities. One of the observations of the

research project was that in the elite sport environment feedback typically focused on player technical and team tactical aspects. There was scope to broaden this view to include evaluation of the leadership role and style of the captain in a structured performance management and development system. In particular, MacLean and Chelladurai (1995) argued for the consideration of a balanced range of measures to evaluate the impact of the captain's role and leadership style. Such a self-evaluation process could be undertaken by the captain and form the basis of a regular discussion and collaborative review during the season with the Head Coach. The process could also include a 360 appraisal involving key stakeholders and form the basis of an end of season reflective evaluation.

An indicative evaluation process including self-appraisal form and 360 appraisal form (with personal development planning) for a team captain in the professional rugby context can be found at Appendix G and Appendix H.

8.1.5 Transferability of findings

Bryman (2012) proposed that transferability was concerned with capturing the contextual uniqueness of the research setting and considering the wider application of research findings to other domains and relevant communities of practice. The quality and validity of transferable insights rests on thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) or rich and detailed accounts of the cultural and professional setting under scrutiny. Transferability also rests on the nature and quality of participant collaboration and consultation on any thick descriptions and detailed cultural accounts (Bryman, 2012).

The features and expectations of the professional sport context were investigated via interviews, observations and archival research across an 11-month season encompassing preseason, preparation, competition and social settings.

There were a number of opportunities for informal and formal participant collaboration and consultation on the research process and research findings throughout the study.

The study found that the professional rugby context was distinguished by three dimensions - commercial (gladiatorial) spectacle, demanding (and dynamic) endeavour and collective camaraderie. Following on from this thick description (Geertz, 1973) it was found that the team captain performed three key roles - environment influencer, game shaper and stakeholder ambassador; that the influencing style of the team captain was based on three key dimensions - personal qualities, process skills and agile practice and finally, that the team captain impacted three areas - team purpose, team performance and team satisfaction.

Practical implications of the research findings for the effective practice (and development) of team captaincy included terms of reference for the supervisory leadership group, a team captain job description, a team captain person specification, a team captain (i) self-appraisal process and (ii) 360 appraisal process.

The application of the research findings and implications would be directly relevant to other team sports that engage in a sustained competitive season with a substantial team roster and squad, contending on a large playing surface with complex technical and (fluid) tactical demands and a protracted match duration. Such sports would include association football, rugby league, field hockey, Gaelic football, hurling, American football and lacrosse.

8.1.6 Theoretical implications

At commencement, the approach and anticipation of the researcher had been that the most notable theoretical explanation for leadership practice (as a mutually

dependent endeavour) might be **Transformational Theory**. On completion, the study found that leadership style was a blend and balance of transacting or behaving authoritatively (to get the job done) as well as mobilising effort and working collectively (to get the best out of others) although the observed emphasis (and participant preference) was a participatory and relational style. There was clear evidence of transformational leadership behaviour and shared leadership responsibilities. These findings provided a degree of resonance with the theoretical anticipation of the researcher that transformational leadership theory might provide the most notable explanation for effective team captain activity.

However, what also emerged in the professional sport team case study organisation was the influence of dispersed theory as an important theoretical explanation (and expectation) for collective working and shared leadership (with particular regard to the senior leadership group and informal peer leaders).

Dispersed Theory suggests that leadership is an organisational capability or influencing (and decision-making) process that can be widely developed and encouraged. Rather than being a designated authority role leadership influence emerges informally in relationship at any time in the organisation setting (Heifetz, 1994). Such leadership democracy was actively encouraged and role modelled by the team captain and reflected the technical, tactical, communication and workload demands of athlete leadership.

At commencement, the approach and anticipation of the researcher had been that the most notable conceptual representation of leadership practice might be **Kogler Hill's (2001) Team Leadership Model** blending personal agency, internal (task and relational) actions, external (environmental) representation and team (performance and development) needs. On completion, the study found that the

team captain performed three key roles – (internal) environment influencer, game shaper and (external) stakeholder ambassador and that the influencing approach of the team captain was based on three key dimensions – personal qualities, (task and relationship) process skills and agile (decision making) practice. In turn, these roles and approaches had an impact on team purpose, performance and satisfaction. These findings provided a degree of resonance with the conceptual frame and anticipation of the researcher that Kogler Hill's (2001) Team Leadership Model might provide the most notable representation of the process for effective team captaincy.

8.2 Original contribution of the study to the body of knowledge

This section of the thesis identified original academic and applied contributions (emerging from the study findings) to the team captaincy and athlete leadership domain. The section also summarised study objectives, wider (and related) research topics and the current body of knowledge regarding professional context, the role of the captain, the style of the captain, the impact of the captain and the development of the team captain (or implications for practice).

8.2.1 “Real world” professional sport insights

The first study objective was to understand the wider context and expectations of leadership in professional rugby union. This was informed by research interest in the academic community for further understanding of athlete leadership real-world contexts and challenges (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughhead, 2017). The current body of knowledge indicated that the professional context focused on (the singular) primacy of winning underpinned by the playing competence of the team captain, the ability to manage significant relationships and

build a wider purpose (Camire, 2016; Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2012). With regard original contribution to the academic field the study found that the “real world” **professional sport context was a complex and pluralist ecosystem of competing and sometimes contradictory organisational dynamics**. The strategic (professional sport) landscape was focused on the business profit motive, commercial viability and controlling costs but had to be delicately balanced with collective and relational (human) values connecting players to the club, each other and the community. The entertainment drama of professional sport and the confrontational and gladiatorial spectacle of competitive fixtures was only possible as a direct consequence of unseen, repetitive and mundane training routines. The heavily structured features and organisational processes of the club setting had to be held in balance with the uncertain and dynamic nature of the workplace (and a professional sport career) and in response the need for players (and teams) to evolve and adapt to these shifting patterns. The professional demands of rugby union highlighted the extreme expectations placed on players by themselves, coaches and stakeholders (including spectators and the media) and the intense rollercoaster experiences that resulted. The study found, in particular, that public expectations and related critical (even abusive) behaviours emerged as a significant issue for players. Personal rewards including individual benefits and team camaraderie provided some balance, contrast and (enjoyable) relief from the professional pressures of the context.

8.2.2 Revised understanding of roles & definition of athlete leadership.

The second study objective was to explain the leadership role and activities of the team captain. This was informed by research interest in the academic community

for further understanding of social and external leadership roles off the field and exploration of other role perceptions (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughhead, 2017). In the specific context of professional rugby and high level competition research needed to further clarify the role of the captain (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016). The current body of knowledge indicated that athlete leaders undertook four important roles or activities in the group setting – setting direction (task), securing effort (motivation), showing concern (social) and managing (external) stakeholders. Task and motivation were considered on field roles and social and motivation off field roles (Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Loughhead *et al.*, 2006). In the specific context of professional rugby the captaincy role was broadly the same but with an increased emphasis (compared to varsity settings) on the external leadership role including player representative, player coach buffer, challenge coach and media liaison (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016). With regard original contribution to the academic field **the study identified two new activities** (or definitions) from the professional sport context - game logistics and referee management. The professional sport context was found to be complex and changeable and this could unsettle schedules and game logistics (including travel and match day arrangements). Lo *et al.* (2019) confirmed that travel arrangements and match locations had to be successfully managed to minimise the impact on rugby team performances. Good preparation habits and match day routines were identified as important team captain and leadership group responsibilities in consultation with club management. MacMahon and Ste-Marie (2002, p570) identified game officials and rugby referees as “influential populations”. Fransen *et al.* (2019, p6) advocated that team captains should have “contact with referees” and Dupuis *et al.* (2006) that team captains should build relationships with match officials. However the study found that

professional team captains went beyond having contact and building relationships to actively researching referee personalities and decision making preferences to build and manage an influencing relationship with match officials. The study also found that **task and motivation roles were both on field (competitive fixture) and off field (wider preparation) activities** in the professional setting. Finally, on the basis of the study findings the existing definition of athlete leadership as “an athlete occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of members to achieve a common goal” (Loughead *et al.*, 2006) was revised for the rugby union domain. This **revised athlete leadership definition** reflected the role of the designated captain, influential peer leaders and the recognised (senior players) leadership group. Athlete leadership was defined as “an athlete occupying a formal or informal role with individual or group responsibilities within a team, who influences members to achieve a common goal”.

8.2.3 Leadership currency

The third study objective was to explain the interpersonal leadership style(s) of a team captain. This was informed by research interest in the academic community for further understanding the relative importance of trait characteristics and leadership behaviours; understanding effective athlete leadership behaviours and understanding shared leadership and the role of the captain (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughead, 2017). In the specific context of professional rugby and high level competition research needed to further clarify the required leadership skills of the team captain (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016).

The current body of knowledge indicated that the interpersonal process and influencing style of athlete leaders was based on five dimensions – being a

competent player, working collaboratively, being a positive role model, adapting to circumstances and building a wider purpose. (Bucci *et al.*, 2012; Camire, 2016; Dupuis *et al.*, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 2010; Johnson *et al.*, 2012). In the specific context of professional rugby captaincy style and influence was shaped by a number of factors - technical and interpersonal skills, by support arrangements including informal leaders and (in particular) the senior or collective leadership group and the nature of the coach relationship and behavioural approach strategies (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016). With regard original contribution to the academic field the study found that at a professional rugby club level **leadership had currency and value in its own right** and could be considered to mitigate limitations in individual technical expertise by contributing more widely to the collective effort (and success) of the group.

8.2.4 Development of the current taxonomy of leadership roles and a framework of key in game leadership evaluation indicators

The fourth study objective was to explain the influence of the captain's leadership role and style on team performance and satisfaction. This was informed by research interest in the academic community for further exploration of leadership analysis during a game and developing a specific athlete leadership behaviours inventory (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughhead, 2017). The current body of knowledge indicated that effective athlete leaders had a notable impact on team confidence, cohesion, and performance (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016; Fransen *et al.*, 2014; Vincer and Loughhead, 2010). With regard original contribution to the academic field the study advocated the addition of a **fifth team captain role of adaptive leader** alongside the four currently established roles of task, motivation,

social and external. While the task role currently mentioned “adjusts them (tactics) if necessary” the study found that agile and adaptive practice to be fundamental, not peripheral, to the team captain’s role. This new or extended contemporary role would fit in the current taxonomy between the task and motivational roles. The study also proposed a **framework of key evaluative indicators** linked to the three on field leadership roles of task, adaptive and motivational. This data could be captured via video and audio and coded for occurrence and frequency then explored further through selected post-match interviews with players. This data could inform leadership role appraisal and development.

8.2.5 Practical implications

The fifth study objective was to evaluate the implications of the research findings for the practice (and development) of team captaincy. This was informed by research interest in the academic community for further understanding athlete leadership developmental needs (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughhead, 2017). In the specific context of professional rugby and high level competition research needed to further clarify the process of selection and crucially how to support the development of both current and future captains (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016). The current body of knowledge indicated that evidence and research was relatively limited on the important process of leadership selection and development. (Gould *et al.*, 2012; Loughhead *et al.*, 2014; Voight, 2012). With regard original contributions to the applied field there were four key practical implications of the research findings for the effective practice of team captaincy. With regard the professional context, team captains should benefit from working collaboratively with an established supervisory leadership group. A revised athlete leadership definition was proposed to reflect

these group responsibilities. **Leadership group terms of reference** were produced for practitioners in the field. With regard the team captaincy role, team captains should be selected against an agreed and clear criterion. A new taxonomy was proposed to reflect the importance of the adaptive leadership role. A **team captain job description** was produced for practitioners in the field. With regard team captaincy style, the personal leadership skills of the team captain should be clearly specified and formally developed. It was proposed that leadership (not just technical expertise alone) has collective value as an organisational currency in its own right. A **team captain person specification** was produced for practitioners in the field. With regard team captaincy impact, team captains should be formally appraised against role objectives and regularly self-evaluate their own practice. It was proposed that a framework of key indicators linked to the on field leadership roles of task, adaptive and motivational could be used to evaluate team captain impact and influence during a game. A **team captain self-appraisal process** and **team captain 360 appraisal process** was produced for practitioners in the field.

8.3 Study limitations and reflections

8.3.1. Study limitations and future avenues of inquiry

No studies to date have explored the perceptions and experiences of athlete leaders, coaches and athletes in a professional rugby union context across four different situations (pre-season, preparation, game and social) sustained over the course of a competitive season using a blend of interviews, observations and archival records. While this blended research approach was appropriate to the demands of the research question it was also original in terms of wider research endeavour in the community of practice. Integral to the research process were a

number of other considerations. Ethical risks and trustworthiness criteria were carefully managed (and documented). The researcher also maintained a reflexive and reflective research diary (Borton, 1970) to consider role and impact on the research process. This diary keeping provided reflection on a select number of unforeseen problems (and reactions) regarding negotiation of system entry and the establishment of workable relationships. At conclusion, the study provided original contributions to the body of knowledge through “real world” professional sport context insights, by further developing the current taxonomy of leadership roles, revising the current definition of athlete leadership, providing insights into leadership currency and proposing a framework of key in game leadership evaluation indicators.

However, there were three key study limitations which in turn pointed to the need for further research. The **first limitation** was the range of data collected on the social leadership role in the field setting. While a wide range of social situations and exchanges were observed over the course of the season including meal times and travel arrangements there were also a number of recreational events and activities organised by the players which enabled them to relax away from the rugby environment and get to know each other personally that the researcher did not attend. It was noted that “getting the boys together out of the environment” (P10) was an important activity and responsibility and that “generally a captain should always be out when the boys are out - he’s the leader of the group on and off the pitch” (P11). The limitation or constraint was the time available to the researcher to attend such recreational events and activities in light of other personal and professional commitments (including the demands of the team captaincy study). The impact of this limitation in relation to the overall findings and

conclusions of the study was not considered detrimental as a significant amount of data was collected on the other leadership roles and a sufficient amount of data on leadership activity in social situations. A future avenue of inquiry would be an evaluation of the team captain's social leadership role and activities off the field (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughhead, 2017).

The **second limitation** was a particular range of data collected on the team captain's leadership role and style in real time during a game. The researcher attended 10 competitive fixtures and observed the team captains role and style (as well as impact) before the game, at half time and after the game. During the game the team captain's endeavours on the pitch were observed with the coaching team often in the stand, above the playing surface, with a panoramic view of proceedings. This strategic coaching viewpoint was supported and complemented by a small team of performance analysts providing real time data collection and analysis with, typically, four computer screens of various visual feeds and angles as well as referee microphone audio. The limitation or constraint was that during the game it was difficult to consistently and accurately identify team captain interactions on the pitch without expensive player mic technology for data collection and subsequently a trustworthy data analysis framework. The impact of this limitation in relation to the overall findings and conclusions of the study was not considered detrimental as a significant amount of data was collected on the team captain's role, style (and impact) across different contexts (pre-season preparation, training activities and social situations) as well as direct observations of the team captain before a game, at half time and after a game. During the game the researcher was able to observe actions but not all interactions (although these

could be explored subsequently through informal participant conversations). A future avenue of inquiry would be an evaluation of leadership role and style during a game (Cotterill and Fransen, 2016 and Loughhead, 2017). One of the study findings and original contributions was the development of a trustworthy framework of key evaluative indicators linked to the three on field leadership roles of task, adaptive and motivational. This data could be captured via video and audio and coded for occurrence and frequency then explored further through selected post-match interviews with players. This data could inform leadership role appraisal and development. A remaining constraint in the rugby domain (because of collision and safety concerns) would be the expensive cost (circa £5,000) of player mic technology. Researchers could consider data collection using less expensive recording technology in other safer, complex multi-player field sports.

The **third limitation** was the limited range of data collected on the selection process and development activities for captains in the case study organisation. More broadly, the literature review had concluded that arrangements in the field are mixed at best with little evidence of formal selection criteria and appointment (role), guidance and training on behavioural expectations and standards (style) or subsequent review of leadership practice (impact) and performance (Voight, 2012; Gould *et al.*, 2013). Cotterill and Cheetham (2016, p6) confirmed that there are a “lack of development opportunities” and what examples exist are at “sub-elite and non-professional levels” with “nothing relating to elite groups”. The limitation or constraint was the absence of formal selection and development activities in the case study organisation. The study found that the role of captain was one of informal custom and practice and social learning rather than deliberate and

documented organisational design. There was no “clear description of duties and expectations and that this would be beneficial to the player to know what is expected and would help the coach to monitor the captain’s effectiveness” (P1). Other participants observed that there was “no formal leadership evaluation” (P11) and “rarely do I evaluate my leadership skills and there is nobody really in the environment to talk to regarding this issue” (P17). The impact of this limitation in relation to the overall findings and conclusions of the study was not considered detrimental as a sufficient amount of data was collected to clarify and confirm the status of selection and development activities in the case study organisation and prompt a range of practical implications including, a team captain job description, a team captain person specification, a team captain (i) self-appraisal process and (ii) 360 appraisal process. A future avenue of inquiry would be an evaluation of selection process and development activities for captains (Cotterill and Cheetham, 2016) following the introduction of a deliberate and documented organisational plan based on the practical implications advocated in the study.

8.3.2 Study reflections and final thoughts

This section of the thesis provides a final, reflective account (in a blend of first and third person) of the researchers PhD journey in the professional sport context. The first part of the account considers **thoughts on practice** and the impact of the setting on key theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions. The second part of the account considers a **shift in practice** and the impact of the road travelled on discipline allegiance, teaching delivery and research focus.

8.3.2.1 Thoughts on practice

The (pluralist) professional sport context and (emerging) athlete leadership domain had a number of key impacts on the framing and conduct of the research process. With regard **theoretical lens and framing**, Loughhead *et al.* (2014, p589) suggested that the “primary theories (applied specifically to athlete leadership in predominantly varsity but also professional settings) included behavioural models of leadership and transactional and transformational leadership”. Loughhead *et al.*, (2014, p591) concluded that transformational leadership was believed “to be the most effective form of leadership”. My anticipation therefore was that the most notable explanation for athlete leadership practice in the professional context would be transformational theory. On completion, there was clear evidence of transformational leadership behaviour but what also emerged in the professional setting was the influence of dispersed theory as an important theoretical explanation for collective working and shared leadership (with particular regard to the senior leadership group and informal peer leaders).

With regard **methodological decisions and conduct**, Cotterill and Fransen (2016) and Loughhead (2017) had called for a deeper understanding of athlete leadership challenges in real-world contexts and Loughhead *et al.* (2006) that research should examine athlete leadership at other levels of competition including professional sport. On the basis that a clearly defined (or bounded) real world, professional sport context was fundamental to the process of explaining the leadership role of team captaincy it was decided that the study methodology should focus on a single, instrumental case study (Harrison *et al.*, 2017; Stake, 1995). As Yin (2003, p13) emphasised “you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions - believing that they might be

highly pertinent to your study”. The selected case study organisation was the Southern Warriors (pseudonym), a professional rugby union team classified as competitive elite (Swann *et al.*, 2015).

With regard **analytical decisions and conduct**, the proposed approach to the detailed analysis of data and the visual presentation of the findings was reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A reflexive (and responsive) approach was appropriate for the variations and uncertainty (Hoye *et al.*, 2015) of the professional sport setting. Reflexive approaches are flexible and codes can evolve throughout the process with the fluid development of themes (Bryman, 2012).

In summary, the PhD journey in the professional sport context had a notable impact on theoretical (transformational theory), methodological (single, instrumental case study) and analytical (reflexive thematic analysis) framing and decisions.

8.3.2.2 Shift in practice

Prior to my current faculty role in academia my work experience spanned circa 25 years in public and private sector sport facility management. My **discipline allegiance** (in the Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences) at the start of the doctoral process was Sport Management and Development. However, as both my academic career and the doctoral process, in particular, have unfolded I find myself experiencing a stronger orientation towards Performance Sport (and high performance team leadership rather than sport organisation management).

Linked to this emerging and evolving shift in allegiance are practical implications for both my **teaching** and future research projects. While much of my teaching still focuses on leadership (including strategy, governance and change) in the organisation setting new lecturing avenues are opening up. At undergraduate

level, I now teach on the Managing High Performance Sport module and at postgraduate level, my teaching on the Leadership and Influencing Skills module places greater emphasis on the theory and practice of high performance team dynamics.

Nudging me further in the performance sport direction are recent allocations of academic staff to **research clusters** in the School. I have been placed in the High Performance Sport Research Group (and not Sport Management and Development). Future avenues of inquiry in the High Performance Sport group include an evaluation of the social leadership role of the team captain off the field, an evaluation of team captaincy leadership (role and style) during a game and an evaluation of the selection process and development activities for team captains.

In summary, the PhD journey through the professional sport context has had a notable impact on my current academic orientation and practice including discipline allegiance, teaching delivery and research focus. I have been asked twice where this thesis might sit on the library shelf and my sense now is that the interested reader might find it under Performance Sport.

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Appendix A – Study briefing session

STUDY BRIEFING SESSION | OVERVIEW

WHAT – Team captaincy in professional rugby union

- The purpose of the study is to explore and understand what team captaincy involves, how team captains lead and the implications for practice. In other words - **what do team captains do, how do they do it and what impact does this have.**
- The study will take place between **July 2012 and May 2013** with the researcher present in the team environment approximately **1 day a week** and attending roughly **10 competitive fixtures**
- I want to understand what actually happens in an elite sport team **not** be judgmental about what happens.

HOW – Observing and talking to people

- The researcher will discreetly **observe** members of the team environment in a range of settings including team practice, competitive fixtures and social situations.
- You may be invited to take part in formal **interviews** or informal conversations on topics related to the study.
- All information collected will be kept **strictly confidential and anonymity** will be ensured through the use of participant codes in the collection, storage and writing up of research material.
- You have been invited to participate in the research because you are a **member of the team environment** and the study proposes to consider and examine a range of perspectives and activities.
- Taking part in the research is **entirely voluntary**. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given an information sheet to read and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.
- I will discreetly observe what goes on and chat to people to get their thoughts **and** everything will be kept confidential with individuals details anonymised.

WHY – Develop knowledge and establish principles

- The study will further **academic knowledge** and understanding of team captaincy in professional rugby union.
- The research also offers the potential to establish and develop **principles of practice** in your team environment.
- The research will help develop knowledge about the subject **and** identify leadership principles that seem to work for you.

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Appendix B – Study information sheet

CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT
YSGOL CHWARAEON CAERDYDD



INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

What is the title of the study?

The leadership role and influence of team captaincy in professional rugby union.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore and understand through interview and observation of participants what team captaincy involves, how team captains lead and the implications for practice. The study will take place between July 2012 and May 2013 with the researcher present in the team environment approximately 1 day a week.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in the research because you are a member of the team environment and the study proposes to consider and examine a range of perspectives and activities.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to read and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The researcher will discreetly observe members of the team environment in a range of settings including team practice, competitive fixtures and social situations. You may be invited to take part in formal interviews or informal conversations on topics related to the study. These discussions will take place when it is convenient to you.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no apparent disadvantages or risks involved. Furthermore all information collected will be kept strictly confidential and anonymity will be ensured through the use of participant codes in the collection, storage and writing up of research material.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation in the research inquiry will further academic knowledge and understanding of team captaincy in professional rugby union. The research also offers the potential to establish and develop principles of practice in your team environment.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used as part of a doctoral thesis and for publication in peer reviewed journals within the academic community. The results will also be used to establish a shared understanding of team captaincy and the conditions for its practice within the team environment.

Who is organising and funding the research?

Mark Lowther a Senior Lecturer in the Cardiff School of Sport at UWIC is responsible for the research study and the writing of the research report.

Contact for further information

For further information or if you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted please contact Professor Scott Fleming, Director of Research at UWIC on sfleming@uwic.ac.uk

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ATHROFA PRIFYSGOL CYMRU, CAERDYDD

Appendix C – Study consent form

CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT YSGOL CHWARAEON CAERDYDD		UWIC	
CONSENT FORM			
Project Title The Leadership Role and Influence of Team Captaincy in Professional Rugby union			
Researcher Details Mark Lowther Senior Lecturer Cardiff School of Sport UWIC			
		Please tick box Yes No	
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the above study.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to interviews being audio recorded .		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) and may be used for future research .		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____ Name of Participant		_____ Date	_____ Signature
Cyncoed Campus Cyncoed Road Cardiff CF23 6XD U.K. Tel: 029 2041 6591 Fax: 029 2041 6768 web: www.uwic.ac.uk email: ccs@uwic.ac.uk Cardiff's metropolitan university		Campws Cyncoed Heol Cyncoed Caerdydd CF23 6XD D.U. Ffôn: 029 2041 6591 Ffacs: 029 2041 6768 gwe: www.uwic.ac.uk ebost: ccs@uwic.ac.uk prifysgol metropolitan Caerdydd	
UNIVERSITY OF WALES INSTITUTE, CARDIFF		ATHROFA PRIFYSGOL CYMRU, CAERDYDD	

Appendix D - Leadership group terms of reference

Scope

The role of the captain is to manage and supervise the squad through a leadership group as well as represent and advocate the team's interests with the coaching staff.

In these endeavours the captain is actively supported primarily by the formal leadership group (but also by informal team leaders and role models) who are able to offer particular technical and position specific expertise as well as tactical experience and insight.

Motivational interventions and interactions as well as the organisation of, and engagement with, social activities are also actively supported by the selected leadership group (and selective informal team leaders or peer influencers) with particular personal qualities or professional expertise.

Objectives

The leadership group performs the following main functions –

- 1) Facilitating **strategic and cultural alignment** (a shared common direction and anticipated set of behaviours) between the actions of the playing squad and the expectations of the coaching team.
- 2) Providing the captain with a manageable span of **supervisory and operational control** for a match day team of 23 players and wider squad of circa 40 players.
- 3) Providing a collaborative and supportive yet **critical circle of trusted advisors** to the team captain.
- 4) Identifying and encouraging an **active and selective network** of informal team leaders, peer influencers and role models.

Composition

The leadership group is comprised of the appointed team captain plus five other recognised and personally regarded players, ideally representing a mix of playing positions, professional experiences and cultural perspectives.

Selection

Selection to the leadership group is based on informal conversation and negotiation between the team captain and coaching team as well as (ideally) a degree of validation with key influencers in the playing squad.

Meeting arrangements

In addition to the fundamental day to day practical execution of the leadership group's objectives in the wider environment and during competitive fixtures there are also important opportunities for formal group meetings and discussion on key issues.

The meeting topics include wider discussion (and role modelling) around **performance expectations and environment** including team philosophy and standards and more focused or detailed consideration of **technical and tactical planning** including game review and preparation.

Reporting arrangements

Wider discussion around performance expectations and environment would take place pre-season in preparation and post season on reflection. Depending on performance these wider discussions could also be convened as appropriate during the season. More focused or detailed consideration of technical and tactical planning would take place on a weekly basis.

These arrangements would complement existing communication pathways and could be formally minuted in appropriate detail for dissemination to the Head Coach and playing squad and review at subsequent leadership group meetings.

Appendix E - Team captain job description

Job title	Team Captain
Department/Section	Rugby Department
Main purposes of job	<p>1. Environment influencer - influence the wider preparation and performance environment (and build cohesion) through engagement in a range of sporting, social and supervisory activities.</p> <p>2. Game shaper – shape and actively impact game day performance.</p> <p>3. Stakeholder ambassador - build a connection and relationship within the local community and with club sponsors and media outlets.</p>
Key tasks	<p>1.1 Actively contribute to team training and team meetings and lead the captains run.</p> <p>1.2 Actively organise and schedule team social activities and events.</p> <p>1.3 Manage (and represent) the squad through the active involvement of the leadership group.</p> <p>2. Actively contribute to pre-game logistics, game plan execution, tactical (and adaptive) decision making, team motivation and referee management.</p> <p>3. Actively contribute to marketing initiatives (including match programme column), media interviews, sponsor relations, community activities.</p>
Key results/objectives	<p>1. Squad purpose and cohesion</p> <p>2. Team performance and confidence</p> <p>3. Stakeholder engagement</p>
Responsible for	<p>Team leadership group</p> <p>Wider playing squad</p>
Reporting to	Director of Rugby/Head Coach

Appendix F - Team captain person specification

Department name:	Rugby department
Job title:	Team captain
Criteria	Essential/desirable requirements
Personal qualities	<i>Essential</i> - An authentic person who is honest, trustworthy and resilient and (with others) approachable, compassionate and respectful.
Qualifications	<i>Desirable</i> - A formal management or leadership qualification or evidence of continuing professional (management or leadership related) development.
Competencies	<i>Essential</i> - An expert (and valued) player who is technically and tactically skilled, a professional role model who sets an example and leads through their (values and) actions and who demonstrates a strong work ethic in training and competition.
Knowledge	<p><i>Essential</i> - knowledge of the specific technical and tactical requirements of rugby union.</p> <p><i>Desirable</i> - knowledge of wider management and leadership research and practice</p>
Process Skills	<p><i>Essential</i> - able to maximise performance by being a team focal point who leads rituals, attends to details and instils pride and by being an authority figure prepared to speak out, critique honestly and enforce standards.</p> <p><i>Essential</i> - able to build individual relationships by communicating well, exploring perceptions, sharing knowledge, delegating responsibility and encouraging involvement.</p> <p><i>Essential</i> - able to build group relationships by working collectively, encouraging connections and effectively representing the squad.</p>

Previous experience	<p><i>Essential</i> – a contributing team member who has used their knowledge and skills to help a team succeed. Able to work effectively, productively and successfully with other people in a group.</p> <p><i>Desirable</i> – a competent team leader who has been able to organise a group effectively to achieve specific goals and objectives.</p>
Special attributes	<p><i>Essential</i> - A self-aware and agile practitioner able to regulate behaviour, be flexible, tailor approach and adapt to circumstances.</p>

Appendix G - Team captain self-appraisal

Name

Department

Date of appraisal

Purpose of the Appraisal Meeting

To enable you to discuss, with your manager, your job performance and your future. The discussion should aim at a clearer understanding of:

- The main scope and purpose of your job
- Agreements on your objectives and tasks
- Standards or targets for measuring your performance
- Your training and future prospects

You can prepare for the meeting and discussion by completing this form.

You may show this form to your manager. This will give him or her time to consider your problems and suggestions. If you do so, it will not be copied or filed without your permission.

If you prefer, you can use this form for your own guidance only, and not show it to anyone.

Bring to the appraisal meeting:

- Your current **job description** (and **person specification**)
- Your **current action plan** (of proposed improvements and suggested training) agreed at your last appraisal.

Self-appraisal

1. Indicate appropriate answers, and **comment below**

- Do you have an up-to-date job description? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you understand all the requirements of your job? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you have an up to date action plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Have you carried out the improvements agreed with your manager which were made at the last appropriate meeting?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you have regular opportunities to discuss your work and action plans? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. What have you accomplished, over and above the minimum requirements of your job description, in the period under review? Have you made any innovations?

.....

3. List any difficulties you have in carrying out your work. Were there any obstacles outside your own control which prevented you from performing effectively?

.....

4. What parts of your job, do you:

Do best?

.....

Do less well?

.....

Have difficulty with?

.....

Fail to enjoy?

.....

5. Have you any qualities, skills or attributes not fully utilised in your job?
If so, what are they and how could they be used?

.....

6. Can you suggest any training and development activities which would
help to improve your performance?

.....

7. Agreed action plan for improvements and developments.

.....

Appendix H - Team captain 360 appraisal form

Employee's name:	
Job title:	
Department:	
Date of engagement:	
Manager:	
Date of meeting:	
Current performance (based on job description and person specification)	
<p>Objective/competence 1: Environment influencer</p> <p>Influence the wider preparation and performance environment (and build cohesion) through engagement in a range of sporting, social and supervisory activities using personal qualities, process skills and agile practice.</p> <p><i>Sources of data include coach, leadership group and peer evaluation questionnaires.</i></p> <p>This section should be used to record discussion on the key areas of the job, and include a summary of achievement against the objectives that have been previously agreed.</p>	
<p>Objective/competence 2: Game shaper</p> <p>Control and actively impact game day performance using personal qualities, process skills and agile practice.</p> <p><i>Sources of data include on field and critical incident performance analysis indicators.</i></p> <p>This section should be used to record discussion on the key areas of the job, and include a summary of achievement against the objectives that have been previously agreed.</p>	

Objective/competence 3: Stakeholder ambassador

Build a connection and relationship within the local community and with club sponsors and media outlets using personal qualities, process skills and agile practice.

Sources of data include community, sponsor and media evaluation questionnaires.

This section should be used to record **discussion on the key areas of the job**, and include a summary of **achievement against the objectives** that have been previously agreed.

Development summary:

This section should be used to record any areas where **performance is particularly strong and should be developed further** and **areas of the employee's work where further training and support is required**.

Development and training

This section should list **specific requirements for any training or development**. These activities are not restricted to training courses and may include planned experiences, projects or any other suitable activity that will enhance the qualities, skills and attributes required in the employee's work or to develop him/her further.

Career planning

This section should record any areas of **longer term career planning** and **career transition preparation** in which the employee has expressed a specific interest.

Other areas of discussion

This section should record **any other points raised** at the appraisal meeting.

Employee's signature:

Appraiser's signature:

Date: