Establishing a High Performing Culture

in an Emerging Rugby Nation

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ABSTRACT

Building and sustaining effective high performing team cultures has been at the forefront of sport research for a number of years. Findings from elite level teams, talent development and collegiate environments share several key features of effective high performing cultures that include a clear vision, strong and adaptable leadership, daily displays of shared winning behaviours and long-term holistic development for example. Although these features – and others - may provide guidance for future theoretical and applied work in these specific domains, there appears a lack of understanding regarding how to build and manage sport team culture in *emerging nations.*

Emerging nations are unique and may experience context specific challenges such as smaller talent pools and less financial and/or resource support for example. Emerging nations may look towards more established environments to mimic best practice, with the movement of coaches from established teams to emerging nations part of this transfer of knowledge. However, although the boundary-less features might be applicable, for a culture to be effective it needs to be the right 'fit' and, due to the specific nuances of teams in emerging nations, directly lifting practices from more established environments may be questionable as the emerging context is ultimately different.

Subsequently, and with the aim of increasing the knowledge base of building and sustaining a high performing culture in specific sporting contexts, this thesis aimed to provide pragmatic, evidence-based guidelines for building a high-performing culture in an emerging rugby nation, with three key objectives:

1. To examine and evaluate the creation of a high performing culture within an existing emerging rugby nation

2. Given the global nature of today's sporting landscape, to investigate best practice in nurturing a high performing culture within multicultural teams and as a foreign coach

3. To investigate the 'opposite pole' of best practice to highlight what should be *avoided* when building a high performing culture as a foreign coach.

These objectives were met through chapters three to six. The first phase of the research included two studies (chapters three and four) that addressed the first objective. Chapter Three, to the researcher's knowledge was the first study of its kind in examining an emerging rugby nation's team culture. Eleven full time professional male rugby union players, the Head of the Hong Kong Rugby Union's (HKRU) Elite Rugby Program (ERP) and the HKRU's peripatetic sport psychologist were interviewed. Through the unique theoretical lens of combining Performance Management and the Resource Based View, inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data revealed five emerging themes, namely, 1) an amateur environment that required change; 2) ERP's professional culture building blocks; 3) leadership strategy and managing key stake holders; 4) evidencing and reenforcing the change and 5) managing on-going challenges in the ERP's professional culture. Theoretical and applied implications for practitioners and program leaders responsible for driving cultural change in their respective emerging environments were revealed.

Following the unique qualitative insight into the development of the ERP's team culture over a four-year period, ascertained in study one, study two, in further meeting the thesis's first objective, aimed to quantitatively examine the *current* status of the ERP's culture. Triangulating the findings from the previous study, the specific aim for study two was to quantitatively evaluate the evidence-based features of an effective rugby talent development culture in Hong Kong. The cultural tool used for this purpose was Martindale et al's. (2010) Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ). Although not an explicit cultural

assessment tool, the TDEQ appeared to be appropriate for this current sport context due to; 1) its focus on identifying environmental strengths and weaknesses to inform intervention needs; 2) its factors and items are representative of effective TDE culture in sport and 3) the evidence of strong ecological validity and reliability in this context and its applicability through a range of sports.

Results from the TDEQ indicated a number of current cultural strengths of the ERP; such as the regularity with which players' performances were reviewed; the effectiveness of the integrated, accessible and approachable support staff; the robust planning of training and training content and the extent with which players' dual careers were developed through the ERP's 'Earn or Learn' scheme. There were also a number of items that were identified by the players as areas that required improvement. These individual items were themed to help shape potential intervention strategies. The four themes were 1) role models and peer pressure; 2) forward planning and welfare; 3) clarity of required process focus and 4) player empowerment. In meeting the first objective the combination of findings from the first phase of the thesis provided a more rounded understanding of the ERP's team culture.

In meeting the second objective and increasing the paucity of knowledge in how elite coaches acculturate and how they manage their acculturation environment, study three was carried out. This study was again unique in its examination of the acculturation experiences of elite rugby union coaches and their management of multi-cultural squads. Five male elite coaches participated in the research. Each of the five coaches arguably fit a 'best of the best' criterion, boasting between them multiple European and UK domestic championships as well as multiple Super Rugby titles with similar accomplishments at international level across fifteen and seven-a-side. Using Berry's (1997) Framework for Acculturation, inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data revealed two emerging themes, a) pro-actively managing personal acculturation and b) pro-actively managing player acculturation.

Implications for coaches managing their own acculturation experience and their respective acculturation environments are discussed with findings synthesised for the emerging context.

Finally, in meeting the third objective, study four examined the 'opposite pole' of best coaching practice and, developing the knowledge surrounding failures of sport leaders, examined the failure of an elite rugby union coaching team through the specific lens of leadership derailment. This study was another unique contribution to the literature given there were no prior reported studies of leadership/coach derailment in sport. Eleven male elite rugby union players participated in the research all of whom were part of the playing squad during the failed season in question. Data from semi structured interviews was abductively analysed and revealed previously established derailment factors that were pivotal to the derailment of the coaching team; namely, problems with interpersonal relationships, an inability to lead the team, an inability to adapt and change; too narrow a functional orientation and a failure to meet performance objectives. By examining these findings, several unique contributions that offer both theoretical and applied advances in the 'opposite pole' of sport coach leadership were presented.

In keeping with the pragmatic philosophy adopted throughout the thesis, with the aim of providing real world solutions to specific problems (Giacobbi et al., 2005), practical guidelines emanating from the four studies, combined with researcher reflections, were provided for coaches of teams within emerging nations to help steer future direction in the creation and development of high performing cultures.

Publications Generated by this Research

Hall, A. (2021). *Optimising Talent Development Environments with Examples from an International Sports Team.* [Webinar]. MVP Analytics. https://tinyurl.com/bz9v8uzn

Hall, A., English, C., Jones, L., Westbury, T., & Martindale, R. (2021). The Acculturation Experiences of Elite Rugby Union Coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2020-0103

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Hall, A., English, C., Jones, L., Westbury, T., & Martindale, R. (Under review). How Not to Do It! An Examination in the Derailment of an Elite Rugby Coaching Team. *Sports Coaching Review.*

AUTHOR DECLARATION

Hong Kong, June 2021

I hereby declare that:

a) I have composed this thesis,

b) This thesis is my own work,

c) This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional

    qualification except as specified

Andrew J. A. Hall

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Dr T. H. R. Hall PhD

1949-2013

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Overview of Organisational Culture

In today's global sporting arms race, significant sums of money are invested in the pursuit of high performance (Rees et al., 2016). For instance, UK Sport supported Great Britain's team through the 2016 Olympic cycle to the sum of GBP355million of public funds (Rees et al., 2016). The rewards for success are no less substantial with the winners of football's world cup for example receiving US$38million (Bennett et al., 2019) and a prize pot of US$1million for gold medal winning Singaporean athletes (Wang et al., 2016). A central feature of the global sporting arms race is the migration of athletes and coaches between and within nations to further their athletic/careers (Ryba et al., 2018). For example, in the English football Premiership foreign players make up the majority (59% - Maderer et al., 2014) and, from the coaching perspective for example, many Chinese diving coaches have moved to Australia to help target their host's Olympic diving success (Tao et al., 2019).

Achieving desired and recurring success takes more than selecting and/or acquiring the best talent however (Wagstaff, 2019b). Previous research in understanding organisational effectiveness has tended to focus on the macro (i.e., governance) and micro (i.e., individual) elements creating a "twilight zone" (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009, p. 428) where crucial environmental factors remain hidden in the shadows. Over the last decade however there has been a significant effort illuminating this blind sport within sport, with an increased knowledge of organisational functioning and its influence on performance (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). A central success factor revealed within organisational functioning across high-performance sport as well as effective talent development environments (TDE) and indeed business is *organisational culture* (Cole & Martin, 2018; Henriksen, 2015; Warrick, 2017).

Interest in examining organisational culture (OC) was sparked in the 1980s and became a critical aspect in the field of organisational studies and management (Leithy, 2017). During

a time when the US economy was experiencing difficulties, three best-selling books in particular stirred this interest (Ostroff, et al., 2003) providing anecdotal evidence and untraditional answers explaining the importance of OC to organisational performance and its variance between one decade and another and between one country and another (Leithy, 2017). Since the 1980's over 4,600 articles have examined the topic of OC (Hartnell et al., 2011) and since its introduction its definition has been debated with Verbelve et al. (1998) identifying 54 versions. The variance in definitions is perhaps unsurprising given the eclectic group of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and psychology that examine OC using a variety of epistemologies and methods (Ostroff et al, 2003). Schein (1992) also attributes the confusion in definitions to a failure in differentiating the levels at which OC manifests itself. Indeed, it was Schein from among the scores of definitions who is recognised for his most comprehensive and an all-embracing notion of OC (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).

> The culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulative learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values and behavioural norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness. (Schein, 2017, p. 6)

Within the sporting context there has also been little consensus in how OC should be defined (Maitland et al., 2015). However, Andersen (2011) attempts to address this ambiguity by identifying OC as shaping member cognition, behaviour, well-being and performance. Looking at high performing cultures, Andersen's view is echoed by Johnson et al. (2012) who contend that performance is boosted by the shaping and coordinating of team members by focusing on values and norms that guide decision-making and behaviour. Cruickshank and

Collins (2012a) offer further clarity in recognising culture as 'a dynamic process characterised by shared beliefs, values, behaviours, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group' (p. 340). They suggest high-performing cultures prevail when "the shared perception and action of elite team environment members (a) supports sustained optimal performance; (b) persists across time in the face of variable results; and most importantly; (c) leads to consistent high performance" (p 340). An important aspect to their definition is the nomenclature around a high performi*ng* rather than a high-perform*ance* culture which reinforces sustained rather than 'one off' success respectively (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a).

While it is arguably an unnecessary endeavour to attempt to pin down a precise definition of culture (McDougall et al., 2017) what *is* imperative, within the sporting context particularly, is to delineate the level of analysis with which the term 'culture' refers (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b; McDougall et al., 2019). Although business based scholars may examine the culture of the entire organisation (Gilmore, 2013) within sport, a team-level focus might be preferred (McDougall et al., 2019). For the premise of this thesis, the level of culture in focus will be similar to Cruickshank and Collins (2012a) with attention centred around the *on-field* team environment which encompasses the beliefs, perceptions and behaviours of the team management, support staff and performers (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). Given how the on-field product (i.e., performance) can impact the success of the entire organisation (Benkraiem et al., 2009) addressing this specific group is clear. That is not to say that the perceptions and actions of individuals and groups outside of this context do not impact the on-field outcome as on- and off-field groups do not work in isolation (Gilmore & Gilson, 2007). However, as Cruickshank and Collins (2012a) impress, the ecological validity of attending to the group responsible for the day-to-day functioning and performance of the on-field team (performers, coaches/managers and support staff) is clarified when recognising this

group's bespoke goals and roles compared to office-based and/or strategic staff; the time its members spend in each other's company; the extent of individuals' emotional ties through shared involvement in performance and finally the greater likelihood of requests from elite team management rather than top level personnel such as the CEO for example.

At any level of analysis, successful sport cultures have been shown to share a number of common key features (McDougall et al., 2019) including a clear vision and direction (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017), an adaptive approach to leadership (Cole & Martin, 2018; Cruickshank & Collins, 2015), daily displays of winning behaviours and habits in the pursuit of excellence (Hodge et al., 2014; Mallett et al., 2016); an emphasis of hard work over individual talent with an ongoing desire to improve (Schroth, 2011); a promotion of athlete empowerment and athlete support through effective coach-athlete relationships (Chase & DiSanti, 2017; Fletcher & Streeter, 2016; Seanor et al., 2017) and a holistic approach to athlete development (Larsen et al., 2013).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The key features identified above have been mostly determined through studies of elite teams, such as the New Zealand All Blacks for example (Hodge et al., 2014), collegiate level sport (Donoso-Morlaes et al., 2017; Schroth, 2011) and/or talent development environments, such as the work of Henriksen and colleagues in track and field, sailing and kayaking environments (2010a, 2010b & 2011). Although they may provide guidance for future theoretical and applied work in these specific domains, there appears a lack of understanding regarding how to build and manage sport team culture in *emerging nations*.

Emerging nations, whose team for the benefit of this research reside outside of their respective top 20 world rankings, are unique in that they arguably fall between high performance and talent development environments (Hall et al., 2019) and may experience context specific challenges in striving for success such as smaller talent pools, less financial

and/or resource support and weaker domestic competitions (Bennett et al., 2019). Emerging nations may look to learn from more established environments to mimic best practice, with the movement of coaches from established teams to emerging nations part of this transfer of knowledge. However, for a culture to be effective it needs to be the right 'fit' and, due to the specific nuances of teams in emerging nations, directly lifting practices from more established environments may be questionable as the emerging context is ultimately different.

1.3 Objective of the Thesis

There remains a growing need to understand the critical components of building and sustaining an effective high-performing culture in sport, specifically within distinct sporting environments, such as in emerging nations (McDougall, 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this PhD is to provide pragmatic, evidence-based guidelines for building a high-performing culture in an emerging rugby nation, with three key objectives:

1. To examine and evaluate the creation of a high performing culture within an existing emerging rugby nation

2. Given the global nature of today's sporting landscape, to investigate best practice in nurturing a high performing culture within multicultural teams and as a foreign coach

3. To investigate the 'opposite pole' of best practice to highlight what should be *avoided* when building a high performing culture as a foreign coach.

1.4 Methodological Design

The studies created to meet these objectives were designed to a particular methodological approach using Saunders et al.'s (2016) Research Onion (Figure 1.1). The Research Onion framework provides a description of the six main layers or stages of an effective methodology namely; the philosophy, the approach to theory development,

methodological choice, strategy, time horizons and techniques and procedures. (Melnikovas, 2018)

Figure 1.1

The Research Onion - Methodological Design
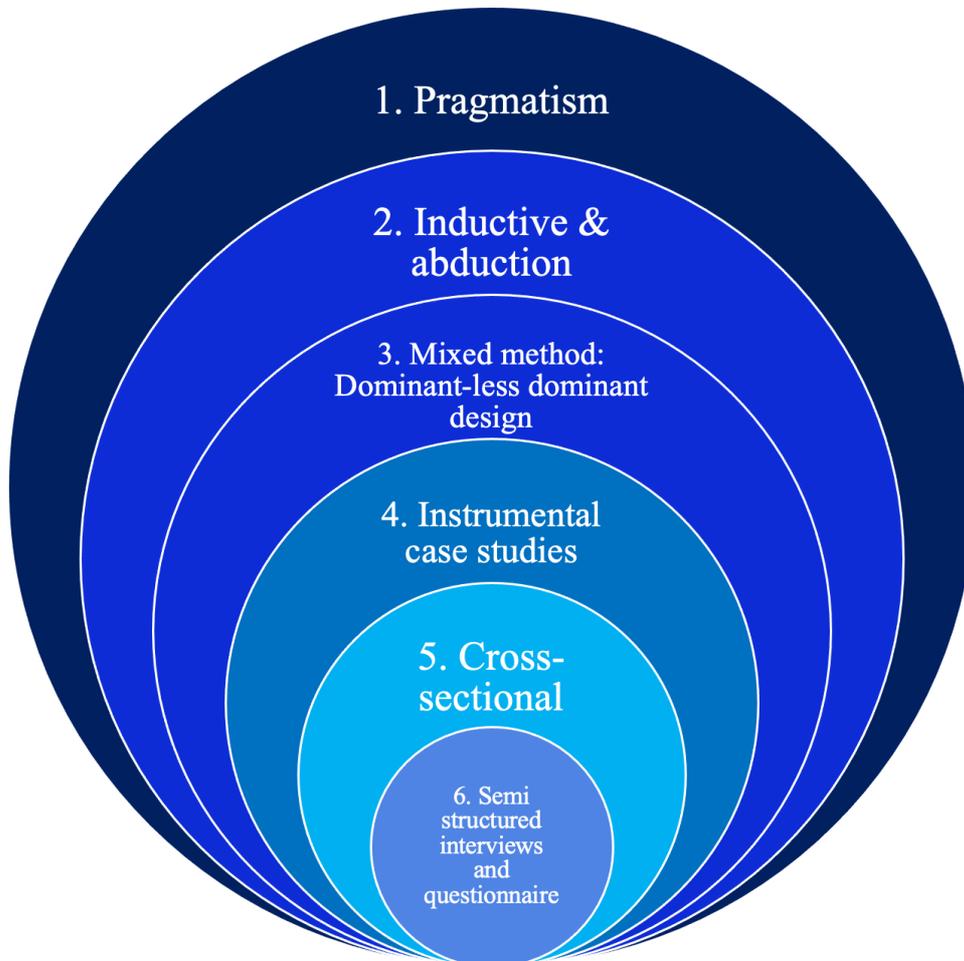
The specific detail within each layer of the Research Onion framework is provided below:

1. **Philosophy** - With the aim of providing a real world understanding of processes in their applied context and in optimising the research's applied impact, the pragmatic approach was adopted through this PhD (Bryant, 2009). Using this approach methods are chosen with the aim of providing solutions to context specific problems without being driven by a definitive epistemological approach (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatism sees the researcher as part of the research and a co-constructor of knowledge (Giacobbi et al.,

2005) and as a former professional rugby player and, at the time of research, transitioning from assistant to the Head Coach of Hong Kong's National Fifteen's team, his insider status was a key strength of this research. This insider perspective is seen as a critical element to further our understanding of team cultures and of cultural change (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013).

2. **Approach to theory development** - In line with the pragmatic philosophy (Giacobbi et al., 2005), the predominant approach taken through this PhD was that of induction, following the analysis steps of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019). This approach was pivotal given the need to establish the nuanced requirements of the emerging context, rather than relying on pre-existing knowledge and/or theory. One study however adopted a different style. For study four, an abductive approach was utilised with the combination of both deductive *and* inductive analysis (Graneheim et al., 2017). The use of deductive analysis as part of study four was to support and to extend specific derailment leadership theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), a theory previously not used within the sporting context.

3. **Methodological Choice -** With the aim of generating rich and detailed descriptions from the respective studies, a qualitative design was the dominant method. As the reader will no doubt evidence, the less dominant design, adopted for study two, was quantitative. The quantitative approach used for the second study was seen as advantageous as it firstly allowed complete participant anonymisation, secondly the evidence to be gleaned came from a theoretically and empirically grounded backdrop and finally, it allowed for a triangulation of data with the qualitative methods used in study one (which enabled the broad talent development environment in question to be explored in more depth), within the same context.

4. **Strategy -** Instrumental case studies were used in the collection of data in studies one, three and four and allowed individuals to provide an in-depth understanding of phenomena under study from within their natural setting (Hodge & Sharpe, 2016).

5. **Time Horizons -** This layer refers to the time frame of the research and all four studies were cross-sectional in nature, that is involved data collection from a specific point in time (Melnikovas, 2018). Studies one, three and four in particular were retrospective in nature.

6. **Technique and Procedures** - Semi-structured interviews were used for the qualitative studies. The rich detail encouraged through this design allows the participants' behaviours, experiences and perceptions to become more meaningful and crucially helps the reader to consider the extent with which the findings can be transferred to their context (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). A questionnaire was selected for study two to specifically help target interventions within the emerging nation context (Yauch & Stedel, 2003).

1.5 Overview of the Research Program

In meeting the thesis objectives, following this introduction, the current research program proposes a further six chapters.

Chapter Two provides a theoretical and empirical overview of the relevant OC literature by firstly outlining OC's emergence in business as well as providing conceptual clarity. Secondly the chapter will examine pertinent research within sport, OC's impact on team performance as well as focussing on cultural change. Finally, as an example of an emerging nation, the nuances of Hong Kong's sporting and rugby landscape will be introduced. This critical review of the literature highlights four clear gaps in the current research; the need for 1) a wider examination of OC in sport that extends beyond that within the field of sport management (Maitland et al., 2015); 2) more evidenced based guidelines on how high

performing cultures are created, maintained and optimised (Cruickshank et al., 2014); 3) a greater understanding in managing culturally diverse teams (Wagstaff, 2019a) and finally 4) further attention on the contextual specifics present within different sporting environments i.e., emerging nations (McDougall et al., 2017). In meeting the thesis objectives and to help fill the gaps in the current knowledge highlighted above, and thus providing novel contributions to the field of OC in sport, the research is presented in two phases. The first phase, comprising of two studies, will specifically examine an emerging rugby nation with phase two - a further two studies - accessing broader high performing expertise drawing on the relevant information for the emerging context.

In meeting the first objective, chapters three and four will examine Hong Kong's Elite Rugby Program (ERP) through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Chapter three will qualitatively assess the ERP's transition from an amateur-based to a fully professional program from the perspectives of current ERP players, the Head of the ERP and the team's sport psychologist. Through the lens of uniquely combining Performance Management and the Resource Based View, findings will aim to reveal key strategic considerations in building a high performing culture within this particular emerging context.

Chapter four will quantitatively evaluate the current culture of the ERP, through the perspective of players, using Martindale et al.'s (2010) Talent Development Environment Questionnaire. As per Hall et al.'s (2019) research into Hong Kong's ERP, the emerging data will highlight strengths in the ERP, with the identified weaknesses themed to help shape intervention strategies targeting areas within the environment that require improvement.

As part of the second phase of the research, chapter five will aim to meet the second objective and, using Berry's (1997) Acculturation Model, will qualitatively examine the acculturation experiences of five elite rugby union coaches and their respective acculturation environments. Each of the coaches have achieved sustained success in managing multicultural

teams at the very highest level and, as a foreigner in their current (and some previous) role(s), their insight will aim to provide invaluable best practice guidelines for the emerging context.

Chapter six will meet the third objective in qualitatively examining the foreign leadership of an elite rugby union coaching team of a Tier one[1] club side. Due to the previous successes of the examined coaching team, the study will use derailment as its theoretical lens. Derailment is a special case of leadership failure as it involves people who, prior to failing, were very successful (Capretta et al., 2008) and is therefore an appropriate representation of the profile of coaches in this study.

Finally, chapter seven presents the general discussion and conclusion of the program of research, identifying practical applications, limitations, future recommendations and finally reflections from the researcher.

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[1] A Tier One country – a termed used throughout this thesis – refers to a team in World Rugby's Top Ten World Rankings (World Rugby High Performance Playbook, 2016-2020)

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

This chapter will provide a theoretical and empirical overview of the relevant organisational culture (OC) literature by firstly outlining OC's emergence in business as well as providing conceptual clarity. Secondly, the chapter will examine pertinent research within sport, focussing on cultural change and OC's impact on team performance. Finally, the nuances of Hong Kong as an emerging nation will be introduced through a brief history in the development of sport and rugby within the region.

2.1 Organisational Culture - A Brief History

Investigating the impact that an effective OC can have on performance was pioneered within the business context and has been long since recognised as the key to organisational performance that not only has the potential to determine success or failure but also adds a significant competitive advantage (Kaiser et al., 2009; Kokt & Van der Merwe, 2009; Mohelska & Sokolova, 2015). The late Tony Hseih (former CEO of Zappos, an online retail company) for example attributed the culture of his organisation as a significant driver in the financial success experienced by Zappos with sales growth of US$8 million to US$1 billion in eight years. Hseih believed that getting the culture right was the first step to this success (Hseih, 2010). Lou Gerstner (former Chairman of IBM) supports Hseih's belief and states, "culture isn't just one aspect of the game – it is the game." (Gerstner, 2002, p.182). In some of the most profitable businesses in the world there are further examples of OC being central to their activities. For example Laszlo Block, the former Vice President of People Operations at Google, suggested culture was at the heart of company's operations (Hughes, 2018) and similarly so at DHL Express, who pride themselves in fostering an OC that brings the best in every employee across their broad and diverse workforce (Colasanti, 2016).

Organisations also recognise the importance of people as both part of their culture and as cultural architects, i.e. those that help to drive the culture from within. For example, global

ice cream producers Ben & Jerry's and pharmaceutical giants Johnson & Johnson have both built a cultural reputation based on caring for people above profit (Chen et al., 2012). The importance of recruiting the right people to help build a strong culture was impressed by Collins (2001) who suggests this is what distinguishes good and great businesses. Great companies start by asking 'who' and then 'what' ensuring the right people are hired whenever and wherever they find them, often without a specific job in mind (Collins, 2001). Airbnb, the online hospitality service, have also used 'cultural interviews' for perspective employees, helping to ensure the right fit for the organisation (Tennant, 2017). The importance of an organisation's culture in *attracting* talented employees is another import factor with Tennant (2017) reporting how perspective employees with two job offers will often use the company's culture as the crucial element that helps guide their decision.

2.2 Conceptual Clarity

Given its complexities, it is unsurprising that there is disagreement in the way in which OC should be conceptualised (Alversson, 2002) with Pettigrew (1990) describing the concept as a riddle wrapped in mystery. Despite this confusion and the arguably impossible assignment of conceptualising culture definitively (McDougall et al., 2017), a number of scholars have developed integrative frameworks (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Denison, 1997; Goffee & Jones, 2001; Payne, 2001; Schneider, 1999) and of those, three in particular stand out for their influence among researchers; Martin's (1992) Three Perspective Approach, Schein's (1990) Three Levels of Culture and Quinn and Rohrbaugh's (1983) Competing Values Theory. All three concepts have been drawn upon previously in sport therefore having understanding of these theories is particulalry important for this context.

2.2.1 Three Perspective Approach

Martin's (1992; 2002) three-perspectives are termed integration, differentiation and fragmentation and although using all three of perspectives are encouraged, she concedes the

majority of empirical research of OC adopt only one, or sometimes two (Martin, 2002). Dominating much of the OC research in sport is the *integration perspective* (Maitland et al., 2015). This approach "focuses on those manifestations of a culture that have mutually consistent interpretations" (Martin, 2002, p. 94). Studies from this perspective have three defining characteristics:

1) all cultural manifestations are interpreted as consistently reinforcing the same themes

2) all members of the organisation are said to share an organisation-wide consensus

3) culture is described as a realm where all is clear (Martin,1992).

An example of using the integration perspective in sport is the work of Weese (1996) who examined the relationship between transformational leadership, organisational effectiveness and culture, where culture was a single variable that could be understood in terms of its strength relative to other organisations (Maitland et al., 2015).

Within the integration perspective there is little room for ambiguity or interpretation (McDougall et al., 2019). Given the varying cultural imprints that individuals bring to an environment, (e.g. family, religion, gender, ethnicity; Girginov, 2010) and not least the multicultural nature of   day sports teams (Ho & Chiu, 2016), it is contested that the conceptualisation and operationalisation of culture must include *more* than that which is coherent and shared as members interpret, evaluate and enact in various ways (McDougall et al., 2019). The notion that ambiguity and incongruity as part of OC distinguishes Martin's *differentiation perspective.* This second approach focuses on a lack of consensus where cultural manifestations have inconsistent interpretations (Martin, 2002). For example, when top executives announce a particular policy but then behave in a policy-inconsistent manner (Martin, 2002). Through this perspective consensus exists but only at lower levels of analysis and are labeled as subcultures that may exist in harmony, independently or in conflict with each other (Martin, 2002). Studies from this perspective also have three defining characteristics:

1) inconsistency

2) subcultural consensus

3) the relegation of ambiguity to the periphery of subcultures (Martin, 1992).

An example from sport where the differentiation persective is used is the work of Colyer (2000) who adopted this understanding of culture to highlight the incongruence between volunteer and paid employess within Australian sports organisations, resulting in tension between the traditional amateur and professional management. The differentiation approach is a useful lens to explore the incongruence between hierarchical levels (i.e., senior management and players), functional levels (i.e., coaches and players) as well as a number of sub-divisions within an organisation (i.e., gender or age; Maitland et al., 2015).

The final perspective is *fragmentation* that views organisations in a constant state of flux and given this level of ambiguity, is the most difficult perspective to articulate (Martin, 2002). When examining cultural manifestations from this perspective a fragmentation study will go beyond the clear consistencies of integration and the clear inconsistencies of a differentiation approach placing ambiguity rather than clarity at the core of the culture (Martin, 2002). The defining characteristics of this particular perspective are:

1) a focus on ambiguity

2) the complexity of relationships among manifestations

3) a range interpretations that do not combine into a stable consensus (Martin, 1992).

According to Maitland et al's (2015) systematic review of OC in sport, there were no examples of studies adopting the fragmentation approach.

Martin (1992) argues that no single perspective to studying culture can capture the complexity of organisational life and using each of these three perspectives to analyse organisations avoids potential blindspots and bias (Martin, 1992). Given the ethnic diversity present in sports teams, as highlighted above, this thesis supports the perspective that a team

culture may at times include *more* than what is shared and may in fact be seen as differentiated. However, there is also agreement with Schein (1992) who questions whether a culture is existent if there is no consensus or if ambiguity is present (i.e., fragmentation). Within a team culture, and indeed the wider sport organisation, it might be argued that there is no room for dissent and ambiguity with all members required to be unified towards the team's vision.

Gammelsæter (2010) refers to this as 'logics.' A logic is a means-end relationship, the values and goals of which will vary depending on one's position within an organisation (Gammelsæter, 2010). Take the Guild Logic for example, that encompasses on -field personnel such as player and coaches, their means-end relationship might be training and the competition environment and excellence in sport respectively (English et al., 2020). In contrast to the Management Logic for example who use managerial tools to measure organisational success, i.e., profitability, as their means-end relationship (English et al., 2020). Although means-end relationships may differ there may be layers of consensus within the different groups/logics due to their specific values or performance measures ultimately directed towards consensus, that is the success of the on-field team. Indeed, it is the idea of a consensus that is the heart of Schein's Three Levels of Culture (1990).

2.2.2 Three Levels of Culture

According to Schein's (2010) functionalist approach to culture, all groups are faced with two tasks: 1) to survive and grow through adapting to the constantly changing environment and 2) to retain group functionality though internal integration. OC emerges as a set of solutions values and behaviours that help contribute completing these tasks (Henriksen, 2015). Schein (1990) proposes three fundamental layers (see figure 2.1) at which culture manifests itself: 1) artefacts; 2) espoused beliefs and values and 3) basic assumptions.
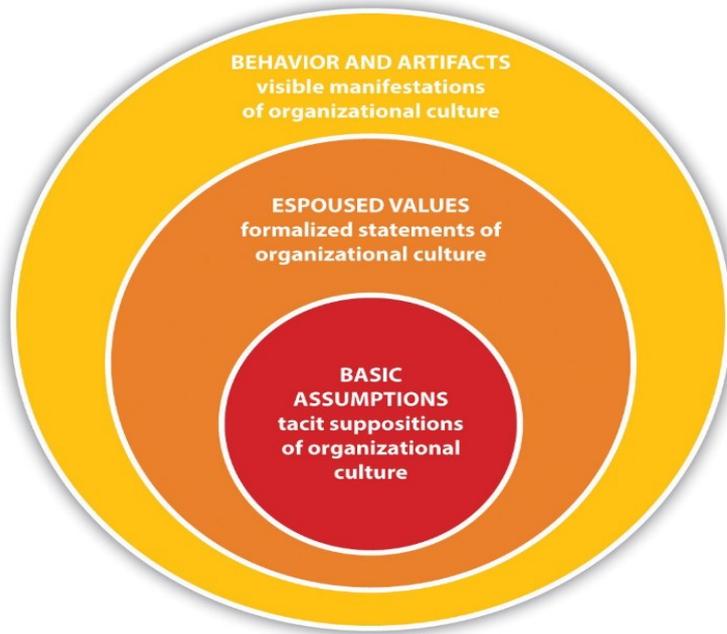
Figure 2.1: Schein's (1990) Three Layers of Organisational Culture

Artefacts are the most evident components of a culture (Schroeder, 2010). They are what you see, hear and feel as you encounter a new group with an unfamiliar culture (Schein, 2017). According to Trice & Beyer (1993) there are four major categories of cultural artefacts: symbols, organisational language, narratives and practices. For example, the architecture of the physical environment, its technology and products; dress code and the way people address each other, emotional intensity and also more permanent examples such as company charters, records or statements of philosophy (Schein, 2017). This level of culture is easy to observe but can often be very difficult to decipher (Schein, 2017) and caution must be made to infer deeper assumptions of the culture based only from artefacts alone (Pondy et al., 1988).

Creating a deeper understanding of culture therefore, the next level reveals the *espoused beliefs and values* - the norms that guide day-to-day behaviour, highlighting what the organisation wants and the importance of those desires (Schein, 2017). Stackman et al. (2000) argue that organisations do not possess values *per se* but rather certain key individuals (i.e., leaders or founders) impart their values into an organisation influencing organisational goals,

processes and systems. Leaders should be aware that espoused values and beliefs are *enacted* through their own behaviours recognising the importance of modelling the desired behaviours on subordinate motivation (Warwick, 2017). An important artefact linked to this is the structure of an organisation – more companies are adopting flat structures (Singh, 2011) that promotes greater influence of the leadership in establishing a successful culture (Cosh et al., 2012).

In order to fully decipher the entire culture of an organisation one should examine the deepest level of culture, the true premise behind organisational behaviour - *basic assumptions.* Basic assumptions are unobservable and reside at the core of an OC (Schein, 1990). These deeply held assumptions often begin as values that over time become so ingrained that they take on the character of assumptions (Ostroff et al, 2003). Culture at this level creates a mental map for employees providing direction as to what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to situations and what actions to take (Schein, 2017). Indeed, when a basic assumption is strongly held by a group, members will find behaviour that is in defiance of the assumption as inconceivable (Ostroff et al, 2003). Basic assumptions provide security for members in terms of identity, how they should behave and how they should feel (Schein, 2017). They are therefore rarely confronted and difficult to change and when challenged can produce anxiety among members (Schein, 1992). Schein (1990) also recognises that a culture is dependent on four elements: 1) Stability (i.e., when a culture and its associated values are constant and resist change despite personnel turnover); 2) depth (i.e., the extent with which the culture is embedded in everything the group does and values influence decision); 3) breadth (i.e., when culture is present in all functional areas of an organisation from top to bottom) and 4) integration (i.e., how well cohesion is achieved between behaviours, values and rituals).

A number of sport studies have used Schein's conceptualisation of culture to frame their research. Cole and Martin (2018) for example used Schein's model to better understand

the nature, development and impact of team culture of the performance of an elite rugby union team in New Zealand. The teams 'performance-based' culture, that included cultural themes and symbolic rituals as well as a collective leadership structure, was viewed as central to the team's success (Cole & Martin, 2018). Junggren et al. (2018) also used the Schein's framework of OC to examine the coaching practices and philosophies within a Danish high-performance swimming environment. Results indicated cultural artefacts such as coaches working together, espoused beliefs such as the use of role models and a long-term development focus with basic assumptions focused on a reciprocated learning where athletes and coaches learn from each other (Junggren et al., 2018).

Schein's three levels framework is also a central feature of Henriksen et al's. (2010a; 2010b, 2011) Environmental Success Factors (ESF) Model which, derived from the holistic ecological approach to talent development (Seanor et al., 2017), has been used extensively to examine track and field (Henriksen et al., 2010a), sailing (Henriksen et al., 2010b), kayaking (Henriksen et al., 2011), trampolining (Seanor et al., 2017), golf (Henriksen et al., 2014) and football (Gangsø et al., 2021; Larsen et al., 2013; Mills et al., 2014a, 2014b; Ryom et al., 2020) TDEs. Given that emerging nations may in fact share more characteristics with TD rather than elite environments (Battochio et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2019) focussing on features of successful TDE within this research seems a worthwhile endeavour.

2.2.3 Competing Values Framework

The competing values framework (CVF) has proven to be useful model in differentiating organisations based on culture (Richard et al., 2009) and according to Gregory et al. (2009) is the most popular conceptualisation of OC when relating to organisational performance. The CVF was orignally proposed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) who analysed a list of 30 indicators that Campbell (1977) considered as possible measures for organisational effectiveness. In producing a more practical way to assess organisational effectiveness Quinn

and Rohrbaugh (1983) chunked the 30 indicators into two dimensions; the first is formal-informal organisational processes that reflect the competing demands of flexibility and spontaneity versus control and order. The second dimension reflects the conflicting demands of the internal and external environment. One end of this continuum represents a focus on internal integration, organisational processes and structural stability versus the other end emphasised on competition, interaction with the environment and a focus on outcomes. The four resulting cultural types represents aspects of a firm's underlying assumptions about motivation, leadership and effectiveness (Dwyer et al., 2003) with each culture competing with or in direct contrast to the set of values expressed in the opposite cultural type (Choi et al., 2008). The four cultural types and brief descriptions follows (Choi et al, 2008):

Clan Culture – Internally orientated, emphasises informal governance and generally a friendly place to work. The organisation is held together through employee loyalty, morale and commitment. Emphasis is placed on teamwork and cohesiveness.

Adhocracy Culture – Combines informal governance with an external orientation. It is flexible and open to change where members are encouraged to take risks in a dynamic and creative environment. Initiative and spontaneity are valued in this culture.

Hierarchy Culture – adopts an internal orientation and emphasises internal efficiency, uniformity, coordination and evaluation. It focuses on stability and smooth-running operations, following rules and regulation with members motivated by security, order and rewards.

Market Culture – emphasises formal governance structure and an external orientation towards productivity, performance and goal achievement. Members are goal orientated with emphasis on planning and efficiency key.

While each OC will be composed of values in each of the cultural types, a dominant cultural type will typically emerge to form an indentifiable OC (Cameron & Quinn, 1999).

Operationlsising the CVF is achieved using the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) that helps to identify an organisation's current culture and the type of culture the organisation should develop based on its members' perceptions (Quinn & Cameron, 2011).

Although less prevalent in the sporting context the CVF has been utilised in this domain. Choi et al. (2008) for example used the CVF to establish the link between job satisfaction and OC in Korean professional baseball organisations. Also, Jones et al. (2009) conceptualised the High-Performance Environment Model based on the CVF. This model was then used to examine an elite swimming environment from the perspective of coaches, current and retired elite swimmers as well as support staff (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016). Findings revealed a culture based on goal achievement, athlete well-being, innovation and internal processes such as the internal control of group functioning were seen as critical in sustaining high performance (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016). Interestingly and importantly, the findings also supported the general consensus that the culture of this environment covered all aspects of the competing values.

So, for emerging nations striving to establish a high performing culture, understanding the different ways OC may be conceptualised is an important first step in this journey. The theoretical backdrop provided highlights that an effective team culture may well have features that are shared (i.e., Schein's Three Layers and Martin's integration perspective). However, it might also be plausible that within the team environment, given the cultural diversity that has become more prevalent, that a degree of differentiation (Martin, 1992) might also be present, perhaps manifested in sub-cultures. Managed correctly however, this does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. On the contrary, as Martin (2002) stipulates, these sub-cultures can exist in harmony and in a team culture perspective this harmony might stem from a focus towards the central vision or goal of the group such as winning or qualifying for a world cup for example. It might also be expected that differentiation exists between the competing values of

the head coach and the board of directors for example. The former seeing value in well-being of players and long-term development for example in contrast to the latter who may want quick results and the expense of all else. Indeed, English et al. (2020) revealed how within South African Cricket, conflict arose when administrative personnel would try and influence coaches' decisions on selection. Again, being aware of these potential conflicts and effectively managing them can mitigate their potential negative impact. Finally, and just as importantly in a *team* context, understanding the characteristics of Martin's (1992) fragmentation perspective such as ambiguity, a lack of consensus and multiple interpretations is arguably something to be avoided given the divisive impact this could have on a group tasked with a single outcome and goal.

As well as understanding OC conceptually, how it manifests in the 'real world' is of central importance for emerging nations as they aim to establish a high performing culture. Therefore, attention now turns to OC in sport.

2.3 Organisational Culture Research in Sport

Early research of OC within the sport domain typically explored elements of sport-management (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018), with Weese (1995; 1996) being at the forefront of this work. In his 1995 research for instance, he examined transformational leadership and OC within the administrative departments of campus recreation programs of Big Ten and Midwestern conference universities. Weese's (1995) findings concluded that programs led by transformational leaders demonstrated stronger OC's and carried out culture-building activities. In the second of Weese's studies he highlighted a positive correlation between cultural strength and organisational effectiveness (Wesse, 1996). These early findings offered preliminary insights into the links between OC, leadership and organisational effectiveness (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Later examples within the sport management context, supporting Weese's findings, include Deloitte (2012 cited in Maitland et al., 2015)

who recognised that shaping the OC of the London Organisational Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games was a key element to the success of the 2012 Olympics.

2.3.1 Team culture and performance

In attempting to extend the research beyond sport management, to more on-field perspective, there have been several important papers progressing the knowledge of OC in sport.

Pim (2016) for example explored the values-based sports program at the United States Military Academy (West Point) to determine how elements of their culture impacted team success. Pim (2016) revealed how West Point's value-based culture was attributed to improved team grade averages, improved standing within national championships, increased number of teams ranked in the top 10 and helped to reduce the number of disciplinary issues. In meeting the requirements for more elite team coach perceptions, and in closing the gap in the research exploring coaches who have developed and crucially maintained high performance cultures (Mallet & Lara-Bercial, 2016), the practices of six Canadian university coaches were explored to assess how they created and sustained a culture of excellence within their programs (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017). Using an instrumental case study design, they discovered that demanding daily winning habits was the first critical step to sustaining a culture of excellence. Similar findings were revealed within a Norwegian sailing TDE where daily routines provided much of the groundwork for the success of the environment (Henriksen et al., 2010b). Meeting daily demands were also part of the New Zealand All Blacks team culture, that purportedly contributed to their impressive winning ratio (Hodge et al., 2014) as well as the University of California Berkely's successful rugby program (Schroth, 2011). An important element of daily winning habits, particular within TDEs, is their process focus towards long term development rather than an over emphasis on short term results (Henriksen et al., 2011; Larsen et al., 2013).

The need for *players* to take responsibility in setting these daily standards, driving competition from within (Hodge et al, 2014) was an important feature of successful cultures. This was further exemplified by Chase and DiSanti's (2017) research into TDEs, who revealed the importance for individuals taking responsibility for personal improvements. The autonomy afforded to athletes in driving the standards towards self-improvement was also evidenced in a Canadian talent development trampoline club were performers were actively 'untethered,' allowing them to learn to make their own decisions about the trajectory and direction of their personal development (Seanor et al., 2017). So too within the TDE of a premier Norwegian football team, where developing players trained in a culture that encouraged a more self-regulated, independent person (Aalberg & Sæther, 2016). When an athlete chooses to work on aspects of personal development both motivation and enjoyment can improve (Chase & Disanti, 2017).

Performers taking responsibility for driving the team culture was also recognised as a powerful influencer (Cole & Martin, 2018). The importance of a culture that is constructed endogenously was also identified by Ric Charlesworth, successful coach of Australia's National men's field hockey team, who used 'trojan athletes' to drive key messages and standards from within the group (Charlesworth, 2016). Players were at the heart of the All-Blacks' culture too when they shifted towards a more player centred approach that fostered trusting relationships and, combined with their collective leadership, helped create a learning culture where players felt empowered enabling them to deal with unpredictable events more effectively (Johnson et al., 2012) - a typical requirement of high performing teams (Becket, 2001).

For an established and effective team culture therefore, the daily discipline of meeting process focussed performance behaviours appears pivotal. In addition, groups would benefit from the monitoring and indeed creation of these agreed set of behaviours to be driven from

within the group rather than a top-down approach. Identifying key individuals who can help drive that player-centred process is key. For an emerging nation however, these critical features and/or personnel may not be as robust or as routine within their team culture and may in fact not be present at all. There might also be a preponderance of players from more 'established' countries to attempt to impress their way on the culture; an assumption that they know best. In their quest for success therefore, emerging nations might be required to identify changes *of* culture (i.e., introducing new principles) as well as changes *in* culture (i.e., doing things better than before; Scott et al., 2003). The next section therefore focuses on the critical considerations of cultural change.

2.3.2 Cultural Change in Sport's Teams

One of the predominant fields of research in OC and sport is change management. Cruikshank and Collins (2012a; 2012b) and Cruickshank and colleagues (2013; 2014; 2015) have been leading voices in this context which is of particular importance in elite sport where sporting organisations hunt for Head Coaches or Performance Directors who can perpetuate a high performing culture (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). Indeed, the need for cultural change expertise is an essential skill set for elite team leaders (Lee et al., 2009) with effective change management including the alignment of strategic direction, rationalising and justifying actions of change, making phased rather sweeping changes, effective interaction with team icons and utilising them as cultural architects as well as balancing long term aims with short term results for example (Cruickshank et al., 2015).

Changing an organisation's culture is one of the most challenging roles for a leader as the very essence of a culture is to prevent change due to the stability it offers groups (Henriksen, 2015). Within the business domain successful cultural change requires buy in from the board and CEO level to align the entire organisation's vision and values (Cochrane, 2017). The same can be said for cultural change within elite and TDE's where the management of board

members and other stakeholders such as athletes, support staff and the media for example is essential (Cruickshank et al., 2014). This management might include the careful balance of acquiring multi-stakeholder support as well as protecting their respective team's 'cultural bubble' (p. 17) from lateral or outside influencers such as the media and the board of directors. (Cruickshank et al., 2014). With the increased number of support disciplines available to athletes in elite and talent development environments, managing the internal power relations existing between these multi-stakeholders and their respective disciplines is of particular importance during any change management (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). This was demonstrated with the successful cultural change process within Leeds Carnegie Rugby Union team where changes were engineered through the facilitation of stakeholders' actions and perceptions (Cruickshank, et al., 2013). Byrne and Cassidy (2017) provided an example of the management of external stakeholders through examining the critical role that former Head Coach of Connaught Rugby, Pat Lam, played in ensuring clarity of culture. Through the process of politicking (Barnson, 2014), Lam fostered clarity among members of the board as well as other the 'non-playing' individuals within the organisation. Another important aspect of managing key stakeholders might also include identifying and deploying resources which can have profound implications for changing team culture (Gilmore, 2013).

Cruickshank et al. (2015) offered yet further insight into the cultural change within elite sport environments in interviewing the Head Coach in one of three leading professional UK sports: football, rugby union and rugby league. Their findings emphasised that cultural change is an on-going, multidirectional rather than a top-down process that requires the constant negotiation and integration of a) player and support staff's fluctuating perceptions and opinion and b) perceptions and opinions of those who could indirectly shape or influence team culture (Cruickshank et al., 2015). Further applied implications, that may prove pertinent in the emerging context particularly, include aligning multi-stakeholder's perceptions and

expectations (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a), achieving immediate results and being wary of applying change processes from one context and applying them in another (Cruickshank et al., 2015).

In summary, for leaders of teams within emerging nations change might be a prerequisite in striving for success. Therefore, having an understanding in how to maximise an effective change process is a vital undertaking. For example, the importance of obtaining 'team-wide' buy-in towards any planned change is central to successful change management. This buy-in can be achieved through justifying and demonstrating the need for change and should include individuals who directly and indirectly impact performance. Avoiding sweeping changes is another important consideration as well as the extent with which cultural architects can be utilised to help promote and drive the change from within. Finally, although finding a balance of short term results and long term development is preferable, the impact of achieving immediate results should not be underestimated when attempting to embed any changes (Frontiera, 2010).

Interest in organisational culture within different sporting contexts continues to grow particularly with the recent emergence of media and anecdotal evidence across a range of sports questioning whether athlete welfare, safety and duty of care are being given the priority they deserve, arguing that the balance of winning and welfare is perhaps not right (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). In meeting the need for further attention on the contextual specifics present within different sporting environments, the final section of this literature review will centre on the Hong Kong context.

2.4 Hong Kong Sporting Context

Hong Kong is home to over seven million people and being squeezed in to just 420 square miles is one of the most densely populated cities in the world (Lam, 2016). A former British Colony (1898-1997), and now a Special Administrative Region of the People's

Republic of China (Zheng, 2016), Hong Kong is perhaps best known for its vibrant night life, its natural harbour and tremendous shopping and entertainment (Lam, 2016). Hong Kong is conceivably less known as a sporting city with an underdeveloped sporting culture due to its heavily urbanised and limited space, a lack of sport participation tradition and, due to family and social pressures among the local Chinese population in particular, a greater focus on education rather than sport (Bridges, 2012).

That said, Hong Kong has a healthy golfing, hiking, fishing and water sports tradition and boasts 43 swimming pools, 259 tennis courts and 25 sports grounds for example (Lam, 2016). Hong Kong is also known for hosting large scale sporting events such as the Hong Kong Games and 2008 Summer Olympics equestrian event (Lam, 2016). Another major annual event that Hong Kong hosts, as part of World Rugby's Seven-a-side series, is the Hong Kong Sevens (HK7s) rugby tournament (World Rugby Sevens Series, 2021). The HK7s - a shortened version of the 15-a-side game that was invented in 1883 in Melrose, Scotland (Godwin, 1981) - was established in 1976 by the Hong Kong Rugby Union (HKRU; Est. 1952). The HK7s has become wildly regarded the world's premier sevens event with a carnival atmosphere with the biggest financial prize pot on the sevens circuit (Hong Kong Sevens, 2021). The event personifies sport's link to businesses with major advertising and sponsorship being fundamental to the tournaments initial and ongoing success (Jones & Lewis, 2012). The financial capital made through the three day tournament is reinvested back into the local community to safeguard the future of the game within the region through development programs in schools and clubs (Jones & Lewis, 2012).

The HK7s is very much the financial heart of the HKRU (Donovan, 2016) and it was this capital resource that enabled the HKRU to keep pace with an increasingly growing and professional game by employing senior internal positions such as a CEO and Marketing Department for example (Agnew, 1991). The HKRU's ongoing investment into the game has

continued through the new millennium and in 2015 with the strategic aim of Rugby World Cup qualification (HKRU Strategic Plan; 2016-2020) the HKRU's board of directors approved the funding of a full time professional fifteen-a-side program - the Elite Rugby Program (ERP; Taylor, 2016) which to date has cost in excess of HK$139million (circa US$18million; Jones, 2021). Interestingly the make-up of the initial ERP playing squad, the majority of whom represent Hong Kong's National rugby team, contained eight different nationalities (Taylor, 2016), a cultural diversity that exists to this day. A similar pattern has also been seen with Hong Kong's National football team, reflecting the diversity within the city, and a pattern that has become a global trend (Ho & Chiu, 2016).

2.5 So What Next? Rationale for Study One

With an understanding of a) how OC has been conceptualised and its relevance to the emerging context, b) the knowledge of the key features of previously examined effective team cultures, c) the important elements of cultural change and d) the particular nuances of Hong Kong as an emerging nation, attention now shifts to the thesis studies to help identify the critical considerations of establishing a high performing culture in an emerging rugby nation. In meeting the need for a greater understanding of how to create and maintain an on-field team culture in a variety of sporting contexts (Cruickshank et al., 2014; Henriksen, 2015; Maitland et al., 2015), study one will qualitatively examine the development of Hong Kong's Elite Rugby Program (ERP). The study will retrospectively explore the cultural change of the program from its inception through to its critical 2019 Rugby World Cup Qualifying campaign. This ERP will be examined through the eyes of players, the Head Coach and sport psychologist thus providing much needed insight in how cultural change can be understood and practically developed (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE

An Evaluation of the Transition from an Amateur to Professional Culture within Hong Kong's Elite Rugby Program

3.1 Introduction

Considering the associated cultural, economic and political significance of sporting success (Henriksen et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2016) many emerging nations – those residing outside of their respective top 20 world ranking - have invested in their individual sporting programs, vying for their place on the global sporting map (Bennett et al., 2019; Elling et al., 2014; Koski & Lämsä, 2015). It may be argued that emerging nations are unique in that they fall between high performance and Talent Development Environments (TDEs) (Hall et al., 2019) and may experience context specific challenges in striving for success, such as smaller populations impacting the talent pool, less financial and logistical resource, weaker domestic competition, dual career performers, geographical location, seasonal variance and even the political bias towards certain sports (Bennett et al., 2019; Halldorsson, 2017; Kasale et al., 2020; Koski & Lämsä, 2015; Telseth & Halldorsson, 2019).

A consequence of driving for sporting success for emerging nations, is the transition from an environment focusing on amateurism to one that focuses on professionalism and the development of a robust high-performing program. This transition has shown to be challenging both at an organisational level and from an athlete's perspective. For example, in the organisational context, the traditional beliefs and ideals of amateur sports, such as sport for sports sake, fair play and humility, are viewed by some as outdated and a hindrance to the financial growth and progress associated with professional sport (Clausen et al., 2018). There are also the organisational considerations of replacing volunteer staff with full-time paid employees, professionalising governance structures and procedures as well as investing in high profile performers and coaches in order to compete (O'Brien & Slack, 1999; Sharpe et al.,

2018). The transition into professional sports has also proved challenging for individual performers. For example, there are differences in the meaning of sport for amateur performers, who seek fun, enjoyment and health, to that of professionals who are driven by performance and personal achievement (Piermattéo et al., 2018). Specific challenges to life as a professional athlete include changes in financial status, pressure to progress and learn new skills, managing new training demands, as well as adaptation of their existing self-identity and relationships (Sanders & Winter, 2016).

As a result of this transition there may also be a need for a change in goals, expected behaviours and general way of operating in order to meet the demands of professional performance. These behaviours, forming the foundation of a team culture, would need to align with the expectations of a professional high-performing environment such as work ethic and consistently meeting measurable performance markers. Team culture has been shown as a central component associated with achieving sustained sporting success (Cole & Martin, 2018) and is defined as, 'a dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group' (Cruickshank and Collins 2012a, p 340). While research has highlighted the importance of team culture across multiple domains (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016; Henriksen et al., 2010; Pim, 2016; Warrick et al., 2016), we know very little about the unique challenges emerging nations have when managing the transition from amateur to professional domains and developing an effective team culture.

Given the increase in the number and aspirations of emerging nations within the global sporting context, further research into the development and management of a high-performing team culture within this milieu is certainly warranted. Emerging nations may look to learn from more established environments to mimic best practice and processes, with the movement of coaches from established to emerging nations part of this transfer of knowledge. However, for a culture to be effective it needs to 'fit' the environment in which it operates and as such it

would most likely need to account for specific nuances of the emerging context, ultimately being different. Consequently, this study will examine a case of an emerging nation's national rugby team through the theoretical lens of Performance Management and the Resource Based View. This study will explore the team's transition from an amateur to professional team culture through the eyes of those directly responsible for sporting performance, specifically the coaches, the players and support staff (Junggren et al., 2018; Wagstaff et al., 2012).

3.2 Theoretical Framework

While an array of interacting factors may influence elite sport performance, over the last 10 years research has increasingly highlighted the impact of organisational processes (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Specifically, there is growing evidence that for sporting organisations to achieve success at the highest level they need to be more intentional and comprehensive in their planning - in other words, to be more strategic (De Bosscher et al., 2009; Green & Houlihan, 2005). In striving for such success, two complimentary strategic frameworks that can help organisations develop and sustain a competitive advantage will be tools for this research, namely Performance Management (PM) and the Resource Based View (RBV) (Pavlov et al., 2017; Won & Chelladurai, 2016).

PM is underpinned by numerous disciplines such as economics, finance and human resources (Kasale et al., 2018) and defined as 'a continual process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and align performance with the strategic goals of the organisation' (Aguinis, 2013, p. 2). Traditional views of PM focused at an individual level (Kloot & Martin, 2000), with the first examples dating back to the third century and the Emperors of the Wei Dynasty who rated the performance of official family members (Coens & Jenkins, 2002). In more recent history, PM was utilised in the early stages of the industrial revolution to monitor the performance of workers within the cotton mills of Scotland (George, 1972, as cited in Brudan, 2010). Over time, PM approaches have evolved,

driven predominantly by the military, public administration as well as industrial companies and within the last 30 years has broadened its scope by critically integrating individual performance with strategic and operational factors (Brudan, 2010).

While PM has been readily used across multiple high performance and high risk domains, there has been a lack of research exploring the concept in elite sport (Molan et al., 2019). Subsequently Molan et al. (2019), in examining PM across multiple contexts, identified four key PM processes that could be applied to elite sport. The first of these processes was strategic PM. Strategic PM is the direction the organisation chooses to pursue its long-term objective (Thompson & Strickland, 2003) and the process that steers them towards this objective (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). The process begins with the leader establishing the vision of the organisation followed by effectively communicating the vision to internal and external stakeholders. As an antecedent to this process, it is critical for a leader to contextualise their vision (Walters, 1995; Arnold et al., 2012) and for this to occur they would need an understanding of the internal resources at their disposal. As such we identify the RBV as a complimentary construct of strategic PM. The RBV is well established in the strategic management literature (Crook et al., 2011) and has also been an invaluable means to evaluate sporting organisations (Truyens et al., 2014). Its central tenet is a competitive advantage derives from the recognition and integrated deployment of rare and valuable resources, under an organisation's control, that are not perfectly imitable or substitutable by competitors (Gerrard, 2003). The resources are split into four categories, (Barney, 1991), the first, and arguably most important (Amabile & Kramer, 2011), is human capital resource that values the experience and knowledge of individuals within the organisation. Secondly, physical capital resource refers to the geographical location as well as the technology and equipment available to the organisation. Smart & Wolfe (2000) revealed that the combination of human and physical resources was shown as pivotal in explaining Penn State University's successful

football program, specifically athlete and coach expertise (human) and their training and competition facilities (physical). Occasionally grouped with physical capital resource (Won & Chelladurai, 2016), financial capital is the third factor and includes the debt, equity and retained earnings of the organisation. Finally, organisational capital describes the formal reporting structures and planning systems, as well as intangible elements such as organisational culture and relationships. These two resources were identified by Wolfe et al. (2006) as the source of Oakland Athletics' Major League Baseball success where a unique player evaluation technique (organisational resource) enabled them to acquire high quality players at limited cost (financial resource).

Sports Organisations understanding the resources available to them is only one aspect. Understanding how to *operationalise* and deploy them is a critical step to achieving a sustained competitive advantage (Won & Chelladurai, 2016). As Marcel Sturkenboom, the Director of the Dutch National Sports Federation acknowledged, having the ingredients is one thing, knowing how to put them together is what counts (De Bosscher et al., 2006). An organisation's readiness to exploit the full competitive potential of its resources (Anderson & Birrer, 2011) is closely aligned to the second process of PM; operational PM. Part of operational PM is understanding the context and includes how internal and external situations may impact organisational decisions. For example, establishing a high-performing program within an emerging nations environment means the athletes could be at a younger training age compared to seasoned professionals and, as such, training protocols may have to be carefully managed. Addressing the performance environment is another theme of operational PM and is concerned with creating the optimal conditions for athletes, coaches and staff. Internal processes and procedures is the third theme and refers to the systems, structures and the management of policies and regulations that aid performance planning. The fourth theme of operational PM is adapting the culture and is concerned with shaping the values, behaviours and attitudes within

the team. An example of these three elements of operational PM were encapsulated during the cultural change of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team. For instance, the players' previous antisocial binge drinking behaviours were no longer accepted (performance environment). The players were also empowered with leadership roles (internal processes and procedures) as well as agreeing to behaviours that demonstrated their expectation of excellence culture (Hodge et al., 2014). The final theme within operational PM is debriefing, feedback and learning and involves assessing performance and identifying areas of improvement across both playing, coaching and support staff.

The third and fourth processes of PM are individual PM and leadership of the performance team. Individual PM involves the evaluation of people's performance using appropriate measures as well as enhancing the capacity of people through the provision of development opportunities; the latter being more prevalent outside of elite sporting domains with links shown in a commitment to develop human capital with improved levels of business performance (Molan et al., 2019). A successful PM approach is underpinned throughout by effective leadership (Arnold et al., 2012; Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). This is modelled through displaying inter-personal skills and a flexibility in leadership styles depending on the context, for example transformational, transactional or darker leadership traits (Molan et al., 2019). Another critical consideration for the leader is ensuring PM practices are aligned with the organisation's culture (Molan et al., 2019). Leadership and culture are closely aligned (Tainton, 2020) and are arguably the glue that holds an organisation together. These two important factors also further reflect the complimentary nature of PM and RBV. For example, the leadership style will govern how an organisation's resources are deployed, which in turn will affect the culture. To elaborate, if an organisation is human capital focused then it is potentially more likely to have collaborative culture (Hartnell et al., 2011). There may also be a need to *change* the culture of the organisation with the leader responsible for demonstrating

the existing culture being no longer functional with the new culture holding greater reward and appeal (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012b). For instance, if the leader wishes to change to a more collaborative culture then their leadership style and resource deployment would be steered by this, with both PM and RBV being invaluable tools through this change (Gerrard, 2003; Molan et al., 2019). PM for example highlights the processes and layers that need to be considered during change, while RBV identifies the constituent parts of these processes and layers. Both theories are important, their combination however affords a deeper understanding of the environment and the scope of change required.

Given the lack of rigorous research in both PM and RBV in elite sport (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Won & Chelladurai, 2016), and their complimentary relationship highlighted above, both will be uniquely combined in this study to examine the emergence of Hong Kong's Elite Rugby Program (ERP) and its transition from an amateur to professional culture.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Context

The Elite Rugby Program (ERP) is the Hong Kong Rugby Union's (HKRU) first professional 15's program. Established in 2015, according to the HKRU's Strategic Plan, its aims were to maximise Rugby World Cup qualification for 2019 and in 2023. At the time of the study, the ERP players and staff had begun their qualification journey to the Rugby World Cup 2023 after failing to qualify for the 2019 competition. The players within the ERP are centrally contracted to the HKRU and train daily together as part of a typical full-time professional program. The domestic Premiership season, in which all ERP players participate for their respective (semi-professional) clubs, runs from September through to March with one game a week. ERP players, of selected to represent Hong Kong, come together as a team through international competition windows in November and June. As Hall et al. (2019) illustrated, with the early career nature of many of the ERP players, in a program based in an

emerging rugby country, the ERP is aligned more to talent development environments (TDE) than many other elite programs.

3.3.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 11 full-time professional male rugby union players centrally contracted by the HKRU to the ERP. Player demographics, nationality and previous rugby experience are broadly presented in Table 1.1, rather than identifying specifics, in order to maintain a level of anonymity. The Head of the ERP (HoERP) and a peripatetic sports psychologist (SP), who worked with the ERP's playing and coaching group for two years leading into the Rugby World Cup repechage, also participated in the study. The HoERP (58 years of age) had a professional coaching experience of 25 years and a level five standard coach in his Tier One home union. During the research period the HoERP was also Head Coach of Hong Kong Men's National 15's Team. The SP (58 years of age) was a Super Rugby team's psychologist (11th campaign at the time of the interview) and for 10 years had provided psychological support across teams and individual sports at international and Olympic level. Due to the timeline discussed within the study both the HoERP and SP could be identified and while they are not named both participants were happy with the level of confidentiality.

Table 1.1

Player Participant Demographics

Age	Nationality	Professional Playing Rugby Experience
Range: 24 to 35 years old	New Zealander	From 1 to 4 years in Hong Kong.
Mean: 28.5 (σ 3.5)	British	73% of the participants had previous
	Hong Kong British	professional experience outside of
	South African	Hong Kong – not exceeding 4 years.
	Australian	27% of the participants had no prior
		professional experience

3.3.3 Design

A qualitative instrumental case study design was selected to gain a rich insight of the ERP's transition from an amateur to professional performance culture, allowing individuals to provide an in depth and detailed understanding from within their natural setting (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). Due to the nature of the research aims, a semi structured interview procedure was selected. The participants were purposefully chosen, and all were known to the researcher through his role as coach within the ERP. Rapport was already established through the day-to-day workings of the researcher and the participants, which facilitated a more relaxed approach to the interview process (Weller, 2017). With the researcher's dual role as coach to the 11 playing participants, to mitigate the impact impression management (Gray, 2009), the participants were reassured that any information shared was confidential, would not influence decisions around selection and/or contracting and in fact the players' open and honest insight might be used to improve the ERP's environment.

There were three distinct interview guides for the playing, HoERP and SP participants respectively in order to elicit the specific retrospective perceptions of the ERP's transition (see Table 3.2). As advised by Rapely (2011), questions were based on relevant academic literature as well as the researcher's considerations about what areas might be important to cover. Additional probes and prompts were used to encourage the participants to expand their answers providing further depth to their responses (Gray, 2009).

3.3.4 Procedure

Prior to the participants being identified for interview, ethical approval was gained. The players, HoERP and SP were recruited via personal contact and, in keeping with basic ethical considerations; informed consent was obtained (Willig, 2008) to take part in a one-on-one interview with details of the voluntary nature of their participation explained.

Player interviews and that of the HoERP took place at a mutually convenient time in private meeting rooms at the ERP's training center. The interview with the SP, who was based in New Zealand, took place via Skype and was arranged through email. The use of such video conferencing technology has increased in qualitative research over recent years and is a valid method to obtain data when face to face opportunities are not possible or practical (Weller, 2017). Each interview lasted between 50 to 90 minutes and was recorded on a digital voice recorder the functioning of which was tested prior to each interview as advised by Gratton and Jones (2004).

Table 3.2

Participant Interview Questions

ERP Player Questions	HoERP Questions	SP Questions
1. Introduction – Playing background	1. Introduction - What is your role at the HKRU?	1. Introduction - What is your current role?
2. To what extend to you view culture as an important element to performance?	2. How would you describe your leadership philosophy?	2. How would you describe your leadership philosophy?
3. When you started in the ERP how would you describe the culture?	3. To what extend to you view culture as an important element to performance?	3. To what extend to you view culture as an important element to performance?
4. How would you describe the current culture of the ERP?	4. When you started your role, how would you describe the culture of the ERP?	4. When you started to work with the ERP group what did you notice about its culture?
5. What role did you play in changing the culture?	5. What was your vision for the culture of the ERP?	5. What did you see as the priorities for chance?
6. How would you describe your integration into the ERP?	6. How would you describe the current culture of the ERP?	6. What changes have your witnessed?
7. Where do you see the key areas for improvement?	7. What were the processes your implemented to change the culture?	7. What do you consider to be our main focus for the next four years?
	8. Where do you see the key areas for improvement?	

3.3.5 Data Analysis

Inductive analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyse the data emerging from the interviews. The opening step was for the researcher to familiarise himself with the data by transcribing the interviews and through multiple readings. The second stage of analysis involved creating codes across the entire data set and then grouping the data

into themes. The themes were then refined, assessing for coherent patterns of meaning, and then the entire data set was reviewed independently by the researcher and two of his research supervisors, ensuring a consistent message across all themes. Finally, clear definitions of each theme were generated ensuring each gave the reader clarity of the overall story. Following this process, as shown in table 3.3, five high order themes were generated, each with a group of associated lower order themes, all based on quotes or 'tags' from the data (Cote et al., 1993).

Table 3.3

Higher and Lower Order Themes

Higher order themes	Lower order themes
An amateur environment that required change	Amateur behaviours and a lack of quality personnel
	Lack of a vision
	Lack of professional facilities
ERP's Professional culture building blocks	Establishing a vision
	Education and demonstrating what professionalism looked like
	Establishing buy in
	The balance of hard work, well-being and holistic development
Leadership strategy and managing key stakeholders	Top down leadership – transactional and coach driven
	Transition to bottom up leadership
	External stakeholder support
Evidencing and reinforcing the change	Developing the ERP's physical environment and the use of symbols to reinforce change
	Positively reinforcing the change
Managing ongoing challenges in the ERP's	Performance pressure
	Player leadership's group message disconnect
professional culture	Lack of competition
	Management of troublesome players
	The need for ongoing clarity on the vision
	Fully integrated identity

3.3.6 Trustworthiness and Credibility

A potential issue with the data is its retrospective nature. As Wenk (2017) highlighted, recalling past experiences can lead to distortions as the brain adds new experiences into existing memory. However, there is also evidence that indicates when memories are sought from the episodic systems of experiences of the self – the Self Referencing Effect - then these

recollections, while not infallible, are potentially more accurately remembered (Symons & Johnson, 1997).

To actively enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the data, specific strategies were employed, namely; prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). First, prolonged engagement was achieved given the researcher's indigenous insider status within the ERP and as an active coach from the program's inception to the present day. Through his day-to-day experiences and witnessing of ongoing changes that occurred through the ERP's transition, the researcher was uniquely placed to provide a nuanced insight into the studied group (Johnson et al., 2012).

Avoiding the potential of bias, often prevalent within insider research (Greene, 2014), a process of data triangulation was used where three independent sources of data - players, HoERP and SP - were drawn upon it to build themes (Bush, 2012). In addition, investigator triangulation was another strategy where the researcher and his research supervisors, with over 40 years' collective experience in qualitative research, employed an intercoder agreement strategy where codes and themes were critiqued through the specific stages of inductive process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). To elaborate, during the iterative process of Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) systematic coding, theme generation and theme refinement stages as part of their thematic analysis framework, the analysis went through two 'trustworthy filters' or critical friends. Critical friends are used in qualitative research as a means to achieve rigour (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Critical friends are individuals within the research process who listen to the voice of the researcher and their interpretations and offer critical feedback with the aim of encouraging reflexivity by challenging each other's construction of knowledge (Cowan & Taylor, 2016). The background of critical friends is also important to offer different perspectives (Smith & McGannon, 2018) and in this instance the primary and secondary

supervisors – used as critical friends - were from outside of the researched environment although familiar with elite rugby coaching and talent development environments respectively.

In terms of the process, to begin with the researcher and his primary supervisor independently coded the participant's transcripts. Following the first round of systematic coding, the researcher and supervisor met to discuss their respective coding, critically reflecting on what each code represented as well as removing and adding irrelevant and relevant codes respectively. Once the codes were agreed these were then sent to the researcher's second supervisor who, again, carried out an independent review. Following this stage of the analysis, the researcher and second supervisor finalised the codes to be themed. For the theming stages of the analysis, the same process occurred whereby the researcher and primary supervisor worked independently to generate and review themes before collaboratively critiquing them. Agreed themes were then sent to the secondary supervisor for further independent review before being discussed and finalised with the researcher.

Finally, due to the availability of participants, member checking was carried out with ease following the transcription process. Frequently used in qualitative research to validate data and control the subjective bias of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the interview transcripts were passed to the respective participants to confirm the accuracy of the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). No changes to the transcripts were made following this process.

3.4 Results and Discussion

Through inductive analysis five themes emerged; 1) an amateur environment that required change; 2) ERP's professional culture building blocks; 3) leadership strategy and managing key stakeholders through change; 4) evidencing and reinforcing a positive transition to professionalism and 5) managing the ongoing challenges associated with the ERP's professional culture. The sections below describe these themes, underpinned by exemplar quotes to support the findings.

3.4.1 An Amateur Environment that Required Change

  3.4.1.1 Amateur Behaviours and Lack of Quality Personnel. It was apparent in the data that the standards and understanding of what a 'professional elite' environment looked like was lacking. For example, players who had previously experienced professional environments elsewhere were not initially impressed with Hong Kong's answer to professional rugby. In particular, the social element was perceived to be too dominant, with players seemingly unaware of the standards required.

> Bit of a shambles - it was more of a social thing rather than a performance setting as much as we try to make it a performance setting. (P7)

The cultural ideals of Hong Kong rugby's amateur past seemingly transitioned into the new professional program and in a similar conflict previously identified by Clausen et al. (2018) was at odds with certain players who knew what professionalism should look like. Operational PM processes were clearly lacking at this stage with the need to address the environment (i.e., the expected behaviours of a professional player) and to adapt the culture away from amateur standards.

  In addition, the quality of the initial cohort of players was questioned by players, specifically those with previous professional experience, 'Some of the players didn't deserve to be there' (P3) and 'if they weren't in Hong Kong, they wouldn't be on a professional contract.' (P11). The ERP's human capital resource - so pivotal for successful high-performance environments (Wagstaff, 2019b) - was somewhat deficient in the early stages of the ERP. A context specific challenge to the strength of the ERP's human capital was also identified. The privileged experience of players growing up in Hong Kong seemed to leave them with a lack of understanding around what is meant to work hard. The HoERP and SP identified the 'home grown' players as potentially inhibiting the wider group culture.

> We can see that with the men, they're doing what they think is high performance or they think they're working hard but they're not really - is just the Hong Kong guys are not intentionally that way and they don't know what they don't know and the upbringing for some of them was very different - that hard edge part of it is missing. (SP)

The negative impact of the Hong Kong born group in particular was also recognised by the playing group with references made to their inability to accept harsh feedback, being described as 'precious,' (P10) with one senior player recognising the impact of being brought up with domestic help and subsequently 'used to having things done for you' (P3). Arguably this could stunt the psychological characteristics required to succeed at the top level in sport (e.g., Collins & Macnamara, 2017). Interestingly there were no reciprocal comments made by Hong Kong born players about their overseas teammates.

3.4.1.2 Lack of Vision. There was a reported rudderless approach in the early stages of the ERP that did not go unnoticed by the players with comments of a program 'finding its feet' (P8) and being 'disjointed' (P5). One of the players remarked how the group wanted to feel galvanised towards a vision but as his colleague below reflected that coherent direction at this stage was lacking.

> Because it was so new I don't think there was a significant driving goal - there are procedures and rules that guys stuck to - but not the driving goals everyone wanted to achieve and the centralised training around that goal…I found it more group of individuals or club players pulled together but not seeing themselves as a team so not really giving their all. (P5)

Having a clear vision is the foundation of building a high-performing culture and of cultural change across sport and organisational domains (Cruickshank et al, 2014; Warrick, 2017; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). It is also a central process within Strategic PM and a key

organisational capital resource, without which shaping the expected behaviours and galvanising a group is not possible to achieve.

3.4.1.3 Lack of Professional Facilities. Reinforcing the amateurish nature of the ERP during the initial months was the physical environment (i.e., the facilities in which the athletes trained and work). Both the former and new professional players voiced their disapproval of the gymnasium that they shared with the general public, as well as lacking a specific space for their exclusive use.

> Because of the nature of our environment it just felt a little bit disjointed and therefore didn't feel fully professional. Having never been in a professional environment I'd always imagined an elite kind of area but in those first few months you'd be gymming in the public gym and resting between sets and a little old lady would come past and put her towel down and at times I thought is this what professional rugby is? (P3)

The operational components of the ERP, specifically their physical capital resource, was clearly inadequate in the early stages of the ERP and is a critical consideration for elite professional teams (Cruickshank et al., 2014). In addition, the operational failings also impacted the human capital with frustration clearly evident from the player's quote.

3.4.2 ERP's Professional Culture Building Blocks.

3.4.2.1 Establishing a Vision. A key component for Strategic PM is establishing a vision and this was one of the first tasks of the newly appointed HoERP. The outcome goal for the ERP group was to gain qualification for the Rugby World Cup 2019. By ensuring an understanding of the team's direction through an articulated vision, the HoERP demonstrated best practice for cultural change (Cruickshank et al., 2014). The key process for achieving their outcome goal was simple - the ERP was all about hard work.

> This is our end goal and how we going get there. I need you to work hard - this is how we potentially can get there, but I need your buy in (HoERP)

The simplicity of the HoERP's vision was particularly significant for the ERP when considering the multinational makeup of the squad with the HoERP recognising the need for 'all the guys to be on the same page, pulling in the same direction.' As part of the vision, the HoERP not only shared his end goal (i.e., Rugby World Cup qualification) he also outlined strategies towards that goal and the expected work ethos (i.e., hard work). According to Wagstaff (2019b) hard work should be prioritised ahead of relying too heavily on the myth of individualism and was also revealed as one of the foundational pillars in a number of other elite sports and TDEs (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016; Henriksen et al., 2010a; Hodge et al., 2014). This was a critical step for the ERP in addressing its previously inhibiting organisational capital resource by explicitly identifying the non-negotiable behaviours required within a professional culture.

3.4.2.2 Educating and Demonstrating What Professionalism Looked Like. An important element of HoERP's vision was to educate the inexperienced professionals as to what was expected of them as professional player as he illustrates below.

> So going back to the directive approach first thing we had to do was to get them (the players) used to working hard, understanding what hard work was and understanding that there was a basic requirement for a professional regarding time keeping, dress code that everyone had to buy into, coaches included.

This necessary education was a means with which the HoERP sought to improve the capability of his players through individual PM and an example of him demanding more from the human capital resource of the ERP. The players soon experienced these demands firsthand with a significant shift in the expectations and physical requirements as one of the new professional players graphically accounts.

> There was just a sudden spike in what we were doing, and the players were mature enough to know that the holiday was over so to speak. That was the turn. It was a

Thursday morning and we saw 'habits.' And we thought it was a presentation on how

we could be better professionals. Forty-five minutes later, three of the lads were

throwing up on the roof! (P3)

Due to the early career nature of the HKRU's professional athletes, previously

highlighted by Hall et al. (2019), providing consistent reminders of the expectations of the

players was paramount. One player acknowledged that there was still improvements to be

made in this area when suggesting everybody was professional when 'on the clock' but was less

assured professional behaviours were lived outside the environment, 'The most important thing

being a professional is what you do when no one is watching…some guys find a way not to

work' (P8). This particular quote indicates a lingering amateur mindset of the players with

behaviours that go against the characteristics of a winning culture defined by a demand for

winning habits on a *daily* basis (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017).

3.4.2.3 Establishing Buy In. A crucial element of strategic PM and operational PM is

to ensure alignment of vision and to engender an understanding of the context. The HoERP

achieve this through establishing buy in across the playing group by explaining the 'why'

behind the vision. This is a well-supported strategy within the change literature (Cruickshank

et al., 2015) and was appreciated among the players.

The good thing is there is a rationale to why we work hard. I understand why we do

things and how it relates to the game. (P8)

The importance of providing a purpose behind the change in expected behaviours and

how this linked to performance potentially played a crucial role in ameliorating individuals

uncertainty and reducing the negative perceptions associated with change (Rock, 2009). In

particular, the specificity to game demands referred to both physiological and cognitive

perspectives where the coaches attempted to create the same stresses and pressure demands as

those experienced in competition by encouraging players to 'feel comfortable in being

uncomfortable.' (P6). This is a strong indication of effective individual PM and from the RBV, challenging players in this way is an example of the HoERP using a strength in the ERP's human capital resource (i.e., his specific coaching expertise) to improve the playing resource. A similar philosophy was adopted by Urban Meyer in his American Football College program where through practice he aimed to provoke, 'chaos, confusion and conflict' (Coffee & Meyer, 2017, p. 99) to prepare his athletes for the challenges of competition.

3.4.2.4 The Balance of Hard Work with Well-Being and Holistic Development

3.4.2.4.1 Well-Being.   In a further example of individual PM and maximising the human capital resource, the HoERP stressed the importance of balancing the need for driving the players and staff towards performance outcomes with care and well-being - a challenge according to the Competing Values Framework that argues by driving performance, well-being would be hindered (Choi et al., 2008). The well-being focus also emphasised how central human capital was to the culture of the group and helped the ERP athletes enrich their buy in towards the vision. The care shown to the ERP players was particularly important given the number of players who originated outside of Hong Kong, subsequently lacking the close support networks of their home country, and those players who were transitioning into professional rugby. The two quotes below highlight the importance of these points respectively

> When I first moved here it was hard…Training a certain way but then playing in a different set up. I've found it tough initially missing my family - but I wasn't the kind of guy to reach out…For my first 2 years I did miss home so much and at the start it's a strain financially. (P8)

> Like a sit down with the coaches and tell the players why they've been brought into the program and not to get too fussed with being a professional athlete. Just go out there and do your job on the weekend. If I had heard that from the start…not to get too caught up and trying to do everything. (P11)

Firstly, isolation from family and friends may lead to a 'culture shock' where, combined with the impact of learning unfamiliar training and playing philosophies, can result in the athlete feeling overwhelmed (Schinke & Park, 2016). In contrast to the recommendations of Schinke and McGannon (2014), there were no defined strategies within the ERP to help mitigate the impact of cultural shock, rather more informal fact finding and communication from both the HoERP and the playing group. A similar relational gap in the individual PM was also identified with a lack of role clarity identified in the second quote. The transition from amateur to professional can be turbulent and fraught with uncertainty (Sanders & Winter, 2016) so ensuring players have clarity in their role can help mitigate the negative impact of this transition through a boost in job satisfaction, self-confidence and commitment to the group for example (Benson et al., 2016). An aspect of both the individual and operational PM of the ERP, and a recognised strength, was the management of player's training load as they transitioned to professional training.

> To be fair my load was managed well so that was a good part of my integration from you guys. (P1)

In a positive functional demonstration of well-being, players integrating into the program, particularly from non-rugby roles, had their workloads carefully monitored to mitigate early injury risk. The management of workload was consistent across the squad forming a key part of the program's injury prevention protocol (Gabbett, 2016).

3.4.2.4.2 Holistic Development. The care for the ERP players also extended through the holistic approach of the HoERP who promoted an 'earn or learn' philosophy where players were encouraged to engage in further education, part time work or similar continued professional development outside of their core hours as a professional rugby player. The HoERP recognised this policy as critical arm of the ERP's professional culture.

And then the personal things they 'earn and learn' - the development of the players outside. That comes back to my personality as a coach - I describe myself as a directive coach, but I've also got that holistic welfare at heart as well for the coaching group and the playing group. So, within that driving concept of working hard and striving we need that balance outside in terms of their CPD and general well-being.

Articulated in the above quote the HoERP displays a caring element to his coaching, or a 'driven benevolence' (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016, p. 233) as he aims to develop the whole person, a strategy recognised as one that can enhance athletic performance (Fisher et al., 2019).

This holistic approach reflects a strong organisational capital resource as well as a positive example of how the HoERP looked to improve the capacity of his players through individual PM. The ERP players were appreciative of the opportunity in developing a dual career and recognised the benefits of having a 'positive distraction' away from the rugby environment as one of the players, who recently completed a postgraduate certificate, testifies to.

You can get consumed in an environment and it becomes the be all and end all so it's encouraged to have different avenues…it also means that when you come back to this environment you're back in it fully because you've taken your mind away from rugby even though you're busy you've refreshed yourself from rugby. (P3)

3.4.3 Leadership Strategy and Managing Key Stakeholders Through Change

3.4.3.1 Top-Down Leadership – Transactional and Coach Driven. The HoERP was the primary architect for change in the first 12 months and initially adopted a transactional approach in driving the vision. This was recognised by the players with the following quote reinforcing a perceived top-down approach.

Coaches were the key drivers at the start. There weren't many players taking ownership at the start. (P10)

Some researchers report a preferred leadership approach would be transformation in nature, where players are inspired and empowered (Northouse, 2013). In reality multiple leadership styles may be necessary, adapting a suitable style to the given situation (Arnold et al., 2012). In this instance, a transformation approach was arguably inappropriate for a group of players who had lacked direction for six months and for a group, that in the HoERP's own words, required galvansing. Instead, a more transactional approach was perhaps the more prudent in early stages at least.

The HoERP also recognised the important role his support staff would play in driving the change early on. He subsequently ensured clarity among the staff with the new agenda and way of operating, freely admitting the need to 'ruffle a few feathers.'

> I knew I couldn't affect the players in the ERP on my own…It was important to get the staff aligned ASAP hence giving the coaches, medical and S&C staff a pretty torrid time in those initial months to get those in the same way of thinking…my management at times could have been a lot more user friendly. There were times when I really pushed and upset you, but I don't think I ever lost the group.

The socially dominating behaviour is an example of a 'darker approach' to the HoERP's leadership and a performance-based ruthlessness that according to Cruickshank and Collins (2015) is an important part of a leader's repertoire and seen as a key strategy to elite coaching. The ability to switch between leadership approaches is a central element of PM and a characteristic of serial winning coaches with the capacity to be 'ruthless but not heartless' (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016, p. 235) another key human capital resource that the HoERP demonstrated.

3.4.3.2 Transitioning to Bottom-Up Leadership. After the first 12 months, the HoERP gradually began using the players to drive change among the group – a vital step given

the positive association between high quality athlete leadership and team effectiveness (Leo et al., 2019) and one recognised by the SP.

> The coach can't keep driving it – it has to become men led really quickly. The coach might have to jump in and challenge people occasionally, but you want a good leadership group that's prepared to die more than anybody else. The other men will follow. But if the leadership group don't go there, then you're f****d.

The HoERP however purposefully delayed the switch from a directive to a more collaborative leadership approach until he felt the group were ready for such a responsibility. Even then it was the HoERP who selected a player group that *he* deemed suitable to drive the new culture forward – a common approach for coaches (Fransen et al., 2019) and one supported by Price and Weiss (2011). This is arguably somewhat Machiavellian giving the perception that the players had a voice where in reality, during the early stages at least, the HoERP was predominant in driving the program (Cruickshank et al., 2014).

The switch initiated by the HoERP to a shared leadership occurred in the final 12 months leading into the Rugby World Cup Repechage where the HoERP facilitated the anonymous election of a peer-selected group called the 'Sing Leung' (translated 'becoming the dragon'). This switch was an important landmark in the transition to a professional culture and has been shown as a valuable tool for coaches (Fransen et al., 2017; Gulak-Lipka, 2016; Wang et al., 2014). The HoERP's dispersed leadership approach, where leadership skills and responsibilities are shared between the leader and follower (Gordon, 2010), may have also reflected his opinion that the human capital resource (the players) were ready for this responsibility. Each of the selected leaders were responsible for between six to eight players on field performance as well as off-field well-being – a critical focus in recent high-performance culture research (Wagstaff, 2019a). Using this leadership format is an important process in relation to change and team culture development. Through the integration of

individual and leadership elements of PM the dispersed leadership approach potentially leant itself to personal disclosure, mutual sharing and social connections that may have engendered a further sense of psychological safety, reducing the potential of seeing the cultural change as a threat and reinforcing buy-in towards the vision (Straglas, 2012).

3.4.3.3 External Stakeholder Support. One of the key factors in driving the change was garnering support from external stakeholders regarding the long-term validity of Hong Kong Rugby's first professional program.

There's a reality – you've got to get the results first. If we hadn't had some early success, I question whether we'd have had the flexibility of budget – winning gives you some leverage. Couple of good wins and the perceived image that the professional game was the right thing to do in Hong Kong and we could then start to look at longevity as well. But you've got to get the short term right first. (HoERP)

The quote above refers to the positive perception assumed by Hong Kong Rugby's Board of Directors - many of whom were skeptical of the program and its projected spend - as a consequence of the ERP's early success, and with it a more flexible budget with which to operate. This importance of achieving immediate success was also shared by Gareth Southgate - England's Football Manager - whose early results afforded him the time to make further improvements and changes (Humphrey & Hughes, 2020a-present). As the HoERP went about his business of change he continually sought to manage not only the HKRU's Board Directors but also the individual Premiership Head Coaches and Premiership Chairmen through formal and informal meetings. This is a well-established tactic in change management (Cruickshank et al., 2014) and by proactively sharing the vision with key people represents a fundamental element of strategic PM and, when managed successfully, building strong relationships with key stakeholders can be a crucial organisational capital resource.

3.4.4 Evidencing and Reinforcing the Change

3.4.4.1 Developing the ERP's Physical Environment and the Use of Symbols to Reinforce Change.

3.4.4.1.1 Brand New Facility. Arguably the most significant symbol for reinforcing the change of culture within the ERP was a stark improvement in its physical capital resource with relocation to a purpose-built training facility. Previously identified as an aspect that was stifling the progression of the ERP's high-performance culture, the players were far happier with their new surroundings as one of the players comments.

> Everything was on one site. One thing I thought was better was you got there and that was our base. You had your food there, we have meetings there, the officers were there, the physios were there. The gym was well equipped. Once you were there it paved the way for a more professional environment. (P5)

Having access to their own facility significantly reinforced the new professional ethos of the ERP with one of the players further commenting how the switch to the new facility signified the real start on their World Cup journey, 'For me that was when it (clicks fingers) right then, we're giving this a good old crack now' (P3). Further, by centralising the training facility it improved the potential for generating greater team interaction fostering closer bonds (Seanor et al., 2017) as this players quote below indicates.

> So, location and centralising the training centre enabled a more professional feel, closer bonds and probably by that time we understood what we wanted to achieve…all our meetings were there, or analysis and we could clip things and show it to everyone. It was our space - it was our home. (P5)

An important resource for the HKRU in this context is the substantial financial capital resource created through the HKRU's running of the annual Hong Kong Sevens event. The monies from the event - reportedly nearly US$30million (Careem, 2019) – would have been invaluable when building a new training facility.

3.4.4.1.2 The Use of Symbols Throughout the Training Facility.   The use of symbols and symbolic actions to reinforce the change were utilised throughout the facility and the day-to-day program as the following two players recognised.

> The keywords around the gym, all the keywords on the wall - you're probably bloody reading that everyday subconsciously without even realising it at the time. (P10)
>
> We used to have the dragon as man of the match, and I think that stuff is great in encouraging effort and trying to increase your performances. (P3)

The keywords are messages around the gym and training areas, as part of the improving operational performance of the ERP, reinforced the hard-working ethos of the group and a tactic utilised in another high performance and development environments (Martin & Eys, 2019; Pim, 2016). With reference to the second quote, as well as using the dragon as a man of the match award, a number of Chinese phrases were used through the ERP. Attempting to link with the Chinese culture of Hong Kong through language and symbols was appreciated by one of the Hong Kong born players.

> Being a Hong Kong kid, being born here, when I hear 'Gai Yau' and we talk about Sing Leung and the dragon warrior it's very particular and just adds to Hong Kong's culture. It's good that we're doing it because we're such a multi-national group, lots of Kiwis, Saffers, but we're playing for Hong Kong and that's the one thing we can all relate to. I think that's a really important. (P4).

Further use of the dragon as a symbol included a 'Dragon's Heart' group emphasising past player successes, as well as representing key elements of the ERP's playing philosophy - both being recognised by the players in reinforcing the professional change of the ERP. An important element to these symbols was the fact they were created by the group and driven informally in such a way that had been previously shown to impact success (Cole & Martin, 2018).

3.4.4.2 Positively Reinforcing the Change

3.4.4.2.1 Performance Outcome Measures.   The ultimate purpose of change is improved performance with the ultimate measure of successful change being performance outcome (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a). As the quotes below from one of the players and the HoERP indicates, in the face of some strong results there was belief from within the group that the changes implemented had worked.

> I think if you looked at the results in the buildup to the repechage there were games that we won fairly comfortably, be it Korea or Malaysia, and then the Cook Islands and they were games where we completely blew people off the park (P6)

> Everything that I've thought about prior to coming was happening! We put distance between Korea and closed the gap on Japan. (HoERP)

The victories described by the player were in the same year as the World Cup Repechage competition so perhaps understandably positively impacted the group's belief leading into the critical tournament. Crucially however, similar outcomes resulted 12 months prior with the HoERP admittedly feeling shocked about the swift progress that was made in reaching their performance goals. The importance of the ERP's 'instant' success cannot be understated as this is known to encourage a swifter acceptance of change (Cruickshank et al., 2014). The positive results described above are perhaps the strongest indications that the individual PM of the ERP had improved with the collective advancement in players' capabilities and capacity. Also, the organisational and human capital resources were seemingly aligned - coach and player - in producing the much-needed early victories.

3.4.4.2.2 Visible Accountability.   Aside from performance outcomes of international games, finding more regular process measures to highlight the success of the cultural change was also crucial as the HoERP ardently explains in the quote below.

Feedback is important and you know how much I drive verbs and measures. I've heard and used so many bullshit expressions – 'that was a good session' or 'we need more intensity.' How do we know unless you can measure it? By trying to measure as much as we could it gave players a marker.

In an example of effective operational PM, the performance markers provided hard evidence that progress was being made. By continually reinforcing and showing the expected standards, players became accountable in attaining certain effort levels in both games and at training. Along with the coach's eye, GPS running data and effort scores from games - counting the number of instances a player was involved in - a triangulation of measures reinforced the central vision of working hard with players reaching the required standard having their scores colored green in recognition. These scores were posted in the training facility and, as a recognised method in reinforcing performance optimising practices (Cruickshank et al., 2013), helped to drive the competitiveness amongst the squad.

Another positive indicator that the change in culture had been a success was the turnover of players, a somewhat surprising positive indicator given the negative impact that too much turnover can have in the culture of the group (Brown & Arnold, 2019).

There were also casualties along the way because the program became too intense - the challenge wasn't for everyone. It was an indicator that it was a tough program and you had to work hard to hang on in there. (HoERP)

Players leaving the ERP was another visible sign of the need for individuals to be accountable for their effort level. Players were removed from the program if they were consistently failing to reach the demands of being in the ERP. This purportedly *positively* impacted the ERP, helping to shape the shared behaviours within the group towards achieving the agreed markers, as summed up by the team captain, 'As you saw there were cuts during that period and I think people then realised shit, this isn't a mess about this is serious.' (P7)

3.4.5 Managing the Ongoing Challenges Associated with the ERP's Professional Culture.

An interesting feature of this study were the ongoing emerging challenges within the ERP as the culture evolved from amateur to professional. The six challenges were; a) performance pressure; b) player leadership group's message disconnect; c) the lack of competition; d) management of troublesome players; e) the need for ongoing clarity on the vision and f) fully integrated identity.

3.4.5.1 Performance Pressure. In the pressure of the World Cup Repechage high levels of stress were reported by five of the players that may have negatively influenced the organisational capital of the ERP as described by the team's PS.

> What I felt, I thought that everyone was working really hard to try to be perfect and not f**k it up. It was an environment where I felt there was tension and maybe some anxiety about not wanting to f**k it up or not lose or not perform and look like we weren't functioning.

The pressure to perform was palpable with feelings of anxiety, detected by the SP, typical of high-stake situations (Nieuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2017). The stress experienced by coaches - also detected by the SP - can impact the players too through the emotional contagion effect (Wagstaff et al., 2012). This was evidenced by one of the playing squad who commented, 'I think the emotional stress people were under eventually took away from performances.' (P9) This perhaps reinforces the need for coaches to be aware of their emotional state and its interdependency in coach-coach and coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

The experiences outlined through this period by players and the SP strongly suggests the pressure of competition affected coach behaviours. An important consideration however is the impact of failing to qualify had on the playing group's reflections of this time. While it

would be imprudent to completely dismiss the perceptions of the players, the extent to which the reflections are a true representation of the ERP's environment during this phase may have been impacted through the performance-cue effect (Lord et al., 1978) where followers tend to rate leaders behaviours based on outcome. The HoERP was acutely aware of this.

> The one thing that never fails to amaze me is form and results within a professional environment. Winning has so much of an impact on the mood and on people's perception - perception is very time based. If you're winning everything is great, if you're losing everything is crap.

3.4.5.2 Player Leadership Group's Message Disconnect. According to the HoERP there was disconnect between the messages from the coaching team and their dissemination, through the player leaders – the Sing Leung Group - to the other players.

> The other thing we learned was the selected leaders needed educating too on how to communicate with the rest of the group. There was real clarity among the coaching staff and leadership group, but they weren't conveying the messages back to the wider group, so the level of clarity perhaps didn't exist to the level I thought because I didn't realise the (Sing Leung) guys were not conveying the message. (HoERP)

Through the PM framework this indicates a breakdown in the leadership of the performance team and a further reminder of the early career nature of the ERP's players - a fact noticed by the SP who, while applauded the way in which the ERP promoted players to drive the culture endogenously, also observed the limitations of the ERP's human capital resource, 'You just haven't got 10 All Blacks in your crew that you can ask to be surrogate coaches and coach the players through peer coaching.'

3.4.5.3 A Lack of Competition. Due to the lack of playing numbers in Hong Kong the ease with which some players were selected for the national team was a potential destabilising source of the ERP's hard work culture and possibly devalued the achievement of being selected.

This was highlighted by over half of the playing participants - articulated in one of the player's quotes below.

> You also lose the honour of the jersey itself. It's too easy to get the jersey - you don't have to beat anyone to get the jersey - like me, straight into it. (P8)

Slight improvements had already begun however, an indication of much needed improvements in human capital resource. Three of the playing participants for example acknowledged that pressure for places were starting to increase with more quality players with previous professional experience becoming eligible for Hong Kong and more quality Hong Kong qualified players being sourced.

3.4.5.4 Management of Troublesome Players. It also emerged from the players' perspective that a small number of 'troublesome players' were not conforming to the ERP's professional behaviours.

> A few people's behaviours in the group are going to be difficult to change but the union needs them more than they need the union. (P7)

The quote makes reference to the challenging demands of managing players who may have particular performance value to the team, but who are also potentially disruptive. This is especially challenging in Hong Kong with a lack of playing numbers and while short-term performance benefits may be experienced the long-term implications of a troublesome player on group cohesion can be destructive (Leggat et al., 2018). Looking at this challenge from another perspective, there is a clash of an individual potentially holding high human capital value but also diminishing the organisational capital resource due to their inconsistent compliance.

3.4.5.5 The Need for Ongoing Clarity on the Vision. The need for ongoing clarity is particularly important in Hong Kong with again reference of the multinational makeup of the

squad, ensuring *all* players are clear about the direction. This can be a challenge at times as recognised by one of the players when referring to the diverse dynamic of the ERP.

> A weakness though is the common understanding of certain things- some people think one thing is acceptable and others might not. Different ways of doing things in certain areas so potential challenges getting everyone on the same page. (P5)

The HoERP acknowledged the importance in considering individual differences but strikes a careful balance and refers to a 'cultural box' whereby individuals' beliefs and backgrounds are sidelined once training and/or the game has begun and 'reclaimed' once complete. This is an interesting tactic to potentially mitigate the confusion that can be caused in culturally diverse squads due to differing values, goals and beliefs (Maderer et al., 2014). By centering all players towards a key goal (i.e., the expected behaviours professional athlete), irrespective of their cultural background, can be crucial in augmenting cohesion in multicultural teams (Khomutova, 2016). In this way the diversity of the ERP's human capital resource becomes a genuine competitive advantage rather than a hindrance.

Another important consideration regarding the vision of the ERP is the need for it to be continually revisited, reinforced, and at times adjusted as this quote from their HoERP expresses.

> There's an assumption that all players know what we're all about, but it's become apparent over the last couple of weeks that they are not. So, it's almost starting again at the next level to ensure we have the same level of clarity as phase one, the same level of buy-in, people are working as hard and it's all driven to the next World Cup outcome.

At the time of the interviews the ERP group were in the early stages of their next World Cup (2023) cycle and, as advised by Moran and Brightman (2001), were at the critical juncture to review and revise their direction and goals. Based on the feedback from the HoERP and players it was evident the ERP group were ready for new direction, a new vision and clarity.

3.4.3.6 Fully Integrated Identity. Linked to the clarity of vision is the need for an integrated identity. While the HoERP drove the cultural change through symbols associated with Hong Kong not all players were convinced of their practical impact.

> The whole idea got lost. The idea of Hong Kong and being the dragon and stuff is great, but the dragon was never used, we never had calls related to the dragon. There was no link apart from having a picture on the wall. That had potential to help develop our culture but wasn't as effective as it should have been. (P7)

Despite the dragon's close association with Hong Kong its use was perhaps not optimised and highlights the importance of making symbols relatable and meaningful across the squad to fully embed change an enhancer collective buy in (Cruickshank et al., 2014). This seems particularly pertinent among Hong Kong's multicultural ERP group and was reinforced by one of the imported players.

> I think the biggest thing and the hardest thing is finding something that means something to everyone. It's finding something we can all say, that's important to me. It's very difficult but doable (P4).

3.5 Conclusion

In responding to the need for a greater understanding of how emerging nations might create a high-performing culture, the transition of Hong Kong's ERP from an amateur to professional program was examined. To the researcher's knowledge this was the first examination of a senior *emerging* sports program. In response to methodological recommendations (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012a; Junggren et al., 2018; Maitland et al., 2015; Wagstaff et al., 2012) the work focused on the perceptions of those individuals directly responsible for sporting performance, namely the players and the coach. Also, in assessing the perceptions of ERP's peripatetic SP, a holistic view of the transition of the ERP's culture was achieved. Emergent theoretical and applied implications will be presented.

3.5.1 Theoretical Implications.

Meeting the need for more elite sport research using both PM and RBV respectively, this current case offers a number of theoretical advances. Firstly, the unique combination of the two frameworks to investigate the ERP's transition from an amateur to professional culture. Secondly, the complimentary nature of PM and RBV that identifies key components of a high-performance environment (i.e. strategic, operational, individual and leadership) as well as the key sub sections beneath (i.e. human, organisational, financial and physical capital resources) proved invaluable in identifying the strengths of the ERP as well as being crucial in determining where improvements to the ERP could be made.

As a primary example, a critical strategic decision made by the HKRU appeared to be operationalising their financial capital resource, derived from the Hong Kong Sevens event. To illustrate, monies from the sevens event were used to enhance the ERP's physical resource in the shape of a purpose-built training facility. The players – who were also funded through the same financial resource - recognised the positive effect that having their own playing base had on ERP's cultural transition. Further operationalising of the HKRU's financial resource allowed them to acquire elite-level coaching expertise, as well as medical, performance analysis and lifestyle support staff with additional physical resources in the shape of GPS and performance analysis technology. While acquiring capital resource to fund a high-performance program is not exclusive to Hong Kong, it is potentially unique in the context of an emerging nation, particularly the *manner* with which the capital was acquired i.e., through the Hong Kong Rugby Sevens - an established and globally recognised sporting and entertainment event. Combined with its value, rarity and being non-substitutable the ERP's financial capital resource is arguably a core competitive advantage, assuming it can be utilised in impactful ways.

Combining the PM and RBV frameworks also revealed factors within the ERP that could be improved. For example, analysing the operational PM processes there appeared a

need for a more robust onboarding procedure of new professional and overseas players. Setting clear expectations of players in their new role was an organisational capital resource that was lacking. This absence of clarity in turn impacted the human capital resource prompting ambiguity for the individual. The integration of overseas players was purportedly ad hoc and another operational failing that required formalising. Recognising the role of the leader within the PM and RBV joint construct is essential and is their responsibility to ensure robust internal processes and procedures described above are in place. Further improvements in operational PM processes; specifically, internal processes and procedures and their impact on human capital, was the need to upskill the player leadership group. The message disconnect reported of the player leaders by the HoERP could have potentially impacted the consistency of key communication to the wider group and impacted the group's culture through a lack of understanding and risking a lack of buy-in to the vision.

3.5.2 Applied Implications

Several applied implications emerged from the research that, as expected, match those previously recommended for other high performance and TDEs. The congruence of key factors with established performance programs affirms the transferable 'go to' themes in establishing a high-performing culture. Namely, the importance of the leader setting a simple vision and steering the organisation towards the vision through non-negotiable behaviours; ensuring a balance of hard work and well-being; the holistic development of players and a leader who can vary their approach depending on the situation highlighting the adaptive practice of leadership. The last two factors are particularly pertinent for emerging nations. The ERP's 'Earn of Learn' program for instance may be relevant in other emerging contexts where, like Hong Kong, there may be limited opportunities for players to further their professional sporting career within the region/country so preparing for life after sport becomes even more shrewd. The ability for a leader to change their approach depending on the situation, for example managing up to Board

members or down to players, is another important consideration for emerging nations. If, like Hong Kong, the emerging nation's playing squad contains inexperienced professionals there may be a need for the leader to display more prolonged directive and transactional approaches carefully assessing, *a la* the HoERP, the appropriate juncture to shift towards a more transformational and shared approach. Further, the vital management of key stakeholders may also require a flexible leadership approach. Educating emerging nation Board members regarding realistic expectations and gaining support and buy in to the coach's vision may need 'darker approaches' as previously identified.

While 'boundaryless' themes were revealed, a chief consideration is also to acknowledge the nuanced implications for the emerging nations context where each environment may have its own unique and national sporting culture and where organisational aims need to 'fit' so they can leverage what is critical in order to gain a competitive advantage. More specifically, regarding the human capital resource of emerging nations, there may be a need to carefully manage 'troublesome players.' Specifically, due to a lack of playing numbers and/or quality personnel, such as reported in Hong Kong, an emerging nation may have to assess the balance of the player's 'on- field' ability, and subsequent positive impact on performance outcome, with their disruptive behavior and the impact of team cohesion and culture. While a troublesome player might expect to be removed in a Tier One context, in an emerging nation like Hong Kong, such behaviours may have to be pandered to if the player is performing on the pitch. Second, linked to a privation of playing numbers, in emerging nations there may be a lack of competition leading to complacency in performances with selection being assured. There may also be deficiencies within the competition structure that potentially stagnates the continued improvement of the group. Mitigating these effects are challenging and may include strategies such as the ERP's public display of effort and GPS scores from games and training helping to drive competition, accountability for progression and standards.

Finally, recognising the destabilising effect performance pressure can have on the environment is a vital consideration. For the ERP it was the final qualification stages of the 2019 Rugby World Cup. While the reports on the ERP players from this time may have painted a darker picture than the reality there was arguably sufficient evidence to alert future coaching behaviours to the importance of promoting effective relationships between coach and athlete - relationships that appeared strained at times due to the performance pressures. Further reminders too for the coaches to be more aware of the inevitable stress that they will face and its impact on their personal behaviours. This is specifically challenging for an emerging nation who may not have the opportunity to experience high-stake performances in high-pressure tournaments on a regular basis.

3.5.3 Reflections and Limitations

Firstly, one of the benefits of the study was the researcher's insider status through his role as one of the players' coaches. His presence throughout the ERP's transition and lived experience enabled a nuanced interpretation of the data that added to its richness. However, it is acknowledged the risk that this dual role may have had on impression management and while every effort was made to mitigate this impact it would be imprudent to the dismiss the notion that the researcher's role as a coach to the players may have impacted some of the players' perceptions. Second, the financial capital resource made available to the HoERP from the HKRU's central funds made certain elements of the transition 'easier.' Paying for the aforementioned customised training facility for example as well as the ongoing costs of monitoring systems such as GPS units and not to mention the expertise of the coaching support staff all had significant impact on driving the successful change to professionalism. Other emerging nations might not be able to boast such a resource so finding more cost-effective ways to drive the culture is fundamental. Finally, only a selection of ERP players were interviewed and caution must be made in generalising the opinions of the 11 players as a

representation of the entire ERP squad. Obtaining the views of board members to examine how they perceived the process of change would have also been a useful element to the results.

Future directions in this line of research may wish to consider further use of the theoretical constructs Performance Management and the Resourced Base View in *combination* as a lens through which to examine sporting domains. Specifically building on the findings of this research and to determine the extent with which they can be generalised across similar milieus, future research may also wish to broaden the understanding into the unique aspects and specific challenges of the emerging context, in other rugby programs as well as across differing team and/or individual sports.

3.6 Rationale for Study Two

Following the unique qualitative insight into the development of the ERP's team culture over a four-year period and in further meeting the thesis's first objective, the second part of the first phase of the research aims to quantitatively examine the *current* status of the ERP's culture. This quantitative approach affords an opportunity to present strengths of the ERP's culture and potential intervention strategies for aspects that may be perceived as weaknesses or areas to improve.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Formative Evaluation of Hong Kong's Elite Rugby Program Using the Talent Development Environment Questionnaire.

4.1 Introduction

It has been extensively reported in both academic and popular literature, the impact that creating an effective team culture can have on sporting performance and success across both talent development and high-performance environments (Henriksen, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Hughes, 2018). A high-performing culture has been defined as 'the shared perception and action of elite team members which a) supports sustained optimal performance, b) persists across time in the face of variable results and c) leads to consistently high performance' (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012b, p. 340). Pim (2016) outlined three key components that contribute to an effective high-performance culture namely, *structure, process* and *people.*

Structure begins with a vision – the essential first step within high performing and talent development environments (TDE) (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012a; Henriksen, 2015; Seanor et al., 2017) - and includes shared core values, standards and goals. Such standards might include fostering a learning environment (Seanor et al., 2017) and/or a focus on athlete well-being for example that incorporates the teaching of life skills (Vallée & Bloom, 2016), with goals striving for the next level of achievement (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016).

Process referred to the actions and activities taken to achieve clearly defined goals with emphasis placed on values being defined behaviourally (Pim, 2016). These behaviours might include demanding daily winning habits such as those displayed by the New Zealand All Blacks where each player aims to improve on their strengths, striving to be the best in the world *every* day (Hodge et al., 2014). Or the behaviours from Canadian collegiate athletes who placed huge emphasis on effort and hard work endeavouring to be 'BEST,' "Better Every Single Time." (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017, p. 506). Processes might also refer to the innovation of

training techniques and technologies as demonstrated in a high performance swimming environment (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016) as well as clearly defined roles and a focus on long term sustained performance (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012a).

Finally *people* was recognised as the most critical component ensuring the structure and process were optimised (Pim, 2016). Specific 'people' factors might include those of the leader who are fundamental in establishing the vision and an antecedent to creating an optimal team culture (Cole & Martin, 2018). Byrne and Cassidy (2017) for example highlighted how the Head Coach of Connaught Rugby worked to ensure clarity of the club's vision across the organisation. This is an equally important role for leaders of TDEs fostering a coherent team culture (Aalberg & Sæther, 2016). Other important 'people' factors may also include the *performers* themselves driving team culture from within. Empowering athletes in this way has been previoulsy identified as a key pillar to building a championship culture (Vallée & Bloom, 2016) and was evident of the rugby players in Manawatu Turbo's professional team (Cole & Martin, 2018) and for the athletes in a Canadian talent development trampoline club who made their own decisions about the trajectory and direction of their personal development (Seanor et al., 2017). Within the same trampolining environment, and a further example of player empowerment through shared leadership, the senior athletes played a crucial role in modeling the expected training habits to the younger performers who in turn reciprocated by continually motivating the senior athletes. A similar theme emerged in the examination of a high performance swimming environment where star performers' achievements were displayed on a honours board to inspire and motivate their peers (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016).

There are other factors that influence culture within sport organisations which Henriksen et al. (2010a; 2010b) referred to as the micro- and macro-levels and athletic and non-athletic domains. The micro-level refers to the environment where the athlete would spend a large proportion of their daily life such as the club environment, school, family and friendship

groups (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b). The macro-level represents the social settings which affect but do not contain the athletes such as sport federations, the media and education systems as well as the values and cultures (national and sport specific) to which the athlete belong (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b). Finally, the athletic domain refers to the part of the athlete's environment that is *directly* related to their sport, in contrast to the non-athletic domain that represents all other spheres of an athlete's life (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b).

Assessing the extent with which these factors, and others, exist as part of an organisation's culture is often conducted inductively through qualitative methods such as research interviews (Jung et al., 2009). However, quantitative approaches have also shown to be an important methodological approach given their systematisation, repeatability, comparability, convenience and large scale capability that is unobtrusive and cost-effective (Tucker et al., 1990). It is argued that the interest and growth in the use of quantitative methods for assessing organisational culture reflected the growing interest in the concept through the 1980s, driven by individuals from consultancy backgrounds who favoured the relative swiftness with which quantitative instruments could be administered and evaluated (Jung et al., 2009). Also, the numerical data obtained from quantitative methods can help to facilitate comparisons between organisations and/or groups, as well as provide a more broad evaluation of the culture through, for example, identifying strengths and weaknesses helping to inform potential interventions (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). In a comprehensive review of quantitative instruments that purportedly examined and assessed organisational culture, Jung et al. (2009) identified 70 instruments. These tools were predominantly developed for the US and UK audience across business, education and healthcare domains (Jung et al., 2009).

Most instruments focus on either a specific type of culture or an organisation's overarching culture with two predominant purposes; 1) stand-alone instruments used for cultural explorations as an end in itself and 2) diagnostic instruments that identify and assess

existing cultures, aiming to align them with the characteristics of 'best practice' high-performing cultures (Jung et al., 2009). In both cases the locus of examination can be individual or organisational wide and can be either dimensional or typological. Dimensional instruments mirror the array of dimensions put forward in the many definitions of organisational culture. The focus is on tangible and intangible aspects that correlate to improved performance such as beliefs, emotions, goals, identity, values, internal and external environment as well as structures and practices (Jung et al., 2009). Typological instruments on the other hand utilise dimensions in assigning an organisation's culture to a specific typological group (Jung et al., 2009).

In distilling Jung et al.'s (2009) list of 70 culture assessment instruments a number of scholars (Howard, 1998; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1991; Schein, 1996; Xenikou & Furnham, 1996) have identified four questionnaires that are widely used in organisational studies. Namely, a) Organisational Culture Inventory (OCIn), b) Organisational Culture Index (OCI), c) Competing Values Framework (CVF) and d) Organisational Culture Profile (OCP). The popularity of these instruments may be due to the common dimensions of organisational culture used across the four questionnaires, namely; cultural type, strength, management style and congruence (Choi et al., 2010). Three of these four - cultural type, strength and congruence - have been shown to be the most critical theoretical dimensions associated with higher degrees of performance (Cameron & Freeman, 1991). These four instruments will now be described to assess their applicability as a formative evaluation tool in a sport context. Given the typological nature of the OCIn, OCI and CVF they will be critiqued as a group, followed by a separate appraisal of the OCP.

The Organisational Culture Inventory (OCIn) was developed by Cooke and Lafferty (1983) and is the most widely used cultural assessment tool in the world, utilised across thousands of organisations and completed by over two million respondents (Balthazard et al.,

2006). The OCIn is a 96 item questionnaire used for organisation consulting and change purposes and is based from 12 sets of norms (eight items in each) that describe the behavioural and thinking styles that might be implicitly or explicitly needed to fit into an organisation (Cooke & Szumal, 2000). These norms specify the ways in which all members of an organisation are expected to approach their work (task focus) and one another (people focus) (Cooke & Szumal, 2000). On a scale of one to five the respondents are asked to indicate the extent with which each behaviour is expected or implicitly required of them and others. Reponses to the items are then used to drive estimates of the strength of each of the behavioural norms leading to an associated cultural type; Constructive, Passive/Defensive and Aggressive/Defensive (Balthazard et al., 2006). The focus on *behavioural* norms distinguishes the OCIn from other questionnaires and in doing so makes the concept of organisational cultured less abstract and easier for organisational members to understand and manage (Balthazard et al., 2006). According to Scott et al. (2003), other strengths of the OCIn, include its widespread use, its good face validity and the graphic illustration of results that helps to provide clear direction of change and assists members' motivation to accepting change (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988).

The Organisational Culture Index (OCI) was one of the first instruments developed (Wallach, 1983). The OCI was designed to measure corporate culture and has also been used in healthcare to assess the cultures and subcultures of hospitals and their relationship to commitment (Lok et al., 2005). The OCI describes organisational culture in three dimensions; bureaucratic, innovative and supportive with each dimension composed of eight items (Wallach, 1983) and can be used to determine the extent with which a person is the right 'fit' for the culture of an organisation (Delobbe et al., 2002).

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) completes the trio of typological instruments and is a popular cultural assessment instrument originally developed by Cameron and Quinn

(1999) for use in educational settings and has since been used in business and government domains (Choi et al., 2010). The CVF is widely used to assess the type, congruence and strength of organisational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The CVF assumes that an organisation possesses either a predominant internal or external focus, striving for individuality and flexibility or stability and control. These two dimensions create four cultural types (Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy) representing cultural values (Choi et al., 2010). The cultural profile developed with the CVF can be used to compare the current culture with an 'ideal version,' identifying imbalances and promoting discussion for improving and growth in each of the cultural types (Cameron & Quinn, 1999).

Given the aim of this paper is to evaluate a culture through identifying strengths and weaknesses and thus design suitable interventions, these typological tools - although valid instruments for identifying the type of culture, its values and an individual's fit - will not be used for this study. Additional limitations, and subsequently unsuitability for this research, include the OCIn's expense and complexity required to complete the questionnaire (Scott et al., 2003). Further there is no evidence of the OCIn and OCI being utilised in sport. Although the CVF *has* been validated for sporting contexts, for example Choi et al. (2008) establishing the link between job satisfaction and organisational culture in Korean professional baseball organisations, it still lacks the level of detail required to guide an intervention i.e. identifying strengths and weaknesses. (Scott et al., 2003).

The fourth widely used cultural assessment tool is O'Reilly et al's. (1991) Organisational Culture Profile (OCP). The original OCP comprised of 54 value statements that established eight dimensions of organisational culture and was designed to examine the congruence between individual's and organisational values to confirm an individual's fit within an organisation (Sarros et al., 2005). While the OCP has a strong reliability and validity rating (Sarros et al., 2005) the cultural dimensions it employs are specific to organisational contexts

and do not readily transfer into the sporting context. Also, in a similar way to the OCIn, given the OCP measures an individual's cultural fit with an organisation this would not be an appropriate tool for this current context given the research purpose and as such will not be used.

Recently in sport, the culture of effective Talent Development Environments (TDE) has been investigated through a series of case studies. Underpinned by Schein's (2017) Three Levels of Culture, Henriksen and colleagues (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b, 2011) and Larsen et al. (2013) used the Athlete Talent Development Environment (ATDE) Model and Environment Success Factors (ESF) working model to assess key features within athletic, sailing, kayaking and football TDEs. Shared features of these environments included training groups with supportive relationships, proximal role models, support of sporting goals by the wider environment, support for the development of psychosocial skills, training that allows for diversification, focus on long term development, strong and coherent organisational culture and integration of efforts (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017). While the methodological techniques used within these evaluations have produced very detailed environment assessment and guidance for future interventions (e.g., Henriksen, 2015; Larsen et al., 2013), they are time consuming and need to be driven by expert consultants.

Interestingly the implications from these in-depth case studies have significant overlap with the work of Martindale and colleagues, who previously identified key generic features of effective practice with TDEs (Martindale et al., 2005; 2007; 2010) and subsequently developed and validated an instrument to measure athlete experience of their TDE (Martindale et al. 2010). Martindale et al's. (2010) Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ) measures the key holistic and generic processes involved in effective development of individuals with the aim of facilitating sporting potential to world class standard. It was developed in line with standard guidelines for questionnaire development (Johnston et al.,

2003), comprising of an ecologically valid and reliable 59-item and 7-factor solution (Martindale et al., 2010):

1. Long Term Development Focus (24 items),

2. Quality Preparation (five items),

3. Communication (seven items),

4. Understanding the Athlete (four items),

5. Support Network (eight items)

6. Challenging and Supportive Environment (three items),

7. Long Term Development Fundamentals (seven items).

As mentioned, these seven factors closely resemble the key features identified in Henriksen and Stambulova,'s (2017) research into the culture of effective TDEs and as such arguably highlights the TDEQ's potential practicality as a cultural assessment tool. More specifically and linking with Schein's (2017) three layers of organisational culture, the TDEQ may help to reveal how certain aspects of the culture are expressed. For example, item 66 within the TDEQ, in referencing the extent with which athletes have the opportunity to talk to more experienced performers, might be referring to the artefacts of an organisation - what you can see, hear and feel - where role models are used to tell stories of how they achieved success. In a similar way, item 35 refers to the extent to which the coach cares about player well-being. This might be an expression of an organisation's espoused values, the norms that guide day-to-day behaviour, and the need for the coach to embody these values through a care for their athletes. Finally, there are items in the TDEQ that may hint to the basic assumptions within an environment. Item 16 for instance – my coach often reminds me what is expected of me – might be an expression of how a team's basic assumptions are imbedded through regular reminders of 'this is how we do things around here.'

Gangsø et al. (2021) has previously highlighted the potential in combining both Henriksen's qualitative assessment processes and Martindale's quantitative evaluation tool work to deepen our understanding of effective TDE culture. Further, there is notable alignment between Martindale et al's., (2010) Seven-Factors and Henriksen and Stambulova's (2017) features of effective TDEs with Pim's (2015) components of a successful high-performance culture; structure, people and processes.

Supporting the relevance and applicability of the TDEQ for this sporting context is its previous use in numerous talent development contexts. Importantly, the TDEQ has been used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different TDEs across sports, as well as to explore our understanding of effective practice (Brazo-Sayavera et al., 2017; Cupples et al., 2020; Gangsø et al., 2021; Ivarsson et al., 2015; Mills et al., 2014a; Wang et al., 2016). The tool has been used to inform, design and monitor evidenced based interventions within elite sport programs (Hall et al., 2019). As well as the TDEQ's practical use in identifying an environment's strengths and weakness, and its theoretical underpinning of its factors and items, the TDEQ has also been shown to be ecologically valid with an ability to distinguish between effective and less effective practice in real world applied settings (Gangsø et al., 2021; Martindale et al., 2013). The TDEQ, in contrast to the previously discussed cultural assessment instruments, appears to be an appropriate tool for this current sport context due to; 1) its focus on identifying environmental strengths and weaknesses to inform intervention needs; 2) its factors and items are representative of effective TDE culture in sport and 3) the evidence of strong ecological validity and reliability in this context and its applicability through a range of sports.

As Jung et al. (2009) acknowledged, it is the responsibility of the researcher to determine the most appropriate approach to fit the needs of their context. Consequently, given the arguments presented, the TDEQ is deemed a valid tool with which to carry out this research.

The aim of which is a quantitative evaluation of evidence-based features of an effective rugby talent development culture in Hong Kong.

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Participants and Procedure

Sixteen full time professional male rugby players centrally contracted by the HKRU to the ERP participated in the study. Players were from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Britain, France and Hong Kong and their ages ranged from 20 to 33 years old. The participants' professional playing experience in Hong Kong ranged from one to four years with 73% of the participants having had previous professional rugby experience outside of Hong Kong not exceeding four years. Twenty-seven percent of the participants had no prior professional experience.

Following ethical approval, all 32 full time players within the ERP were contacted via email by the researcher who was also the players' line manager as Head of ERP (HoERP). Each player was provided with a participant information form and had the opportunity to ask questions. Those players who volunteered to participate were provided an additional informed consent and arranged to complete the TDEQ at a convenient time during their working day, taking approximately 15 minutes to complete. Players were not required to provide demographic details in order to retain their anonymity and mitigate the potential of impression management (Gray, 2009).

4.2.2 Talent Development Environment Questionnaire

In keeping with the ongoing pragmatic approach of this thesis, where methods are used to address a specific problem (Giaccobi et al., 2005), the TDEQ was viewed as an applicable tool for this study. The TDEQ was designed and developed as a result of the growing need to understand and measure the processes of effective TDEs (Martindale et al., 2010, 2013). The foundation of this questionnaire was based on previous work by Martindale and colleagues

(Martindale et al., 2005, 2007) who identified four generic features of a TDE namely: 1) long term aims and methods; 2) wide ranging coherent messages and support, 3) emphasis on development rather than early success and 4) individual and ongoing development.

Due to the applied nature of this study, the original 59-item TDEQ was utilised to maximise ecological validity. For this type of research, as previously utilised by Mills et al. (2014a) and as recommended by Martindale et al. (2010), the TDEQ was examined on a factor by factor and item-by-item basis. Each item offered a six-point response scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, where a low score represents a strength and a high score a weakness. Adequate reliability and validity for the TDEQ has been previously demonstrated (Martindale et al., 2010; 2012).

As a *team* of coaches were responsible for the delivery of the rugby program within the ERP any question that referred to *My Coach* the players were asked to consider the Head of the ERP (HoERP) in their response. As a result of the need for context specific versions of the TDEQ (Mills et al., 2014) players were instructed to leave any questions that they considered to be irrelevant to their current experience blank. Due to the small number of participants items with any blank responses were left out of the analysis, leaving 57 items in total. As previously highlighted by Hall et al. (2019), with the early career nature of the players within the ERP, despite being a senior professional program, it is aligned more with a TDE which further supports its use specifically for this context.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

In line with previous research (Martindale et al., 2010), TDEQ responses were coded from one (strongly agree) to six (strongly disagree). For questions that were negatively framed the coding scale was reversed. Mean scores were established for every question with the top 20% (i.e., the lowest mean scores) perceived as strengths and the bottom 20% (i.e., the highest mean scores) highlighting areas for improvement. The Likert scale labels provide some

qualitative context to the mean scores, specifically one (strongly agree), two (agree), three (agree a little bit), four (disagree a little bit), five (disagree) and six (strongly disagree). Then, at an item level to help design an intervention strategy, using Hall et al.'s (2019) previous work as a guide, the author grouped the areas for improvement into themes.

4.3 Results

This section is structured in two parts. Firstly, descriptive statistics for each of the factors (see Table 4.1) followed by an item-by-item analysis of strengths and areas for improvement (see Table 4.2). The strengths of the ERP were reported across four factors: *long term development focus* (six items), *support network* (three items) with one item in both *long-term development fundamentals* and *quality preparation.* Areas to work on within the ERP were identified in six factors: four items in *long term development fundamentals* and three in *long term development focus*, two items in *communication* and *challenging and supportive environment* with one item in *understanding the athlete* and *quality preparation.* At an item level, the players perceived 11 strengths and 13 areas for improvement within the ERP - refer to Figure 4.1.

Table 4.1

Mean Factor Scores for Player Perceptions of the ERP

Factor	Number of Items	Mean Score	SD
Support Network	7	1.91	0.87
Long Term Development Focus	24	2.18	0.99
Quality Preparation	5	2.30	1.11
Understanding the athlete	4	2.38	0.85
Communication	7	2.45	0.98
Challenging and supporting environment	4	2.61	1.16
Long Term Fundamentals	6	2.89	1.25

Figure 4.1

Player's Perceptions of Strengths and Areas for Improvement in the ERP. Strengths are identified with a + and areas for improvement with a -

Long Term Development Focus (24 items)
+ My development plan incorporates a variety of physical preparation such as S&C, core, flexibility, agility, co-ordination, balance etc
+ My coach plans training to incorporate a wide variety of useful skills and attributes, for example, techniques, physical attributes, tactical skills, mental skills, decision making
+ My training is specifically designed to help me develop effectively in the long term
+ My coach constantly reminds me what he expects of me
+ My training sessions are normally beneficial and challenging
+ Organisation is a high priority to those who develop my training program
- My coach allows me to learn through making my own mistakes
- I am encouraged to keep perspective by balancing any frustrations I may have in one area by thinking about good progress in others (e.g. slow skill development but good strength gains or poor performances but good technical development
- If it didn't work out for me here, there are other good opportunities that would help me to keep progressing in my sport or related areas and other careers

Quality Preparation (5 items)
+ I am not taught that much about how to balance training, competing and recovery
- I feel pressure from my mates in sport to do things differently from what my coaches are asking of me

Challenging and Supportive Environment (4 items)
- I have the opportunity to train with performers who are at a level I am aspiring to
- I am regularly told that winning and losing just now does not indicate how successful I will be in the future

Long Term Development Fundamentals (6 items)
+ My progress and personal performance is reviewed regularly on an individual basis
- I am involved in the decision making process regarding my development
- I often have the opportunity to talk about how more experienced performers have handled the challenges I face
- I would be given good opportunities even if I experienced a dip in performance
- I am encouraged to participate in other sports and/or cross train

Understanding (4 items)
- My coach rarely talks to me about my well-being

Communication (7 items)
- I regularly set goals with my coach that are specific to my individual development
- My coach and I talk about what current and/or past world class performers did to be successful

Support Network (7 items)
+ I can pop in to see my coach or other support staff whenever I need to (e.g. physiotherapist, psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc)
+ My coaches and others who support me in sport are approachable (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc
+ Currently, I have access to a variety of different types of professionals to help my sports development (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc)

ELITE RUGBY PROGRAM

4.3.1 Factor-by-Factor Analysis

4.3.1.1 Support Network. This factor comprises of eight items and relates to the extent to which a coherent, approachable and wide-ranging support network is available to help support and develop the player across all areas (Martindale, et al., 2010). With a mean factor score of 1.91 this was the highest performing component within the ERP with 79% of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the quality of support experienced. The players specifically acknowledged the approachability ($m = 1.69$; SD = 0.79) and accessibility of their coach and support staff ($m = 1.38$; SD = 0.62) and the variety of support available within the program ($m = 1.69$; SD = 0.60). One of the items within this factor (Q.38 - My

coaches ensure that my school/uni/college understand about me and my training/ competitions) was not completed by the players as it was not considered to be relevant to this environment.

4.3.1.2 Long-Term Development Focus. Twenty-four items are contained within this factor and relate to the extent to which development opportunities are afforded to athletes that are specifically designed to facilitate long term success (e.g., on-going opportunities, rounded development and clear expectations). Items within this factor also relate to the attitudes, psychological skills and understanding required for long-term-progression (e.g. responsibility, dedication and coping skills; Martindale et al., 2010). With a mean subscale of 2.18 this factor emerged as the second highest performing component within the ERP with 81% of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the ERP was focussed on their long-term success. The players were particularly praising of the variety of physical preparation they experience with all but one participant either agreeing or strongly agreeing to this aspect of the ERP. Training was generally viewed as challenging and beneficial (m = 1.75; SD = 0.58) with 14 out of 16 players either strongly agreeing or agreeing that the training would assist their long-term development. With specific emphasis on the HoERP, he was seen as a supportive influence for the players (m = 1.94; SD = 0.68) as well as being good at highlighting players' personal strengths and weaknesses (m = 2.13; SD = 0.68) - 13 and 12 of the players agreed or strongly agreed with these coaching aspects respectively. Players in general (10 out of 16) also agreed or strongly agreed that the HoERP aimed to provide a rationale to their training (m = 2.13; SD = 0.81) but there was less of a consensus (under 50%) from players regarding the HoERP emphasising processes during training and competition over winning (m = 2.56; SD = 0.89). Despite the largely positive responses, 10 players agreed or strongly agreed that developing players are often written off before given a chance to show their true potential (m = 2.69; SD = 1.35) with less than a third of players agreeing that their chances of progressing in their career beyond the ERP in Hong Kong were strong (m = 3.06; SD = 1.29)

4.3.1.3 Quality Preparation. There are five items contained within this factor and refers to the extent to which clear guidelines and opportunities are in place to provide and reinforce quality practice through training, recovery and competition experiences (Martindale, et al., 2010). The overall mean for this factor was 2.30 and represented the third strongest factor of the ERP with only 11% of players disagreeing with the strength of their preparation. All items within this factor are negatively framed therefore high mean scores are acknowledged as a perceived strengths of the ERP and are reverse coded during data analysis. Fifteen players either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were not taught to understand the importance of recovery as part of their training ($m = 1.63$; SD $= 0.62$) - this was the strongest aspect within the factor. Eleven players also disagreed or strongly disagreement regarding the lack of clarity in their guidelines for progression ($m = 2.25$; SD $= 0.58$). The weakest element within this factor referred to the pressure the players felt from their peers to do things differently from what the HoERP asked ($m = 2.88$; SD $= 1.75$). Fifty percent agreed or strongly agreed with the presence of such pressure.

4.3.1.4 Understanding the Athlete. Four items make up this factor and relate to the extent to which the coach understands the athlete in depth, at a holistic level, and has developed a strong professional relationship with them (Martindale, et al., 2010). Fifty-eight percent of players agreed or strongly agreed with this notion and with a mean score of 2.38 this factor ranked fourth within the ERP. Congruent with the *quality preparation* factor, all questions were negatively framed hence a higher number refers to a positive perception are subsequently reverse coded as part of the data analysis. Eleven of the players disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were not helped to develop their mental toughness ($m = 2.13$; SD $= 0.72$), with the same level of disagreement regarding the lack collaboration between the HoERP with other support staff regarding player development ($m = 2.13$; SD $= 0.72$). Concerningly however, and

the weakest item within this factor, less than half of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the HoERP rarely talked to them about their wellbeing ($m = 2.75$; SD = 0.93).

4.3.1.5 Communication. This factor contains seven items that collectively relate to the degree with which the coach communicates effectively with players in formal and informal settings (Martindale, et al., 2010). As a factor, the quality of communications was one of the weaker aspects within the ERP ($m = 2.45$) although 62% of players still agreed or strongly agreed with the effectiveness of the coach's formal and informal communication. Specifically, all but three of the players agreed or strongly agreed that the HoERP regularly talked to them about progressing to the top level in rugby ($m = 2.00$; SD = 0.63) with a similar level of agreement regarding the planning for the players' next big test ($m = 2.06$; SD = 0.68). As the weakest item within this factor, 25% of players disagreed or strongly disagreed that the HoEP discussed what current and/or past world class performers did to be successful ($m = 3.38$; SD = 1.41).

4.3.1.6 Challenging and Supportive Environment. Four items are contained within this factor that relate to the degree with which players are appropriately challenged by, and supporting through, their development experiences (e.g., links to high standard players; Martindale, et al., 2010). This factor was one of the poorest rated within the ERP with a mean score of 2.61 with only 45% of players either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the level of appropriate challenge and support. While ten of the players agreed or strongly agreed that their part time work placement and/or university were supportive of their rugby ($m = 2.25$; SD = 1.00), over a third disagreed or disagreed a little that they were regularly told the winning and losing just now does not indicate how success they will be in the future ($m = 2.81$; SD = 1.33).

4.3.1.7 Long Term Development Fundamentals. There are seven items related to this factor that relate to the extent to which key features for effective development are embedded in the program (e.g., ongoing opportunities and athlete autonomy; Martindale, et al.,

2010). With a mean factor score of 2.89 this represented the weakest element within the ERP. Almost one third of players disagreed or strongly disagreed that key long term development features were indeed embedded within the ERP. Only six players agreed or strongly agreed that they were involved in the decision-making process regarding their development (m = 3.06; SD = 1.39). There was less agreement regarding the players opportunity to talk to more experienced players (m = 3.06; SD = 0.85), and – perhaps unsurprising for an elite professional program - the opportunities they would be given should they experience a dip in performance (m = 3.63; SD = 1.36). Similarly, and unsurprisingly given the context, 11 of the players disagreed somewhat how that they were encouraged to participate in other sports and/or cross train (m = 3.69; SD = 0.48). One of the items within this factor (Q44. My coaches make time to talk to my parents about me and what I am trying to achieve) was not completed by the players as it was not considered relevant to this environment.

4.3.2 Item Analysis

Similar to the process used by Hall et al. (2019), the top and bottom 20% for mean item scores were used to determine the specific strengths and areas for improvement of the ERP respectively – refer to Table 4.2. To help facilitate an intervention the areas for improvement were grouped into four themes (Hall et al., 2019), and shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2

The Perceived Strengths (light grey rows) and Areas to Improve (dark grey rows) of the ERP

Item	Mean	SD
Q.67 My progress and personal performance is reviewed regularly on an individual basis	1.38	0.50
Q.8 I can pop in to see my coach or other support staff whenever I need to (e.g. physiotherapist, psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc)	1.38	0.62
Q. 21 My development plan incorporates a variety of physical preparation such as S&C, core, flexibility, agility, co-ordination, balance etc	1.50	1.03
Q.47 I am not taught that much about how to balance training, competing and recovery	1.63	0.62
Q.49 My coach plans training to incorporate a wide variety of useful skills and attributes, for example, techniques, physical attributes, tactical skills, mental skills, decision making	1.69	0.70
Q.40 My training is specifically designed to help me develop effectively in the long term	1.69	0.87

Q.30 Currently, I have access to a variety of different types of professionals to help my sports development (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc)	1.69	0.60
Q.65 My coaches and others who support me in sport are approachable (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc	1.69	0.79
Q.16 My coach constantly reminds me what he expects of me	1.75	0.58
Q.40 My training sessions are normally beneficial and challenging	1.75	0.58
Q.37 Organisation is a high priority to those who develop my training programme	1.81	0.75
Q.34 I have the opportunity to train with performers who are at a level I am aspiring to	2.75	1.39
Q.42 I regularly set goals with my coach that are specific to my individual development	2.75	1.06
Q.35 My coach rarely talks to me about my well-being	2.75	0.93
Q.39 I am regularly told that winning and losing just now does not indicate how successful I will be in the future	2.81	1.33
Q.61 My coach allows me to learn through making my own mistakes	2.81	0.98
Q.51 I feel pressure from my mates in sport to do things differently from what my coaches are asking of me	2.88	1.75
Q.63 I am encouraged to keep perspective by balancing any frustrations I may have in one area by thinking about good progress in others (e.g., slow skill development but good strength gains or poor performances but good technical development	2.94	1.29
Q.43 I am involved in the decision making process regarding my development	3.06	1.39
Q.66 I often have the opportunity to talk about how more experienced performers have handled the challenges I face	3.06	0.85
Q.22 If it didn't work out for me here, there are other good opportunities that would help me to keep progressing in my sport or related areas and other careers	3.06	1.29
Q.18 My coach and I talk about what current and/or past world class performers did to be successful	3.38	1.41

Four items were grouped to form *Role Models & Peer Pressure*; I have the opportunity to train with performers who are at a level I am aspiring to; my coach and I talk about what current and/or past world class performers did to be successful; I feel pressure from my mates in sport to do things differently from what my coaches are asking of me; and I often have the opportunity to talk about how more experienced performers have handled the challenges I face. Three items formed *Clarity of Required Process-Focus*; I regularly set goals with my coach that are specific to my individual development; I am regularly told that winning and losing just now does not indicate how successful I will be in the future; and I am encouraged to keep perspective by balancing any frustrations I may have in one area by thinking about good progress in others (e.g. slow skill development but good strength gains or poor performances but good technical development). Finally, there were two items in both *Forward Planning and Welfare*; if it didn't work out for me here, there are other good opportunities that would help me to keep progressing in my sport or related areas and other careers; and my coach rarely talks

to me about my well-being and *Player Empowerment;* I am involved in the decision-making process regarding my development; and my coach allows me to learn through making my own mistakes.

Table 4.3

Intervention Themes for Areas of Improvement

Target Items	Intervention Theme
Q.34 I have the opportunity to train with performers who are at a level I am aspiring to	Role Models & Peer Pressure
Q.18 My coach and I talk about what current and/or past world class performers did to be successful	
Q. 51 I feel pressure from my mates in sport to do things differently from what my coaches are asking of me	
Q.66 I often have the opportunity to talk about how more experienced performers have handled the challenges I face	
Q.22 If it didn't work out for me here, there are other good opportunities that would help me to keep progressing in my sport or related areas and other careers	Forward Planning & Welfare
Q.35 My coach rarely talks to me about my well-being	
Q.42 I regularly set goals with my coach that are specific to my individual development	Clarity of Required Process-Focus
Q.39 I am regularly told that winning and losing just now does not indicate how successful I will be in the future	
Q.63 I am encouraged to keep perspective by balancing any frustrations I may have in one area by thinking about good progress in others (e.g. slow skill development but good strength gains or poor performances but good technical development)	
Q.43 I am involved in the decision-making process regarding my development	Player Empowerment
Q.61 My coach allows me to learn through making my own mistakes	

4.4 Discussion

The aim of this study was a quantitative evaluation of evidence-based features of an effective rugby talent development culture in Hong Kong. This section will present the ERP's strengths and areas for improvement as established from player perceptions using the TDEQ. As per Hall et al. (2019), areas for improvement were themed and will be used to help inform potential intervention strategies.

Overall, the strongest factor within the ERP, perceived by the players, was reported to be the robust *support networks* and secondly its *long-term development focus.* Within these two

factors nine out of the 11 item strengths were contained. However, the top strength item featured within *long-term development fundamentals* and referred to the regularity with which players performances and progress was reviewed. This is a central role for a coach as part of a TDE (Henriksen and Stambulova, 2017) and was also identified a key performance enabler within a high performance swimming environment (Fletcher & Streeter, 2016). Critical strength items within *support* and *long-term development focus* factors included the clarity of the HoERP's expectations of the players – a crucial antecedent to developing effective team cultures (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Schroth, 2011) - and the accessibility and approachability of the support staff within the ERP and the staff's interdisciplinary approach. Within a professional program the presence of a multidisciplinary support structure should be implicit, however the *effectiveness* of these support disciplines was particularly encouraging. For example, the ease with which these staff are accessible was a key strength of the ERP and has been previously highlighted as a crucial element of TDEs (Martindale et al., 2010). Further, the interdisciplinary approach of the support staff, identified by the players, was an important operational strength of the ERP and referred not only to the preparation and structure of players' personal development but also the integrated planning of training phases through the season (Carson & Collins, 2017). This integrated approach is also seen as a key pillar of effective TDEs (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017).

Other identified strengths referred to the detailed planning of training ensuring all components of performance (tactical, technical, physical and psychological) were considered resulting in a challenging and ultimately beneficial program. The high standard of training content experienced by the players should arguably be a prerequisite of a professional program. Indeed, Mallett et al. (2016) recognised this type of quality preparation as a fundamental feature of coaching within high-performance cultures. Finally, highlighting the early career nature of the players in the ERP, the players also identified the importance of being educated how to

balance their training and competition demands with recovery *(Quality preparation)*. Experienced professionals would arguably be attuned to this crucial balance, knowledge that might be absent among the 'younger' professionals.

In a similar way to Hall et al. (2019), the 13 items perceived by the players as areas for improvement were themed into four categories to help identify potential intervention strategies. The four categories were a) Role models and Peer Pressure; b) Forward Planning and Welfare, c) Clarity of Required Process-Focus and d) Player Empowerment.

4.4.1 Role Models and Peer Pressure

Regarding role models the players identified a lack of discussion around what world class performers do to become successful (Q.18) as well as not having the opportunity to talk to more experienced performers and about to how to handle challenges (Q.66). The playing group were also split regarding the pressure they felt from their colleagues to do things differently from the advice given by the HoERP. (Q.51). Eight players agreed or strongly agreed that they felt pressure, with five further players disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing and one player strongly disagreeing with the item.

Firstly, the use of role models is a key feature of effective TDEs (Henriksen and Stambulova, 2017) and successfully integrating senior athletes into these leadership roles can help drive the standards of the younger performers who in turn can motivate their senior counterparts (Seanor et al., 2017). The renowned collegiate rugby program at Berkley University California for example also invite past performers to share memorable stories helping to grow the legacy of the team's culture (Schroth, 2011). Some TDEs however have shown integrating role models into the daily life of athletes as a challenge (Larsen et al., 2014) and is a particular difficulty in Hong Kong where the ERP is the sole professional fifteen-a-side-rugby program. Hall et al. (2019) had previously reported how attempts were made to improve this weakness through integrated training sessions with Hong Kong's professional

seven-a-side players. A similar concept was reported by Gledhill et al. (2017) where footballers were encouraged to develop different competencies from their peers. Within the ERP however this intervention had limited effect as players purportedly viewed their seven-a-side colleagues as peers rather than 'more experienced performers' (Hall, et al., 2019). Further, although peripatetic coaches from Tier One countries were introduced into the ERP through various stages of the season as well as educational sessions discussing the characteristics of other high performing teams, these approaches were not sufficient to positively impact this weakness (Hall et al., 2019).

A more effective intervention may therefore require a more nuanced approach to peer-to-peer discussions between Hong Kong's professional 15s and sevens players. For example, although while on the surface none of the cross-code players are viewed as better or more experienced, they may all boast varying strengths or positive features from each other. For example, a stronger passing or tackle technique, a good time manager, a more diligent rehabber, a more robust sleep routine or stronger compliance to their nutrition. Encouraging players to learn from each other through sharing their 'signature strengths' may be an alternative approach in targeting the lack of role models. In addition, at a strategic level, increasing the frequency and exposure to competitions/games of a higher standard might help improve the lack of role models enabling the players to learn from more experienced professionals *in vivo*. The Super Rugby franchise training week as previously used within the ERP (Hall et al., 2019) for example and the short-lived Global Rapid Rugby Tournament in 2019 and 2020 (McNicol, 2020). Also, as alluded to in chapter three, rather than relying on experienced role models to set standards and drive competition, the public display of key performance measures can be used to foster competition from within as well holding players accountable for their performance standards.

Secondly, given the influence that peers can have on performance (Gledhill et al., 2017), targeting the pressure some players received from their colleagues regarding the adherence to the HoERP's advice is an important consideration. In designing an intervention for this instance, one could perhaps turn to the senior players within the ERP. As indicated in chapter three, the ERP leadership group was responsible for delivering key messages from the coaching team ensuring clarity and buy in. Player leaders would also be expected to challenge any decenters. This player led strategy, ensuring team values and standards are maintained, has been successfully implemented in other elite rugby union environments (Cole & Martin, 2018; Hodge et al., 2014). Also emerging from chapter three however, was the leadership disconnect regarding the dissemination of key messages from the HoERP to the wider playing squad. Moving forward, further education of this critical player-leader group would seem an essential intervention within the ERP specifically ensuring the leadership group are aware of their responsibility to lead by example, setting the standards of behaviour, particularly given the lack of role models.

4.4.2 Forward Planning and Welfare

Opportunities for players to continue to develop within their sport if it did not work out for them in the ERP (Q.22) was also identified as an area for improvement with less than half of the players agreeing or strongly agreeing with this item. This was a weakness identified in the ERP by Hall et al. (2019) and is perhaps not surprising given there are only two professional rugby programs in Hong Kong (ERP and the Hong Kong Institute of Sports Seven-a-side) and therefore a limited number of playing, coaching and/or administrative opportunities. To mitigate this lack of opportunity, and as Hall et al. (2019) and chapter three previously outlined, the HoERP developed an 'Earn or Learn' philosophy where players were encouraged to seek further education, work experience, internships and/or part time work outside of their training and competition commitments. Formalising this approach, the HKRU employed an Athlete

Welfare Manager (AWM) to work within the ERP whose role included the coordination of players' dual careers. The use of an AWM was previously reported in a kayaking TDE (Henriksen et al., 2011) and is a key addition ensuring career planning has direction and to assist in the inevitable, and often difficult, transition of players out of a professional sporting career (Alferman, et al., 2004).

As highlighted in chapter three, although a holistic development philosophy was adopted within the ERP, identifiable through preparing players for life after professional sport as well as supporting them through their various transitions, this did not detract from the lack of rugby options available to them. Even after a targeted intervention by Hall et al. (2019) this item worsened and continued to be a perceived area for improvement in this study. This perhaps reflects the inescapable lack of rugby opportunities in Hong Kong and might place further emphasis on the importance of the ERP's forward planning through the Earn or Learn policy. Moreover, and perhaps as importantly, stressing its specific importance in Hong Kong's context given the scarcity of professional rugby opportunities outside of the ERP.

Despite the level of care offered to the players in the ERP, described in chapter three and in Hall et al. (2019), six players agreed, and one strongly agreed, that the HoERP did not take time to talk about their wellbeing. This is arguably a pertinent reminder for the HoERP and his personal role player for player wellbeing, rather than relying solely on the AWM for example. In fact the importance of building and maintaining quality coach-athlete relationships is central for successful cultures (Byrne & Cassidy, 2017; Lafrenière et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2014b) and was demonstrated by Premiership rugby coaches in New Zealand who were able to strike the difficult balance between being caring and an effective leader (Hassanin et al., 2018). As also indicated in chapter three, players perception of a lack of wellbeing from the HoERP might be due to the absence of formal strategies regarding the integration of new foreign players and/or new professionals. The isolation that new foreign players may

especially experience, being away from their close support network, can prove overwhelming (Schinke et al., 2011) and coupled with a lack of clarity regarding their role as a new professional player can negatively impact job satisfaction, self-confidence and commitment to the group (Benson et al., 2016). Consequently, rather than relying on the informal strategies alluded to in chapter three, an important intervention targeting player wellbeing would be to *formalise* the onboarding of new professionals – both foreign and domestic - ensuring their effective integration and to provide clear guidelines as to expectations of each player as a new professional.

4.4.3 Clarity of Required Process-Focus

A process focus over outcome is a central pillar in effective TDEs (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) demonstrated in Henriksen et al.'s. (2010a, 2010b, 2011) research into athletics, sailing and kayaking TDEs as well as Larsen et al.'s (2013) research into a Danish Under 17 football club. This process focus is also evident in high performance teams, most notably the New Zealand All Blacks and their commitment to daily excellence (Hodge et al., 2014) as well as US Collegiate sports teams who strive for daily championship habits as a key process towards success (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017). There was a purported *lack* of process focus indicated by five of the ERP players who disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the notion that performance outcomes in the short term did not indicate how successful the player will be in the long term (Q.39). In highly competitive environments there is a danger to focus too greatly on 'producing results' which may drive ego-centered coaching promoting a controlling environment and ultimately impacting coach-player relationships (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). In a similar need to focus on process over outcome, five players acknowledged a lack of encouragement to keeping perspective by balancing frustrations they may have in one area by reflecting on the progress made in another (Q.63). In other words, focusing on day-to-day processes across the components of performance.

A need for more process focus was a similar theme identified by Hall et al.'s (2019) research into the ERP where an intervention strategy significantly improved the targeted process focused feedback in addition to an emphasis on the players' effort. According to Donoso-Morales et al. (2017) hard work is recognised as a key feature of winning cultures and was a central feature in Henriksen et al's. (2010a) track and field TDE. As the findings from chapter three highlighted, hard work was also a central tenet to the ERP's vision, so an important intervention moving forward would include regular referral to the players' efforts in training and matches as part of any process focused feedback. As Hall et al. (2019) also acknowledged however the focus on processes should not be at the expense of developing a winning mentality. As Larsen et al. (2013) highlighted, winning *and* development can be developed simultaneously and for the HoERP who is required to balance the need for development and immediate results, this is an important consideration.

Another key element to process focus is goal setting. Given the central role goal setting plays in sport performance (Gould et al., 2002), a concerning item identified as an area to work on related to the regularity with which players set goals with the HoERP that were specific to their individual development. Although 10 players agreed with this item, four players somewhat disagreed, and one player disagreed. Goal setting within the ERP takes place formally as part of players' bi-annual appraisals where all components of performance are discussed with the player and associated staff and form part of the players' individual development plan that is referred to and adapted through the season. Then, through the season, players' game performances are reviewed, either with the HoERP or assistant coaches, using reflective feedback questions as identified by Hall et al. (2019) which include weekly goal setting as part of the process. Such is the regularity of these formal reviews it is difficult to identify where further improvements could be made. This highlights one of the challenges of quantitative data in that responses cannot be explored at a deeper level (Jung et al., 2009) and

so the 'real' meaning behind the five disagreeing players is difficult to discern. Perhaps as the players were asked to consider the HoERP with any question referring to their 'coach,' the responses reflected the fact that their weekly appraisals and goal setting took place with the assistant coaches and not the HoERP. A simple strategy to improve this factor might be for the HoERP to ensure he spends time through the season with each player - either meeting one on one or joins the player reviews led by his assistant coaches. This increased contact with the players may also foster further effective the HoERP relationships with the players as well as improve the identified shortcoming.

4.4.4 Player Empowerment

Inspiring athletes to take responsibility for their development is a central tenet to ongoing excellence (Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Indeed the New Zealand All Blacks directly correlate developing players' self-reliance to increased performance (Hodge et al., 2014) and in TDEs, working with players in an autonomy supportive manner develops many psychological, social and behavioural competencies (Gledhill et al., 2017). However, two items suggested that the empowering of ERP players could be improved, namely, their involvement in the decision-making process regarding their development (Q.43) and the extent with which the HoERP allowed the players to learn from their mistakes (Q.61). With respect to the first item, while it might be expected in senior professional programs for coaches *and* players to collaborate regarding individual player development (Hodge et al., 2014), six players disagreed at various levels that they were involved with this type of planning with the remaining players showing somewhat to strong agreement that they were. The inconsistency of this finding was in contrast to a strategy adopted in cultivating Olympic trampoline champions where coaches gave all athletes control of their learning trajectory (Seanor et al., 2017). So too of a high performance military team whose team members not only had a say in

their own development but in that of the team's, being a voice during the recruitment of new personnel (Martin & Eys, 2019).

The lack of involvement as purported within the ERP during this study was also a shortcoming identified in Hall et al's. (2019) work and despite a twelve-month intervention, including more responsibility given to the players for planning of competition phases and peer appraisal, this item only slightly improved. As Hall et al. (2019) went on to identify, and as shown in Chapter Three, perhaps a more substantial intervention, targeting changes to the player leadership structure, would lead to more significant improvements (Hodge et al., 2014). Fostering player autonomy through dispersed leadership (Gordon, 2010) would be a key element of this intervention and is pivotal in building an effective culture (Chase & DiSanti, 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

An alternative intervention might also include formalising specific times in the weekly schedule for players to determine what aspects of their preparation requires attention. Coaches could support the players regarding practice content and, if necessary, help identify the player's priorities. This is a similar approach taken by Eddie Jones – England Rugby's current Head Coach – who allots time in the first morning of every week for players to schedule areas of focus, coordinating the coaches to assist (Humphrey & Hughes, 2020b-present). Given the relatively inexperienced nature of many of the ERP players however, and a purported dysfunctional player leadership group identified in chapter three, this particular intervention strategy may take time to embed and might therefore require a staged approach before offering full autonomy to the players.

Although identified as an area to work on within the ERP only one player specifically disagreed with the notion that they were allowed to learn from their mistakes. Ten players in fact agreed or somewhat agreed that they were given opportunities to learn. Being identified as an area to improve therefore is a surprise given the ongoing work targeting this specific

shortcoming previously identified by Hall et al. (2019) who tackled this flaw by coaches revaluating errors in competition and training, discussing identifiable *acceptable* errors. Specifically, encouraging players to take greater responsibility in relation to their skill errors was a key element. This involved coaches limiting the amount of explicit feedback during practice and allowing the players to self-organise and find own their own solution (Renshaw et al., 2010). Providing regular reminders through player education meetings that explicitly identify how the coaches are approaching mistakes within the ERP seems a worthwhile endeavour and follows the need for ongoing clarity identified in chapter three. In addition, developing honest feedback mechanisms to discuss the learning opportunities available through player mistakes is also a valuable consideration not least given its ability to build trust and transparency (Martin & Eys, 2019).

4.4.5 Redundant Items

Two identified items purported as the weakest across the whole program will *not* be part of a potential intervention strategy. Firstly, question 64 related to the extent with which players would be given opportunities if they experienced a dip in performance. As previously acknowledged by Hall et al. (2019), this is as an example of the HoERP's challenge in balancing the need for long term development against short term results. As indicated in Chapter Three, the swiftness of success for the ERP, demonstrated through early results, was an important factor in garnering support from senior management and convincing the playing group that the change to professional training and behaving was working (Cruickshank et al., 2014). With players therefore whose form dropped below the expected standard, while they would continue to receive the necessary support to improve their performance, they would *not* expect an opportunity to play. Moreover, and as indicated in Chapter Three, consistently poor performances would ultimately result in contractual release.

The second item referred to the extent with which players are encouraged to take part in other sports and cross train (Q.46). For players who are part of a senior professional program and have moved beyond the sampling phase of their athletic development, they would not be encouraged to participate in other activities other than those outlined in their contracted specialist sport.

4.4.6 The TDEQ as an Effective Cultural Assessment Instrument

This chapter also introduced the scope of using the TDEQ as a valid tool of assessing a team culture in a senior professional program, furthering the previous work of Hall et al. (2019) within this specific context. The use of the TDEQ triangulated the qualitative findings of Chapter Three, providing an opportunity for players to feedback completely anonymously, against a backdrop of evidenced-based items (i.e., features of the environment that have been shown to be relevant for effective development environments). This has helped to provide both targeted feedback as well as the opportunity for more open, in depth insight into the environment strengths, weaknesses and potential areas that need improved. Overall, this mixed-methods feedback facilitates a more rounded and deeper insight into the ERP's culture by identifying the specific strengths and areas for improvement thus helping to structure a useful intervention efficiently and effectively. The important combination of a validated questionnaire and key stakeholders' perspectives, obtained through interviews, answers the call for more of these types of mixed method approaches (Cupples et al., 2020; Gangsø et al., 2021; Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

Although this study has shown encouraging signs for the legitimacy of using the TDEQ to examine culture, the research has also revealed some limitations of its use in its current form. These limitations imply how future research within this domain might be directed in order to maximise the use the TDEQ as a recognised cultural assessment tool. For example, the language used in some of the questions within the original 59-item questionnaire would need

to be amended to represent the current developmental stage of athletes within the environment under study. For example, the first question in the original version states, 'My coaches care more about helping me to become a professional/top level performer, than they do about having a winning team/performer right now.' In this example, one would except that in a senior program the players would already be at the 'professional' or 'top performer status.' Other similarly framed questions that do not match the senior context environment would also need to be reworded should the TDEQ be used in a similar context again. In addition, four of the questions in the original TDEQ are arguably irrelevant to a senior professional program. For instance, question 44 reads, 'My coaches take time to talk to my parents about me and what I am trying to achieve.' The likelihood of a coach discussing a senior professional player's development with their parents is extremely unlikely.

However, another important consideration specifically for senior programs in *emerging* nations, such as Hong Kong, is that they may align more with TDEs than senior performance programs - much like the ERP - and so, given a group of professionals that may lack experience, questions referring to their long term development and education should remain (e.g. Question 53 - I am constantly reminded that my personal dedication and desire to be successful will be the key to how good a performer I become). Further, questions concerning implicit elements of a senior professional program, the provision of multidisciplinary support for example, should perhaps be framed not on whether they are present (e.g., question 30; Currently, I have access to a variety of different types of professionals to help my sports development (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor etc)) but rather the *quality* of that provision. Lastly, given the stresses and challenges of elite sport, there should perhaps be more emphasis given to questions explicitly examining player well-being. In the original TDEQ version only one question asks specifically of this provision. Then, in line with Henriksen's (2010a; 2010b) ATDE and ESF models, and to align more

explicitly with a cultural assessment instrument, the TDEQ might need to frame questions in relation to micro- and macro-level factors such as the environment and physical training setting as well as the values and customs of the national and sporting cultures respectively. Moreover, specific questions relating to the levels of culture; namely artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions might be a valid addition, as well as the intangible elements of culture. The factors within the TDEQ might be described as tangible aspects of culture so it might be important to also consider intangible features such as theming, for example. Theming is an intangible that has been used as a cultural tool to provide meaning and identity. For instance, Phil Jackson themed his last season as Head Coach at the Chicago Bull's basketball franchise as the 'Last Dance' (Jackson & Delehanty, 2014) and the Saracens rugby team theme their defensive strategy as the 'wolf pack' (Greenwood, 2014)

Finally, as per previous amendments to the TDEQ (Brazo-Sayavera et al., 2017), an altered version of the questionnaire that incorporates more specifically culturally framed questions would need to be rigorously tested to establish its reliability and validity. In addition, and as previously critiqued by Gledhill et al. (2017), the need for the TDEQ to be sensitive to specific sporting environments if it is to be used across sporting contexts. Future research may target such a cause as a priority.

4.5 Rationale for Study Three

Studies one and two have taken a mixed studies approach to reveal critical aspects of establishing a culture within a specific emerging rugby nation - Hong Kong. In order to build on this work, in an attempt to add value for the purpose of identifying practice guidelines, further research is required. As such, the next study investigated the experiences and perceptions of established, expert high performance rugby coaches who have had previous success in developing and managing multi-cultural squads and/or coaching in foreign countries. Both multi-cultural squads and foreign coaches are typically associated with

emerging nations, as such lessons may be relevant for the purposes of helping to identify 'best practice' guiding those responsible for teams and/or programs in emerging context. As revealed in the first two chapters there might be a need for other emerging contexts to manage a squad of differing national and cultural backgrounds as demonstrated in the ERP. Chapter five therefore will explore the nuances of managing multi-national teams and working as a foreign coach as part of the wider team.

CHAPTER 5

The Acculturation Experiences of Elite Rugby Union Coaches - Evidenced Based Guidelines for Foreign Coaches of Emerging Nations.

5.1 Introduction

In 2013, an estimated 214 million individuals were considered migrants – one in 33 people worldwide – and of those a growing number of transnational elite sport professionals, including coaches, who may migrate between and within nations to further their athletic careers (Ryba et al., 2018). In the sporting context (and in general) migrants may be categorised based on the specific drivers of their relocation and situation. For the premise of this study the coach migrants are referred to as 'voluntary sojourners' who leave by choice, relocating on a time-line basis for a specific purpose - i.e. a fixed term contract for a specific role (Schwartz et al., 2010). As an indication of the prevalence in sporting migration, over the last thirty years a significant number of Chinese coaches have moved to Australia augmenting the host's Olympic diving teams (Tao et al., 2019) and in the English football Premiership 59% of professional players were foreign (Maderer et al., 2014). The same pattern has been seen in emerging nations or teams where hiring immigrant coaches is also prevalent with four out of five head coaches in World Rugby's official 'Emerging Unions' being foreign.

Relocating can prove stressful with the newcomer facing numerous potential challenges. For example, learning a new culture and potentially a new language, as well as coping with being away from the support of family and friends (Schinke et al., 2011). Such stressors are often magnified in sport where individuals may also experience the potential change in their coaching demands, different coach-athlete relationship dynamics and even how to behave and/or communicate within the new environment (Schinke et al., 2011; Schinke et al., 2013). For example former Soviet Union gymnastic coaches identified a number of sociocultural challenges in their move to New Zealand such as the perceived work ethic from

the performers, the overly active role of performer parents and the inability of performers to accept critical feedback (Kerr & Moore, 2015). A failure to adapt to these dramatic changes can lead to maladaptive states of 'culture shock' (Schinke et al., 2016a) resulting in a sense of isolation and feeling overwhelmed. Evidence of this was reported among immigrant elite coaches in Canada who reported negative effects of their relocation as they felt at times disrespected, mocked and deeply dissatisfied by the standards of training (Schinke et al., 2015). The increase in global mobility of sports professionals has also seen a requirement for coaches and support staff to not only manage their own relocation challenges but also hone their cultural intelligence – that is, the ability to function effectively in a culturally diverse setting (Earley & Ang, 2003). As an example, European basketball coaches emphasised the important balance between the individualistic views of immigrant players with the contrasting collectivist position of 'local' players, with goal setting becoming a central premise factor in unifying the conflicting viewpoints (Khomutova, 2016).

The process that any newcomer – including sporting migrants - goes through in order to psychologically adapt to the habits and practices common to the host country's culture is called acculturation. According to Berry (1997) - a recognised scholastic leader in this domain (Ward & Kus, 2012) - acculturation is a lengthy continual process and describes "what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context when they attempt to re-establish their lives in another" (Berry, 1997, p. 5). Acculturation research within sport is a relatively new topic but, considering the increasing number of performers relocating due to the globalisation of sport, with the associated acculturative experiences of coaches (and athletes) impacting performance and well-being (Schinke et al, 2015), it is clear why the study of acculturation has begun to increase within sport psychology (Khomutova, 2016; Ryba et al., 2015). For example, Schinke et al. (2015) examined 10 immigrant elite sport coaches in Canada exploring aspects impacting their respective acculturating experiences, namely;

training standards, commitment levels, athlete respect and coach status and credential recognition. Research into the acculturation experiences of professional basketball coaches in central Europe revealed three themes around value differences and playing styles; working with black players and the formation of ethnic sub groups (Khomutova, 2016) with Schinke et al (2013) highlighting the need for coaches to bridge the gap of world views by balancing positive perceptions of the host context with what can be learnt from the immigrant individual's culture. Examples of this favoured shared approach alluded to above may include strategies such as language learning exchanges or understanding and celebrating cultural festivities among team members (Schinke et al., 2013; Schinke & McGannon, 2014). Other shared strategies might extend beyond the coach and include senior players reinforcing the expected behaviours or work ethic of the newcomer for example (Ronkainen et al., 2019). Whether involved directly or in-directly the coach is crucial for driving these approaches.

5.2 Theoretical Framework

Acculturation has existed for millennia with contemporary research interest growing out of concern for the effects of European domination of indigenous peoples (Berry, 2005). Over the last three decades John Berry's (1997) Framework for Acculturation Research has been widely acclaimed (Schwartz et al., 2010; Ward & Kus, 2012) and is based from his bi-dimensional acculturation model that posits immigrants and individual groups are confronted with two main issues in the acculturation process and vacillate between heritage-culture retention and receiving-culture acquisition (Berry, 1997). In attempting to synthesise the multifaceted processes of acculturation, Berry's (1997) framework (Figure 5.1) illustrates the main factors that influence an individual's acculturative experiences, combining both structural and process features and guides research through inputs, outcomes and moderating factors.

Figure 5.1 – Berry's (1997) Framework for Acculturation Research
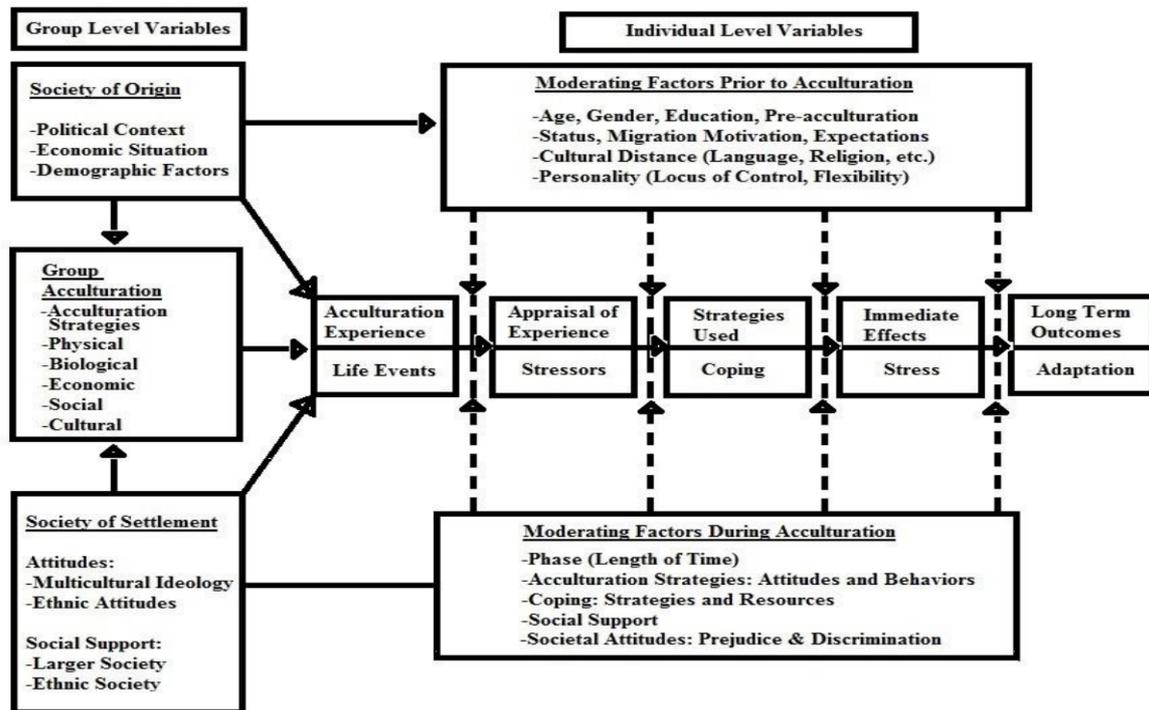
On the left side of the diagram are 'Group Level Variables' described as predominantly situational, that is they are dependant in the interaction between individuals within a group (Berry, 1997) and to the right are 'Individual Level Variables' referring to individual factors. Both group and individual variables are essential elements when studying psychological acculturation (Berry, 1997). The right hand upper block refers to features that exist prior to acculturation with the lower block containing elements that arise during the process of acculturation (Berry, 1997). The centre of the framework represents the flow of the acculturation process over time, beginning with the initial contact with the host/dominant culture, followed by an assessment of that experience (with associated stresses) and subsequent strategies used, assessment of those strategies and subsequent adaptation i.e. long term outcomes (Berry, 1997).

In terms of the strategies used as part of the moderating factors during acculturation, Berry (1997) provides additional detail highlighting four approaches. The first is *assimilation*

when individuals discard their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures. Second, *separation* occurs when an individual places value on maintaining their original culture and avoids contact and interaction with others. Third, and most desirable, is *integration* that sees an interest in the individual in maintaining their original culture and spending time interacting with other groups. Integration is the more psychosocially adaptative strategy where acculturative stress is minimised (Berry, 2005) and well-being and optimal adjustment are maximised (Schinke et al., 2016b). Finally, *marginalisation* where both original and receiving cultures are rejected and, as such, causes the greatest acculturative stress (Berry, 2005). The strategy adopted by an individual will determine the extent with which they adapt to their new environment. These adaptations may or may not be positive and include psychological adaptation (psychological and physical well-being) and sociocultural (how well the acculturating individual manages daily life in the new cultural context; Berry, 2005). Factors assisting in an individual's adaptation, as indicated within moderating factors during acculturation, include social support and positive intergroup attitudes, with the latter indicating how acculturation should be a shared process of immigrants *and* hosts working through differences and how *both* groups move between each other's cultural practices (Verkuyten, 2005).

Given the predominance of Berry's (1997) work in bilateral acculturation research and the need for further acculturation studies in elite sport, Berry's framework provides an ideal lens to view both coach acculturation processes and those of the acculturation environment. The purpose of this study therefore, using Berry's (1997) framework, is to advance the knowledge of acculturation within elite sport with three core contributions. Firstly, examining five elite rugby union head coaches' personal experiences as a 'foreigner' and explore the acculturation challenges they faced, furthering the limited work examining coach perspectives (Borges et al., 2015; Schinke et al., 2015). Secondly, to examine the paucity in understanding

of the acculturation environment, that is how the *hosts* can best support incoming players into a team (Ryba et al., 2018; Schinke et al., 2013). Finally, through synthesising these findings, real world evidence-based recommendations will be made for the acculturation of foreign coaches and the management of their multicultural squads, specifically applying them to the emerging nation context.

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Participants

The sample consisted of five male elite rugby union coaches - four of whom, at the time of the interviews, were Head Coach at either a Guinness Pro 14 team (played in Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Italy) or a Gallagher Premiership Club (played in England) with one participant the Head Coach of a World Sevens Series team. The coaches were purposefully chosen with each of the coaches coaching outside of their country of origin and having had experienced repeated successes in managing multicultural squads. To maintain participant anonymity the coaches' demographics are broadly presented in Table 5.1. Further, any references made within the results to teams or individuals, that could potentially identify the participants, were removed or replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 5.1

Coach Demographics

	Age	Nationality	Tenure in current role	Professional Coaching Experience
Coach 1	50	English	4 years	19 years
Coach 2	52	Irish	10 years	19 years
Coach 3	47	Welsh	4 years	9 years
Coach 4	56	New Zealander	3 years	21 years
Coach 5	49	English	3 years	15 years

Mean 50.8 (σ 3.42)   Mean 4.8 (σ 2.95)   Mean 16.6 (σ 4.77)

5.3.2 Design

With the aim of generating meaningful and practical knowledge a pragmatic research philosophy was used to frame this study (Giacobbi et al., 2005). The pragmatic approach sees the researcher as a part of the research process and a co-constructor of knowledge (Giacobbi et al., 2005). The researcher's close connection with the research subject as a current professional coach was therefore seen as a critical element for interpreting participant responses as part of the data analysis. As an additional influence, the researcher's close connection afforded access to the often-inaccessible world of elite sport.

A qualitative design was selected in order to gain a rich and 'real world' insight into the management of multicultural squads through the eyes of elite head coaches as well as their personal acculturation experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). Such a design allowed participants to provide a much-needed in-depth and detailed understanding of acculturation in elite sport (Schinke et al., 2016b). Due to the nature of the research aims and given the previously reported overreliance on quantitative analysis into acculturation (Chirkov, 2009) a semi-structured interview procedure was chosen. While typically a pragmatic philosophy would be associated with a mixed methods approach, a combination of both qualitative *and* quantitative (Giacobbi et al., 2005), it was decided that, due to the importance of exploring the coaches' perceptions, a qualitative method was deemed most suitable. The nature of the interview structure, in addition to the rapport created by the researcher's partial insider status, leant itself to a level of conversational freedom enabling emerging themes to be explored (Weller, 2017).

The five participants were interviewed across six key questions (see Table 5.2). Additional exploratory questions were used to prompt the participants to expand their answers providing further depth to their responses (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Table 5.2

Interview Questions Posed to the Elite Coaches

Interview Questions

1. How influential do you view the team culture of the teams you coach?

2. When you arrived in your current position how did you go about creating 'your way' regarding the culture?

3. How have you managed/do you manage the multi-cultural nature of the squads you've coached/coach?

4. What strategies are in place/have you previously put in place for the integration of new players and foreign players?

5. What were some of the challenges you experienced as a foreign coach?

6. If you were going to drive the development of an emerging/young rugby nation, how would you approach the task?

5.3.3 Procedure

Prior to the participants being identified for interview, ethical approval was gained. All participants were recruited via personal email and, in keeping with ethical considerations as suggested by Willig (2008), informed consent was obtained to take part in a one-on-one interview with details of the voluntary nature of their participation explained.

With the global outbreak of the COVID-19 virus at the time of the research, restricting all travel and social meetings, all five interviews were conducted through Skype. The use of such video-conferencing technology has increased in qualitative research over recent years and is a valid method to obtain data when face-to-face opportunities are not possible or practical (Schinke et al., 2016b). Each interview lasted between 45 to 80 minutes and was recorded on a digital recording device.

5.3.4 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were complete the researcher transcribed them enhancing his familiarity of the data and helping to establish an early set of themes (Rapely, 2011). Verbatim transcriptions then went through a process of reflexive inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This type of analysis, in line with pragmatic research (Giacobbi et al., 2005), places an importance on the researcher's role in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The steps of analysis are shown in Table 5.3 and follow the six stage process as outlined by previous work of Braun and Clarke (2006). From the analysis, four higher order themes were generated. Each higher order theme had a group of associated lower order themes, all based on quotes or 'tags' from the data (Cote et al., 1993).

Table 5.3

Six Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase
1. Familiarisation with data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

5.3.5 Trustworthiness and Credibility

First, the very nature of the participants' experiences and success, as outlined previously, provides an implicit level of credibility to the findings leading to 'best practice' in seeking solutions to the applied challenge of elite coach acculturation and the management of the acculturation environment as well as multicultural squads (Giacobbi et al., 2005). In addition, more explicit tools were used to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the results, namely researcher reflexivity through the use of critical friends and member checking.

Given the researcher's previously mentioned partial insider status and his nuanced familiarity of themes being discussed - though this tacit knowledge is another strength of the study (Johnson et al., 2012) - there was a potential for an over-reliance of that status when interpreting the data (McGannon et al., 2019). Through a process of reflexivity however and the use of critical friends this bias was mitigated. The role of critical friends are to listen to the researcher's interpretations then offer critical feedback, challenging the construction of knowledge, helping to solidify the plausibility of the findings (Smith & McGannon, 2018). To elaborate, the critical friends served as 'trustworthy filters' helping to ensure the participant's story was suitably represented. The key stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) analysis where these critical friends were employed included the systematic coding, theme generation and theme refinement stages. To begin with the researcher and his primary supervisor independently coded the participants' transcripts. Following the first round of systematic coding, the researcher and supervisor met to discuss their respective coding, critically reflecting on what each code represented as well as removing and adding irrelevant and relevant codes respectively. Once the codes were agreed these were then sent to the researcher's second supervisor who, again, carried out an independent review. Following this stage of the analysis, the researcher and second supervisor finalised the codes to be themed. For the theming stages of the analysis, the same process occurred whereby the researcher and primary supervisor worked independently to generate and review themes before collaboratively critiquing them. Agreed themes were then sent to the secondary supervisor for further independent review before being discussed with the researcher who finalised and named the themes.

Transcriptions were also sent to the five participants to be member checked. Frequently used in qualitative research to validate data and control the subjective bias of the researcher, the interview transcripts were emailed to the respective participants to confirm the accuracy of

the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). No changes to the transcripts were made following this process.

5.4 Results

Through inductive analysis two main themes emerged: a) pro-actively managing personal acculturation and b) pro-actively managing player acculturation. Findings revealed a number of factors pertaining to coach acculturation and the management of multicultural squads that could be transferred to the emerging context. In addition, generic items were also revealed that *any* coach might experience.

5.4.1 Pro-actively Managing Personal Acculturation

When discussing personal acculturation experiences the coaches revealed a number of salient approaches in proactively managing these processes.

5.4.1.1 Educating Senior Management. For all coaches, an ongoing challenge was the managing up to senior personnel such as board members. For the participants, an important principle of this management involved *educating* their senior counterparts.

> As a Head Coach one of your biggest challenges is ensuring alignment across all facets of your program and the edges of the program with the stake holders and try to ensure that people are aware of what you're trying to produce and how you're trying to do it – and educating people on that process. (C4)

> The people at the top of the organisation need to be able not just judge it on where you are in the table - but how else do they judge progress or development? I would be part of managing that. (C3)

In the second quote, Coach Three challenged the thinking of his senior management to look beyond results and trophies taking a more long-term view. All coaches specifically mentioned this as a challenge, "Development and winning at the same time is brilliant and

everyone is happy, but you might need to manage upstairs…I don't want to develop players, lose and then get the sack." (C5).

5.4.1.2 Taking Time to Understand the Individuals and Existing Culture. Learning about the individuals within the team and understanding the existing team culture appeared an essential element for the coaches' personal acculturation strategies when moving into their current roles. Firstly, across all coaching participants there was an appreciation of the cultural diversity existing in their respective squads with this multicultural mix being seen as a strength as Coach One describes.

> That diversity is a good thing for a playing group. We celebrate that – we don't want everyone to be the same. It's about understanding and celebrating each other's differences and showing them as a strength to the rest of the organisation.

Coach Two shared a similar sentiment in embracing the uniqueness of each individual, "First and foremost we want people to be themselves." Building deep relationships with players was seen a critical part of understanding the backgrounds of their multicultural teams with Coach Two suggesting it the *most* important aspect, "I mean genuinely getting to know someone at as deeper level as you can… more about who they are and what their backgrounds are." As the three quotes below respectively highlight, Coach Three found it important to understand individual backgrounds to avoid potential racial stereotyping and develop healthy understanding of different ethnic groups (i.e., ethnic attitudes), Coach Four's quote explains how a deeper understanding of his players helped manage positive performances, with Coach Three going even further to connect with a player by meeting his family.

> So, what does a Tongan culture look like? What's it like growing up in Tonga? Sharing that with the group. How different is that to growing up in Samoa or Fiji? We tend to be guilty of lumping them all in the same boat, don't we? (C3)

You need to understand how your players tick. I put a lot of emphasis around getting to know an individual player – getting to know their wife, their girlfriend, their kids, their background and so on. Ultimately if they're happy at home we're going to get more out of them here. If they're in a position that they've got issues and they trust you and they know you care hopefully you can help them with their issue which hopefully makes them play better on a Saturday. (C4)

The biggest one is when a new player comes into the program we go and meet their family. The managers and coaches go and visit the village to thank them for their support…We find that because the family support and community support is such a big thing here the player feels more confident when we've made that connection. (C3)

Developing these interpersonal skill sets would seem imperative for an incoming coach as well as applying that knowledge in the management of players as Coach Five comments.

You probably don't criticise Polynesians in front of other people because that's not their thing…You need to understand they're family orientated. Don't leave them isolated – if a Polynesian is on their own in a cold country, they won't play well for you and they'll be miserable. I've learnt that over time.

In addition to understanding the multicultural nature of their respective squads and building relationships with players, having an appreciation of previous team culture was also a fundamental consideration for the coaches as they acculturated into their new environment. All coaches reported using a period of time for observation and fact finding to ascertain what elements of the culture should remain and which aspects should be removed.

'XXX' had been a slogan for the guys who have been here for seven, eight or nine years. It's been something that took them from second bottom in the comp to eventually winning a title. So that's a big part of the fabric, so for me to come and in and go, 'I don't really like that' probably wouldn't have been well received. (C4)

Coach Three was also acutely aware of his position as a foreigner and cautious of demanding certain expected behaviours that were the norm in his society of origin but perhaps less common in his current role.

In other teams you get inundated with kit and you have to wear particular kit at training and around the hotels but here there is a culture of being independent and wearing your own stuff at times – I've called it 'village time' – they need to have this space away from what the demands of being a pro player all the time…Giving them some space at times, being in a hotel and saying right 'Village Time' wear what you want I think has been an example of creating a positive response.

Coach Three insisted on a number of performance behaviours but appeared to integrate these expectations with the cultural norms of the group. This would appear an important skill set within multicultural settings and particularly pertinent for a coach moving into a foreign environment, being especially conscious of the efficacy of enforcing previously held ideals from one cultural context to another.

As well as identifying *what* required change, an important appreciation was judging *when* to initiate changes with coaches conscious of 'wielding the axe' too soon suggesting a more gradual tact, "I was very mindful though of not being the know it all Englishman…Keep your powder dry for 100 days, meet the players, learn and ask good questions" (C1). This is arguably a key acculturation consideration for an experienced coach moving into an emerging team who, like Coach One, might boast suitable expertise to drive important change but also being cognisant of creating a negative perception of an arrogant know it all and being a potential threat for pre-existing coaches within the environment.

5.4.1.3 Managing Additional Personal Challenge. The coaches also identified a number of additional personal challenges when moving into their current roles. Firstly, two of the coaches found being away from their family particularly tough, "For me being away from

family was our biggest challenge" (C4)**.** Two of the coaches also acknowledged the challenges in modifying their preferred game strategy as a result of the climatic contrast between the northern and southern hemispheres, while Coach Three experienced personal attacks.

> One of the toughest things was potentially a bit of racism – coming to our country as a white man and you are assumed to have the same perceptions and opinions as every other white guy that's been there.

> I had a letter handed to me up at a tournament by an eight year old who was running by – and I had my kids at the tournament as well - and the letter pretty much slagged me off and I was only here to take money off the local population and I should leave the country quickly.

5.4.2 Pro-actively Managing Player Acculturation

The strategy for integrating foreign players into the coaches' teams was managed through informal and formal processes.

5.4.2.1 Informal Processes. For Coach Two the informal processes included chats with players over lunch with Coach Four hosting a Christmas Day for players who were away from their families, affording them an opportunity to showcase their respective national cuisine.

> So, an example would be a couple of Christmases ago…we invited what we called the 'orphans.' So, anyone who didn't have a family here we hosted for Christmas – a couple of kiwis, a few Aussies, some Fijians and Tongan – and everyone had to bring a dish from their own culture. So we had all sorts! It was a banquet. I think all that sort of stuff allows players to show a bit of pride about where they're from.

> Creating situations where players could come together was also imperative for Coach Three who employed strategies that are perhaps best described as 'formal-informal.' Specific

grouping of players at training for example encouraged rapport building opportunities and more informal chats.

5.4.2.2 Formal Processes

5.4.2.2.1 Recruitment Strategy. There was great emphasis placed on "getting the right people on the bus" (C1), as a moderating factor prior to acculturation, ensuring the right cultural fit for the team. Coaches' recruitment criteria was steered by individual's character rather than talent with coaches strictly selecting players they could "trust" (C1) and who would "conform to the vision of the group" (C3) respectively. Taking such a steadfast recruitment stance is perhaps difficult for emerging nations/teams however, with the likely slimmer talent pool. In the emerging context then, perhaps a more robust recruitment process might be required where players are given opportunities to prove themselves. Coach Two alluded to such a strategy.

> We're a big believer that there's good in people… and so what we try and do is meet potential new players together as a coaching group so it's not just me deciding whether I liked him or not in the spur of the moment…we might meet them a couple of times or we might meet them with their wives or mum…put them in a situation where you can judge them a little more.

This coordinated approach to player recruitment, in particular meeting with members of players' support network, is perhaps a useful strategy for coaches in emerging nations. Where talent is potentially at a premium in the emerging context, finding the appropriate judgment on what constitutes 'good or bad' character seems an important consideration with ongoing education ensuring expectations are clear another important implication as Coach Two stresses below.

> I've seen 18- or 19-year-olds who are hard and difficult to deal with…aged 27 they're magic. I think you've got be patient and you've got to educate.

5.4.2.2.2 Onboarding Process.   All five coaches reported meeting successfully recruited newcomers to outline the expectations within their environment, reminding them, "this is how we do things." (C2). Vital ongoing meetings with senior players ensured clarity by reemphasising these performance behaviours. In Coach Four's team, the player leadership group also played an important part ensuring younger players were clear of their roles and also linking foreign newcomers with established players from a similar cultural background.

We really drive our leaders to get a strong connection with the rest of the group so they understand if a youngster's struggling they'd grab them a go for a coffee and see how things are going – maybe they're lacking clarity in what we're trying to do - or it could be more of a cultural thing so we'd get one of our more experienced Fijian boys for example to help out with the new Fijian boy.

5.4.2.2.3 Well-Being. Player well-being also emerged as key factor in the acculturation environment of the respective coaches. For Coach Three he specifically focussed on developing the whole person as indicated below.

The program here is about improving individuals and it's important we do because the connection we're making is rugby can do this for you and move you so far but you're going to move yourself beyond that and all your experiences that you're having here and your ability to self-mange and self-determine the next stage of your life will free you up to become the best player you can be here as well.

In referring to his holistic philosophy the coach indicated how he not only prepares his athletes for the rigours of competition but simultaneously develops skill sets that will prepare them for life in *and* away from rugby. In a critical link to performance, Coach Four added, "If the guys you're dealing with know that you care about developing them as rugby players and their career and their life then they'd generally spill a bit of blood for you."

5.5 Discussion

The primary aim for this study was to examine the acculturation experiences of five elite rugby union coaches. Results revealed a crucial element of their acculturation process was gaining a rich understanding of their players' lives and history, particularly their ethnic background. In doing so, the coaches demonstrated the importance in attempting to appreciate the individuals within the 'society of settlement' (Berry, 1997) – or perhaps in this context '*team*' of settlement – thus helping coaches to inform their practices accordingly. This gathering of information can also occur prior to starting and can help facilitate the coaches' cultural transition (Ryba et al., 2016). Striking relationships with key stakeholders, specifically senior management, also proved an important aspect of coach acculturation, and in educating these groups as to the balance between long term development and immediate success the coaches' hoped to help secure the longevity of their tenure and subsequent ability to execute team goals. The role of coaches handling senior managerial officials while attempting to drive an effective environment has been previously highlighted by English et al. (2020) who revealed challenges such as disconnected agendas, interfering administrators and distrust of board members within the development environment of South African Cricket.

Gaining an understanding the team's cultural landscape and the staged approach to executing any required changed was another key aspect of the coaches' acculturation process and evidence of best practice within cultural change (Cruickshank et al., 2014 & 2015). Regarding the personal challenges experienced by the coaches, the reported feelings of separation are common stressors for immigrant coaches when appraising their acculturation experiences (Schinke et al., 2011) and highlight the types of family challenges previously shown to be prevalent in elite coaching (Borges et al., 2015; Joncheray et al., 2019). For coaches moving to new roles overseas, having coping strategies in place to maintain professional and family life balance are invaluable. The personal attacks experienced by Coach Three potentially indicates a degree of cultural blindness from the hosts expressed through

racial stereotyping (Schinke et al., 2011). In helping to promote a more positive perception of an incoming coach, and as an important moderating factor during and potentially before the acculturation process, Cruickshank et al. (2014) suggest adopting an inclusive management strategy and gathering support from within the organisation, such as existing staff, as well as managing key external allies and the messages sent to the wider community. This would help foster more positive attitudes and social support within the new society of settlement (Berry, 1997).

The second aim for this study was to examine the respective acculturation environment of the coaches. Each of the coaches' diverse teams reinforced the positive approach to cultural plurism adopted by their respective society (or team) of settlement and indicates a positive multicultural ideology (Berry & Kalin, 1995). Allowing players to be themselves may have also fostered more creative and effective working behaviours (Allende, 2018). Typical of high performance environments however, there were also explicit expectations regarding performance behaviours, ensuring *all* players, irrespective of their background and culture, were held accountable for and aligned to the same standards (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). In the elite sport context therefore it might be appropriate to add 'expected performance behaviours' as an additional element to Berry's (1997) society of settlement level. At least one of the coaches through his 'village time' time adopted a more culturally-informed leadership approach and evidently understood the cultural context of his society of settlement and with it the implicit expectations of the group he coached. He therefore altered his way of operating an demonstrated an important skill set within multicultural settings (Duchesne et al., 2011).

Informal and formal acculturation strategies were also important aspects to each of the coaches' respective environments. The Christmas gathering hosted by one of the coaches for example may have mitigated the potential feelings of isolation with the foreign players being away from their families - a common stress for relocating athletes (Schinke et al., 2011) as well

as potentially influencing the social bonds between team mates, a proven factor leading to greater team cohesion (Khomutova, 2016). It is also a reminder for coaches to focus on the acculturation experiences of individuals in *and* away from the training environment (Schinke et al., 2017). A similar shared approach was reported in some National Hockey League (NHL) and Major League Baseball franchises who rotated various national dishes of their team members in the player clubhouse (Battochio et al., 2013).

Creating shared acculturation practices such as 'buddy systems,' was an example of a formal strategy employed in this research and previously demonstrated among professional NHL players who would be paired with players of similar shared experiences and cultural backgrounds and was an essential factor in the newcomer gaining a sense of belonging (Battochio et al., 2013). Other formal strategies included onboarding meetings with coaches and senior players and are examples of the social support as part of the moderating factors during acculturation that can augment the engagement of newcomers and provide a platform for peak performance (Ryba et al., 2018). The scrutiny with which coaches carried out their decisions on contracting a player was another key aspect of the acculturation environment. Not only did coaches access the wider network of players (i.e. family members) to help inform recruitment, the decisions were also greatly dependent on a player's character. The use of networks as a useful tool in the recruitment process has been previously highlighted (Borges et al., 2015) with selection based on character common place in tier one teams like New Zealand where coaches often seek "good buggers" over skill sets (Hassanin et al., 2018). As revealed in the results, for emerging nations with slimmer talent pickings, this may prove a particular challenge if a player was poor in character but rich in talent - short-term results at the price of longer-term team cohesion (Leggat et al., 2018).

Finally, the world of elite sport can often be hostile and unpleasant and while success can be achieved under such conditions (Cruickshank & Collins, 2015) there has been a more

recent shift to promote high performance *and* well-being (Brown & Arnold, 2019), further evidenced in this research. Integrating well-being strategies were part of the coaches' acculturation environments with specific examples of developing their players holistically in a familiar approach to other elite sport settings (Lee & Price, 2016) and emerging nations (Hall et al., 2019). Coaches talked of caring for their players too - an increasing requirement of elite coaches (Dohsten et al., 2020) - and in a multicultural context where players might experience acculturative stress there may be a need to keep a close eye on player wellbeing ensuring stress levels are managed reducing the impact of demotivation, burnout and poor performance for example. This is perhaps another example where Berry's (1997) framework could be modified for elite sport contexts and differentiate 'well-being' as a moderating factor during acculturation. For emerging nations this crucial well-being ingredient might need to be rationalised with players, assistant coaches and senior management (i.e. board members) might not recognise this 'softer' element as being a credible part of a high-performance program.

5.6 Conclusion

In response for a greater understanding of acculturation in sport, specifically the acculturation experiences of elite coaches and their acculturation environment, a number of theoretical and applied implications emerged.

5.6.1 Theoretical Implications

Berry's (1997) framework has been uniquely utilised in this research as a lens to view the acculturation experiences of elite coaches and the management of their respective acculturation environments. Many factors emerged that substantiates previous 'generic' knowledge how coaches lead and manage high-performance teams. However, what has also been presented, and subsequently drives the theory forward, are the mechanisms and nuances of effectively creating and managing a high-performance team within diverse/multicultural groups as well as the adaptive leadership practices required to navigate this, maximising buy-

in across the group. Furthermore, several modifications to Berry's (1997) original framework might be considered for future exploration within elite sport contexts. These include contextualising group factor terms in elite sport such as 'team' of settlement as well as adding specific moderating variables such as player education and holistic development (factors during acculturation) as well as prior coaching/playing experience of the incoming individual (factors prior to acculturation). Finally, it might also be pertinent within an elite sport context to explicitly recognise 'performance outcome' as a key feature of adaptation.

5.6.2 Applied Implications

Several applied implications transpired from the research. Given the third aim of the work, the following examples offer evidence-based guidelines for future foreign coaches of emerging multicultural nations/teams.

Firstly, as a foreign coach of an emerging nation/team there may be a need to prepare for and manage potential antipathy from members within the society of settlement, particularly if seen to be taking 'one a local's job' or enforcing change. An appreciation of when to execute these changes has been shown to be critical. Then, while importantly driving key performance behaviours, such as hard work, an appropriate balance should be made with well-being.

Secondly, fostering relationships with players and key stakeholders is a crucial consideration for coaches in this context as well as the management of new foreign players into the acculturation environment. Adopting a shared acculturation approach was favourable and may help augment individuals positively acculturating and ultimately performing. Further relationship building with internal stakeholders, such ambitious senior management, and external stakeholders, such as the media, may also prove useful particularly in an emerging team in both managing expectations and positively managing external messages respectively.

Finally, it appears player recruitment decisions in emerging teams/nations must be as robust as possible to avoid non-selection of high quality, but potentially problematic players,

who under the right circumstances could develop and adapt their behaviour to fit the culture. As identified, creating innovative and flexible talent identification and selection processes, as well as accessing 'typical' references from former coaches and/or players, may provide an broader view of whether a player is a good 'cultural fit.'

5.6.3 Study Limitations and Future Research

Notwithstanding the strengths of the research, there were some limitations to importantly recognise. First, while the focus of the research was intentionally aimed at elite *coach* acculturation and their management of multicultural squads, other relevant opinions (e.g. player's experience) are missing, thus cross examination of these coaches' experiences with significant others is not possible. Future research may therefore wish to consider a more holistic representation of a sporting environment that includes player, assistant coach, support staff and senior management opinion. Second, with four out of the five coaches based in the United Kingdom coaching fifteen-a-side male teams the research was dominated within this context. Further, only four out of five coaches had experienced acculturation challenges in their current role. Future research therefore may wish to consider a broader spread of coaches from the top leagues across the world and, although not revealed in the results, examine coaches with multiple acculturation experiences including, for example, the potential challenge of learning a new language as part of the acculturation process. In addition, a wider selection of seven-a-side coaches, as well as work within other sport contexts may be explored. Lastly, it might be argued that findings may only be transferable to other male high-performance rugby cultures with subsequent caution in generalising findings across sporting milieus. That said, with the researcher's insider status and first-hand knowledge of both high performance and emerging environments the suggested applied transferability of findings to the emerging context is credible.

5.7 Rationale for Study Four

The previous three studies have revealed important considerations of how to effectively create and develop a high performing culture in an emerging rugby nation. As beneficial however is examining the 'opposite pole,' examining what *not* to do. By assessing failures, further emphasis can be directed to 'what works' as well as revealing aspects of inadequacy that may be inhibiting the performance environment (Henriksen et al. 2014). The final study therefore will examine a failed elite rugby union coaching team.

CHAPTER SIX

How Not to Do It! An Examination in the Derailment of an Elite Rugby Coaching Team

6.1 Introduction

Leadership has been a heavily researched topic for over 50 years (Burke, 2006) and it has been long established the critical role leaders play in enabling individual and organisational performance (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). In sport a number of popular leadership concepts have emerged particularly suitable to coaching, namely transformational (Vella & Perlman, 2014), servant (Rieke et al., 2008) and altruistic leadership (Miller & Carpenter, 2009). As leadership research has evolved it has been typically guided by the quest in seeking the most effective methods (Schyns & Schilling, 2013), being dominated by examples of successful leaders (Burke, 2006). For example, Graham Henry and Wayne Smith's successes in leading the cultural change within the New Zealand rugby team (Hodge et al., 2014). Pete Carrol – one of the most decorated coaches within the National Football League – provided his thoughts on successfully leading an elite professional sports team (Voight & Carroll, 2006) with Din et al. (2015) examining 22 Olympic coaches and athletes to discern 'Olympic-Winning Leadership.'

To only associate leadership with good leadership however is misguided and misleading and by adopting this one-sided view we are left with an incomplete understanding of the concept (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). Indeed, there is as much to be learnt from leadership *failure* (Kellerman, 2004). Within sports research there is a significant body of work within this context. Research on abusive coaching for example (Kerr et al., 2020; Kuhlin et al., 2020; Mountjoy, 2019; Wilinsky & McCabe, 2020) as well as dysfunctional and poor coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Harvey et al., 2020; Potrac et al., 2002; Purdy & Jones, 2011; Smits et al., 2017). The negative impact of these 'coaching failures' on the athletes has also been widely reported. Smits et al. (2017) and Kuhlin et al. (2020) for example reported how coaches

of elite gymnastics and figure skaters respectively used intimidating behaviours that resulted in athletes being afraid to report injury. The controlling nature of the coaches in these studies also promoted a coach-dependant environment where learning was inhibited with athletes perceiving success to be contingent on following coach demands (Kuhlin et al., 2020; Smits et al., 2017). Coach dependency was also a feature within an elite rowing context, examined by Purdy and Jones (2011), where coaches also purportedly relied too heavily on negative feedback, demonstrated a lack of respect towards their athletes as well as showing a lack of understanding to the rowers' needs and creating an oppressive social environment. Other research has highlighted further examples of such 'poor coaching practice' for instance, within elite football academies and the use of direct personal castigation and ruthless criticism towards players as well as coaches using abusive behaviours as a motivation tool (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Champ et al., 2018).

As outlined above, given the impact that a leader's behaviour can have on the individual and indeed the whole organisation (Schyns & Schilling, 2013), increasing the knowledge base within this domain appears a worthy endeavour. For instance, the importance of understanding examples of failed and poor leadership can help in the development of robust talent management strategies and leadership education (Ross, 2013; Zhang & Chandrasekar, 2011). An appreciation of what has failed may also further emphasise the 'what works' as per Henriksen et al's. (2014) research into a failing golfing talent development environment that also revealed aspects of inadequacy, previously unknown to the coaches. Examining the 'opposite poles' to success is a fundamental tenet to the personal construct theory and in Gucciardi and Gordon's (2009) work, they used this theoretical approach to characterise what mental toughness was but also, as importantly, what it was not. Additional research examining the 'opposite pole' included the work of Collins et al. (2016) as well as Taylor and Collins

(2019) who demonstrated the key differences of athletes that succeeded at the highest level with those that 'failed', crucially identifying how to prevent such failures.

Examinations of failed leadership however remain rare; therefore, the unique contribution of this study is to further enhance the body of knowledge of failed leadership within sport targeting a specific type of failure; namely, leadership derailment. Derailment, as distinct from abusive and/or dysfunctional coaching, occurs when individuals, who are perceived to have high potential for and/or have previously demonstrated high levels of success within their leadership role, become plateaued at a lower level than expected and therefore may leave the organisation voluntarily or involuntarily (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988). Derailment is a special case of leadership failure as it not limited to low levels of leadership competence, but instead refers to people who, prior to failing, were very successful (Capretta et al., 2008). This theoretical position seems particularly critical given the globalisation of sport and with it the movement of coaches across borders (Ryba et al. 2018) who might be purposefully recruited for their expertise, reputation and successful practices from their home environment.

6.2 Theoretical Framework

Interest in examining the antecedents to leadership derailment has existed for some time with McCall and Lombardo (1983) investigating three senior executives of US based industrial organisations. They revealed derailed leaders commonly displayed an insensitivity to others, performance issues (i.e., failing to meet business objectives), a failure to delegate and an overreliance on a single mentor. Morrison et al., (1987) developed derailment research by studying female derailers across 25 companies in a variety of industries. Derailing factors again included performance problems as well as an inability to adapt to a new boss or culture and an inability to lead subordinates or to be strategic. Lombardo and McCauley (1988) furthered the previous two bodies of work and used a larger data set of male and female managers revealing interpersonal problems, difficulty in moulding staff and making strategic

decisions as derailing factors. This foundational research in the 1980's revealed derailment factors that have been latterly grouped into five core themes - (Cullen et al., 2015; Gentry et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2013) - see Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1

Five Factor Model of Leadership Derailment
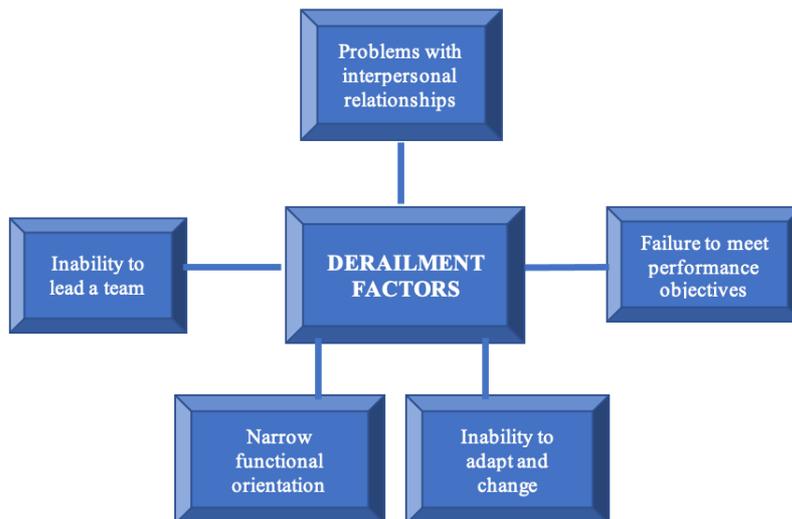
As Capretta et al. (2008) summarised, derailed leaders will share one or more of the following causes; the first, and purportedly one of the two reasons leaders derail, is problems with *interpersonal relationships* (Capretta et al., 2008). Examples of these failings include being overly ambitious, authoritarian, being cold or arrogant and/or overly critical (Capretta et al., 2008). Secondly, linked to interpersonal skills, is the *inability to lead a team* where an imbalance exists between 'mastery over' and 'connection with' people (Van & Leslie, 1995) and where the leader may overmanage direct reports (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2004). Third, is *the inability to adapt and change* and includes a failure to adapt to a new boss and/or culture, or an overreliance on previously established skill/s or an unwillingness to learn new skills (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989). The fourth factor is having *too narrow of a functional orientation.* Specifically, this refers to a leader who is overdependent on a single skill and has key skill deficiencies (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2004). Lastly, the *failure to meet business*

objectives. Specifics within this factor might include overmanaging for example (McCall & Lombardo, 1983) or an inability to prioritise (Hogan & Hogan, 2001). This particular factor, in context for sport, will be termed failure to meet *performance* objectives and will include, for example, results of matches. In sport, this final factor may also be a *signal* of derailment as well as factor itself. In other words, if a coach has problems with interpersonal relationships, fails to adapt, ineffectively leads the team and is inflexible in their functional orientation one might anticipate poor performance outcomes.

Notwithstanding the regularity in which leaders derail - up to 50% in the business context (Zhang & Chandrasekar, 2011), with high turnover also reported in professional sport (Gaines, 2016) - there is still a paucity of research based evidence available (Inyang, 2013). Outside of the sporting context, Bono et al. (2017) has attempted to fill this gap with their research into the differences between male and female derailers, confirming the role that ineffective interpersonal relationships play as a derailer. This was also the case in Thacker and Freeman's (2019) work who agreed that developing interpersonal relationships was a critical consideration for acting and/or potential University Presidents in avoiding derailment. Research by Song et al. (2018) examined derailment across organisations in USA, UK and China, where key implications suggested improving a leader's self-awareness, and its link to interpersonal behaviours, was central in preventing derailment.

Within the sporting context however there appears far less derailment-based research. For example, a comprehensive search using an online institutional library and four data bases, namely SPORTDiscus, MEDLINE, PscyINFO and Psychology and Behavioural Sciences was carried out. Across three separate searches, using terms 'derailment' AND 'sport,' 'leadership,' and 'sport coaching' and without restricting date of publication, there were zero findings. Given this gap in specific coaching derailment, the purpose of this study is to use the

five factored themes of derailment to abductively examine derailment within an elite rugby union coaching team.

6.3 Method

6.3.1 Context

This research retrospectively examines a specific season of the Wildcats (pseudonym) rugby team. The team played in a top 10 ranked country according to World Rugby rankings (World Rugby Rankings, 2021) and competed in their respective elite domestic and regional competition. At the start of the season in question two new foreign coaches were appointed to the Wildcats, a Head Coach and an Assistant Coach, with a further Assistant Coach retained from the previous coaching team. Using pseudonyms throughout the paper, the coaches will be referred to Mark, John and Matthew respectively. The new appointments had achieved much success in their previous coaching roles winning elite provincial and global competitions. The retained coach had been at the Wildcats for five years prior to the season of study, arriving to the club following a successful playing career where he represented both his province and country. The coaching team were sacked after eight months, before the end of the season, having won 37% of games they were in charge. This was in comparison to the team's previous season's 42% winning ratio. Subsequent to their dismissal, all coaches, acquired further roles including international coaching, head of performance and international development. As such this appears to be a clear case of derailment of coaches who previously were, and subsequently went on to be successful (McCormack, et al. 2017).

6.3.2 Participants

Eleven former players of the Wildcats team participated in this study. Former players were selected to answer the need for more derailment research that focuses on information gathered from sources other than the derailed leader and that which focus on *actual* derailment rather than the *potential* of leader derailment, i.e., when derailment is prevented (Williams et

al., 2013). All players were part of the Wildcats' playing squad through the researched season. Of the 11 participants, six had represented the same country at international level, the country in which the Wildcats team was based. The participants' ages during the season in question ranged from 22 to 31 with number of years as a professional player ranging from five to 12 years (an average of 8.8 years). To maintain participant and coach anonymity, all participants' names and the identity of the coaches have been removed from the text as have any references made to specific results, other teams or personnel that may identify the team and subsequently individuals within.

6.3.3 Design

Given the aim of the study, and the desire to produce practically relevant knowledge, a pragmatic research philosophy was adopted. Using this approach methods are chosen with the aim of providing real world solutions to context specific problems without being driven by a definitive epistemological approach (Giacobbi et al., 2005). A qualitative instrumental case study design was therefore selected for this study, providing the opportunity to examine in detail the factors perceived by the players that led to the derailment of the Wildcats' Head Coach and coaching team (Hodge & Sharpe, 2016). Due to the nature of the research aim, a semi-structured interview procedure was selected. The participants were identified having played for the Wildcats during the season in question.

In keeping with the pragmatic research philosophy, the researcher's insider status was seen as a critical component of the study (Greene, 2014). Having a career in elite rugby union playing and coaching, the researcher was not only able to gain access into the often-clandestine world of elite sport but also his knowledge through his professional experiences meant he was well placed to provide insight and tacit interpretation of the data (Johnson et al., 2012). Further, as an insider the researcher was able to create a level or rapport, trust and acceptance with the participants that is infrequently afforded to outsiders (Chavez, 2008). The rapport created

through the researcher-participant relationship fostered a relaxed and conversationally toned interview through which the players shared their detailed experiences.

The interview guides were based on relevant academic literature as well as the researcher's considerations about what areas might be important to cover (Rapely, 2011). The interview was split into four sections exploring; 1) the Wildcats' environment prior to the new coaching team; 2) first impressions of the new coaching team; 3) the changes within the Wildcats' environment and 4) the impact of these changes. Throughout the core sections additional prompts and probes were used as required to stimulate further participant response (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Although the main questions were open and broad in order to avoid leading the participants responses, probes and prompts were used to ensure all areas within relevant theoretical areas (e.g., derailment literature) were covered.

6.3.4 Procedure

Prior to the participants being identified for interview, ethical approval was gained. Fifteen players were invited to participate in the study via personal email with 11 players volunteering to take part. Informed consent was obtained from the 11 participants to participate in a one-on-one interview. Details of the voluntary nature of their participation was also explained (Willig, 2008). Prior to the interview commencing, in order to help trigger memories and generate discussion, each player was provided a contextual summary of the season in question through detailed fixtures and results, as well as competition stages, a full squad list and reminders of the Wildcats various training venues.

With the global outbreak of the COVID-19 virus at the time of the research, restricting all travel and social meetings, all interviews were conducted through video conferencing software. The use of such technology has increased in qualitative research over recent years and is a valid method to obtain data when face-to-face opportunities are not possible or practical

(Lo Iacono et al., 2016). Each interview lasted between 45 to 80 minutes and was recorded on a digital recording device.

6.3.5 Data Analysis

The methodological approach to the data analysis was abduction which describes the use of a combination of both deductive and inductive analysis (Graneheim et al., 2017). As part of the data's preparation phase, the researcher transcribed all 11 interviews which also served to familiarise himself with the data (Rapely, 2011). Then, in line with the research's pragmatic philosophy, where the researcher's contextual perception is seen as a resource (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Giacobbi et al., 2005), the transcripts underwent reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018). The deductive stage of the analysis used a pre-determined set of themes, namely the five factors of derailment identified in the literature, to organise the quotes from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The summary of the deductive analysis is shown in Table 6.1 and, in a similar way to Martindale et al., (2007), highlights the extent with which the raw data supported the theoretically and empirically based five factor model.

The inductive stage of the analysis followed this initial deductive phase and examined the quotes under each derailment factor using Braun and Clarke's six-stage process (2006; 2013). This particular process is useful given its flexibility and potential to deliver rich understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The quotes under each of the five factors were refined and themed ensuring they told a coherent and insightful story in relation to the aims of the chapter under each of the deductive factors (Braun et al., 2018). Inductive themes were identified at a semantic level, recognising the concepts explicitly shared by the participants, as well as identifying underlying ideas and conceptualisations - a latent level - to create specific implications for the sport context (Braun et al., 2016). The summary of the inductive content analysis embedded within the deductive factor structure can be seen in Table 6.2.

6.3.6 Trustworthiness and Credibility

To acknowledge, a potential issue with the data is its retrospective nature. As Wenk (2017) highlighted, recalling past experiences can lead to distortions as the brain adds new experiences into existing memory. However, there is also evidence that indicates when memories are sought from the episodic systems of experiences of the self (Self Referencing Effect) as well as memories learned in times of stress, then these recollections, while not infallible, are potentially more accurately remembered (Kesner & Wilburn, 1974; Symons & Johnson, 1997). Specifically supporting the accuracy of recounted events in this case, there were three core incidents of the season (not revealed to maintain anonymity) that were similarly recalled by all 11 participants.

To facilitate a judgment of trustworthiness and credibility, a number of critical processes took place. In answering the concept of credibility, one must first look at the participants (Graneheim et al., 2017). In this case, given their years of professional playing experience, international pedigree and subsequent working under different coaches, their ability to reflect on these experiences and of the phenomena under study enhanced the integrity of the findings. As Graneheim et al. (2017) identify, given the participant experiences strengthens the potential for these findings to be transferred to other elite sporting contexts. Then, regarding content validation, the analysis of the data was linked to triangulation where the researcher's supervisors, with over 25 years of qualitative research between them, independently reviewed the data arriving to triangular consensus at every stage of the analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This co-creation of analysis helps to address the challenges of dependability (Sandelowski, 2011). The researcher's additional supervisor also proved an essential critical friend to mitigate the potential of the researcher's bias due to his inside status with an objective perception of the analysis as well as also promoting researcher reflexivity (Greene, 2014). Finally, each of the transcripts were member checked by the respective

participants and to confirm accuracy of the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). No changes to the transcripts were made following this process.

6.4 Results

Through the deductive phase of the analysis, summarised in table 6.1, and in line with previous derailment research (Capretta et al., 2008), the data revealed that the coaching team demonstrated all five derailment characteristics in the build-up to their eventual sacking.

Table 6.1

Summary of Deductive Analysis

Theme	No support	Support	Number of quotes
Problems with interpersonal relationships		11	63
Inability to lead a team	1	10	28
Inability to adapt	2	9	27
Narrow functional orientation	1	10	56
Failure to meet performance objectives	6	5	15

As per previous research, problems with interpersonal relationships were cited as the biggest contributor to the coaching team's failure with all 11 players supporting this *and* the theme with the greatest number of supporting quotes. Too narrow a functional orientation was the next significant contributor followed by the inability to lead a team and the inability to adapt. While the team's win ratio was a mere 37% not one player identified this, which is perhaps surprising given this was a *worse* ratio than the previous season (42% winning ratio). Instead, a failure to meet performance objectives, supported by five of the participants, referred to the perceptions of players' personal development. The following section examines the five derailment factors with additional elite coach context provided from emerging themes emanating from the inductive analysis, summarised in table 6.2.

Table 6.2

Summary of Inductive Analysis

Five Factors of Derailment	Higher order themes
Problems with interpersonal relationships	Lack of respect
	Negative messaging
	A toxic environment leading to dissention and revolt
Too narrow a functional orientation	My way or the highway approach
	The impact of their single-minded focus
	Coaching mix - Three bad cops
	Lack of skills
Inability to lead a team	Lack of rationale and buy in
	Rate of change
Inability to adapt and change	Lack Cultural Sensitivity and Due Diligence
	One size fits all
Failure to meet performance objectives	Stagnated and constrained individual player development
	Fear of failure

6.4.1 Problems with Interpersonal Relationships

Within this pivotal derailment factor, the specific context of this failing related to coach-player relationships where three themes emerged, 1) a lack of respect; 2) negative messaging and 3) a toxic environment that led to dissention and revolt.

6.4.1.1 Lack of Respect. A key element to the poor coach-player relationships emanated from a reported 'fundamental lack of respect' (P10) exhibited by the coaches, with eight players identifying the Head Coach in particular. The lack of respect manifested through criticism of players' past achievements, to the team and to the country where many players came from. This is highlighted by the following three quotes.

I think they approached it with a phenomenal lack of respect – for all of us as individuals for all of us as players. I remember him saying "Where do you get your (*international)* caps? F*****g (*a local shop)*?" (P10)

I think any successful club now they've embraced the history of the club and respecting what's gone before you. They just didn't do that. (P10)

Belittling the country they were in, or the international team that many of the players played for. (P1)

6.4.1.2 Negative Messaging. Many of the players identified the coaches' extreme bias towards negative feedback.

So, there was a constant you're s**t, you're s**t, you're s**t and even if we'd played well and come up short, we were still s**t. There was never an arm round us at all. (P6)

As alluded to above there was rarely a balance to the feedback with messaging only being negatively framed, lacking positive affirmation. At times too, comments were harshly directed at players, exposing individuals in front of the group as Player Five recounted, 'They'd yell at you. There was no conversation. In front of everyone.'

6.4.1.3 A Toxic Environment Leading to Dissention and Revolt. The lack of functioning coach-player relationships created a coach-player divide within the team. Six players described the environment becoming 'toxic' as noticeable rifts began to form through the squad, 'He *(the Head Coach)* had delivered things so poorly that he had created this fractious environment' (P4). Specifically, this tension was felt between senior and younger players.

We played XXX in the (*regional competition)* and winning at half time - then the wheels came off because we were knackered, and he unloaded on us and me. I remember him spending about a minute just screaming at me – going well beyond,

that's not ok to say stuff like this. That's the time I was looking around me and I would

like to think if I was a senior player in that situation, I would have stood up and say

that's not on. You can't speak to us that way. No one did. Everyone just stayed silent.

(P4)

Referring to the 'definite divide between senior and junior players' (P11), two of the

senior players reflected that they could have perhaps done more during the season with one

questioning, 'How many of us actually challenged Mark?' (P6).

The ongoing unhappiness within the squad took its toll with dissention from the group

becoming revolt where the coaches had 'lost the changing room' (P10) and with players that

'just didn't want to be there.' (P7). For many within the playing group, their agenda turned to

getting the coaches sacked with 'some players making it very clear that was their mission.'

(P4)

6.4.2 Too Narrow a Functional Orientation

Within this second derailment factor, four sub themes emerged – 1) my way of the

highway; 2) the impact of their single-minded focus; 3) the coaching mix; and 4) a lack of

skills.

6.4.2.1 My Way or the Highway. One of the characteristics of a leader with too narrow

a functional orientation is an overreliance on a particular skill set. For this coaching context

the overreliance manifested itself in the coaches' relentless attitude to the physical nature of

their training sessions with them being 'obstinate in their approach and belief.' (P2)

Specifically, the players questioned the coaches' single-minded approach to training

that involved weekly 'toughness and resilience' sessions, resembling military style training.

There was an initial appreciation that these types of sessions were warranted, but not for the

whole season.

There's nothing wrong with a Marine style session. There's nothing wrong with that. If you pitch it right, it's actually a fun thing to do. But not every f*****g week…. Getting there and beating the s**t out of each other…It just chipped away at your resolve. Those sessions can be a laugh. Running up and down the beach with a log that can be fun. But not every week. (P11)

6.4.2.2 The Impact of the Coaches' Single-Minded Focus. In their single-minded drive to change the players through a physically driven regime the coaching group failed to recognise the impact they were having on player confidence and motivation that was evidently lacking within the group.

Calling you soft all the time. Doesn't do much for your confidence. A lot of people lost huge amounts of confidence. (P11)

I dreaded Tuesdays and at times didn't want to get out of bed. (P1)

The extent with which confidence and motivation was eroded resulted in several players sharing how they were considering leaving the team. The two quotes below perhaps highlight the severity of the situation.

And I was f*****g struggling at this stage and I remember being on the phone to my folks in tears because every day we're going into training and f*****g dreading it - getting smashed and shouted at. I remember telling my Mum I f*****g hate this. I'm quitting. I'm stopping. I don't want to do this anymore. (P4)

Anyway, I came in brimming with confidence, loving rugby and then a few months later despite having been capped, I couldn't f*****g stand the game and could have walked away halfway through that season. (P10)

6.4.2.3 The Coaching Mix – Three Bad Cops. Five of the players described how the coaching team lacked balance in that they were, 'all hard-nosed; old school.' (P5). The implications felt from this coaching combination meant there was no 'people person' (P5)

among the coaches or 'no good cop.' (P4). Player Four continued to share why the balance of the hard and softer edge was important for the group.

> You need a good cop and bad cop. You need to have - if you're going to unload on somebody there needs to be a touch of humanity…An occasional hand on the shoulder to see how you're getting on. Make sure the message comes across that you cared for. They just beat us down, beat us down, beat us down whereas if you had a different assistant coach that could have been the balance (P4)

6.4.2.4 Lack of Skills. Three of the players were forthright in their view that the coaches' intent to change the team environment and the players within was required. Player Four even conceded, 'there were definitely advantages in what he (*the Head Coach*) was trying to do.' All three players also agreed however that the manner with which the change was managed was poor and questioned whether Mark had the skill sets to implement what was required as summarised below.

> There was a real opportunity missed. And I'm not advocating Mark was the right guy but a lot of what he was trying to implement was absolutely needed. It just needed somebody with a bit more nuance to deliver it. (P4)

6.4.3 Inability to Lead a Team

Within this third factor of derailment two sub themes emerged. Firstly, the rate at which the new coaching team tried to change the environment and secondly the lack of buy in and rationale.

6.4.3.1 Rate of Change. There was agreement among nine of the players that the environment prior to the new coaches arriving required change. It was at times 'very boozy' (P9), training lacked sufficient structure and sophistication with some players 'just happy to be paid' (P2). Three of the players however, including the team captain, while agreeing with the need for change considered the *rate* of change to be 'too much, too soon.' (P2)

So, I do think they had some basis for their criticism and their desire to change the culture, but culture takes a while – it's deep rooted. I felt instead of chipping away at it they came in with f*****g dynamite and tried to blow it up. (P2)

6.4.3.2 Lack of Buy-In and Rationale. Two thirds of the participants identified the lack of a rationale being a critical error made by the coaching team. Not only did they fail to provide a plan for the season they also failed to offer a reasonable rationale as to their methods of training as the quote below demonstrates.

I don't remember them ever bringing an argument to the table that was right about what they were doing. I never thought oh yeah, I can see what you're trying to do here. I never thought that. (P11)

It might have been expected that the senior players would have been consulted about the season's projection but as one of this group at the time reflects, they were also not privy to the plans.

I don't recall ever being invited in to hear this is where we're going. I don't ever recall knowing the game plan and getting guys on board. With other coaches I can remember that happening…it was just, this is the way. (P8)

Without an explanation of the season's goals and strategy the group lacked buy-in and direction as the captain confirmed, 'If you take the players with you that's great but we were going in different directions.' (P2)

6.4.4 Inability to Adapt and Change

For the fourth factor of derailment, two emerging themes were revealed. Firstly, and arguably an antecedent to the coaches' inability to adapt and change, was their seeming lack of cultural sensitivity and due diligence. Secondly, linked with their unyielding approach, there was little evidence of adapting this approach to the individuals within the team.

6.4.4.1 Lack of Cultural Sensitivity and Due Diligence. The players quickly realised that the new coaches in particular had an apparent lack of understanding of their new coaching context and that they 'didn't know what they were coming into.' (P3). Specifically, there was reference to a lack of knowledge surrounding the playing squad, the city where the team was based, and the underlying culture associated with the country.

But having an understanding and an appreciation of international history. The place, the people. What motivates the people? What the people's history is, where their insecurities lie and why. Where they over perform and why. This is the nation's people…Mark didn't have any of that. (P3)

Five of the players also shared their frustration of not only the lack of understanding but the apparent lack of *wanting* to understand, 'I don't think they tried to understand…I don't think they gave a s**t.' (P10).

Linked to the new coaches' lack of cultural sensitivity and due diligence, several players identified the Head Coach in particular seemed biased in his approach, adopting methods that worked within his own country but failing to acknowledge the type of people who played rugby in the country where the Wildcats team was based. Player Four shared his early concerns of the Head Coach's stance.

I remember one of the first meetings at (*the training ground)* and he (*Head Coach)* comes in and starts talking…and remember he's come from (*Head Coach's country)* where rugby is the only sport…he comes to (*the Wildcats' country)* where the game is upper class predominantly and he said to a room full of privately educated players, 'I like my players to have grown up on the street eating coal.' And I'm sitting there, and my heart sunk – I'm f****d. I went to a private school; I sound like this and my dad is *(high profile job)* - he's going to instantly hate me. (P4)

In addition, there was a sense that the Head Coach was pushing his culture onto the players – as indicated in the quote below.

There was a definite sense of them forcing (*the Head Coach's National*) culture on a group that wasn't from (*that country*). Right (*the Head Coach's country*) are good – that works for them so let's push that on them. Not let's have a look at what's here. (P11)

6.4.4.2 One Size Fits All. There was a strong sense that players' individual motivations were not accounted for with a 'one size fits all' (P2) policy being implemented. Specifically, the players referred to the coaches' harsh training regime and feedback strategy as the quote below confirms.

It was just one approach. There was no understanding that there was a time for the hammer and the time for the hand on the shoulder. It was just the hammer. (P4)

Three players did appreciate that the coaching approach may have had success in previous environments but also acknowledged the need to ensure these methods 'fit' the context, 'He was well respected back in *(his country),* but they use a different methodology, every country is different, and I don't think he adapted very well.' (P7).

6.4.5 Failed to Meet Performance Objectives

Within this final derailment factor, despite the team's dismal 37%-win rate, not one player explicitly mentioned the poor results. Instead, emerging in this context, a failure to meet performance objectives referred to a lack of individual player development and a fear of failure.

6.4.5.1 Stagnated and Constrained Individual Player Development. Four of the players reflected how after a (albeit shortened) season under the coaching team their development and form had either stagnated or worse, significantly dropped.

I didn't learn anything in that season. You think about development. We had those

goals to take the next step, but I think that period put a number of people back. A

number of people didn't go on to bigger and better things. (P7)

Players also felt that under the coaching regime their game was constrained with a

feeling of being unable to express themselves and a fear of stepping outside of the prescribed

game plan.

Then I felt constrained. So, I had a job to do and that was my job – you are a tighthead,

this is what a tighthead does so just do that…So, I felt constrained and then really

nervous in games because I felt I couldn't express myself. (P11)

6.4.5.2 Fear of Failure. The nervousness expressed by Player 11 was shared by two

additional players who described players being 'petrified to make a mistake' (P1) which again

inhibited their personal performances.

We got so concerned about making an error than you make more. You didn't want to

make any mistakes and you'd get the ball and immediate get rid of it - I don't want to

touch it. We were so self-conscious and nervous about making a mistake you actually

made more. (P5)

6.5 Discussion

The purpose of this research was to use the five factored themes of derailment to

abductively examine the derailment within an elite rugby union coaching team. Pivotal to the

coaches' derailment, and one the most common factors within previous derailment research

(Capretta et al., 2008), was their flawed interpersonal relationships, manifested in a lack of

respect towards the players, their persistent negative messaging, all contributing to dissention

and revolt. After the coaches failed interpersonal relationships, a narrow functional orientation

was the next most identified factor, where the coaches demonstrated an obstinate approach to

their physical training regime, ultimately impacting players' confidence and psychological

well-being. The lack of diversity of approach within the coaching team was another feature within this factor, so too the lack of requisite skills of the Head Coach to drive and inspire the much-needed change within the team. The inability to lead the team was the third most identified factor with players citing the coaches' inappropriate rate of change and their failure to obtain player buy-in. The fourth most identified factor was the coaches' inability to adapt and change. Within this factor, the players purported a lack cultural sensitivity and due diligence demonstrated by the new coaches, including 'culturally blind' behaviours such as a lack of cultural awareness of the team and its members as well as imposing an approach from one culture on another. Also evident within this factor was a lack of understanding toward individual motivations. The fifth derailment factor identified was a failure to meet performance objectives and referred to the players' shared belief that personal development stagnated as well as holding a fear of failure.

In examining these findings in more detail, there are several unique contributions that offer both theoretical and applied advances in the 'opposite pole' of sport coach leadership.

6.5.1 Theoretical Implications

The primary derailment factor was *the failure to develop interpersonal relationships* - the heart of high-performance sport coaching and performance (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). In examining the antecedents to this primary failure was the coaches' purported lack of respect. As Bennie and O'Connor (2010) identified, respect is a crucial element in developing coach-player relationships and may have potentially influenced the players' preparedness to align with the coaches' vision and objective - a collective buy in that was noticeably lacking at the Wildcats. Potrac et al. (2002) also demonstrated how building respect was a key feature of an elite football coach who, in leading an English second tiered professional team, used informational power as a tool to gain respect of his players. Within the failure to develop interpersonal relationships with the players, and linked to gaining their respect, the players also

highlighted the consistent negativity of the coaches' feedback. As Potrac et al. (2002) demonstrated the overuse of negative feedback or 'bollockings' (p 197) can result in a loss of player's respect and is in steep contrast to Din et al.'s (2015) research who revealed Olympic coaches fostering a supportive learning environment. The constant delivery of negative messaging was also a likely source of the players' reported lack of confidence (Potrac et al., 2002). As part of this theme the personal attacks, outlined by some of the players, can also impair team cohesion, team psychological safety and performance outcomes (Smittick et al., 2019). Such practices are the antithesis of what the coach-player relationship should be trying to accomplish (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) but unfortunately have been shown to be common in elite youth environments, for example, in English professional youth soccer (Cushion & Jones, 2006). That is not to say however that direct criticism has no place in elite sport environments; if performers fall short of their high expectations then they should expect frank feedback (Din et al., 2015; Potrac et al, 2002). It is the balance of the feedback and the manner with which it is delivered that are the important distinctions and, contrary to the evidence in this study, the ability also for the *coach* to be challenged (Din et al., 2015).

The coaching team's narrow functional orientation, revealed as the second most significant derailment contributor, referred to the autocratic way the coaches' oppressive training regime was delivered. Again, there might be an expectation for coaches within elite teams to, at times, consciously deploy darker, more directive approaches as part of their leadership repertoire (Cruickshank & Collins, 2015). In this instance however there was *constant* autocracy with no hint of a brighter transformational or a much lauded collaborative approach previously shown to optimise team environments (Fransen et al., 2019). The oppressive nature of the coaches' training regime was another critical component within this factor and while there may be some justification of their 'toughness and resilience' sessions in preparing the players for the stresses of competition (Barker et al., 2014) the impact this

ongoing training had on the players was reportedly psychologically damaging and arguably therefore questionable. Indeed, Kerr et al. (2020) revealed similar negative responses of tough training regimes and, like the Wildcats, where exercise was used as punishment. These practices, Kerr et al. (2020) stressed, were not only pedagogically inappropriate but may even be considered as professional misconduct. Developing this point further, and an important consideration in elite sport contexts and emerging nations who may look to follow suit, is the risk that the extreme inappropriate cases of stress and physical strain become normalised (Harvey et al., 2020).

The *inability to lead a team* and the *inability to adapt and change* were closely linked. The lack of player buy in, that was a feature within these factors, could have been averted, for example, by the coaches using symbolic actions to encourage buy in towards their vision (Cruickshank et al., 2014). For instance, emphasising the team's early results (four wins from four) as well as a projection of how the training and competition phases would be planned. This may have provided a more positive perception that a) the change was working and b) that the players were part of the process. This, in turn, may have helped establish a more collaborative environment. The coaches' lack of change management skills was also a notable failing. Specifically, although the players reported a need to change the professional standards existing within the environment, the sweeping changes enforced on the Wildcats' playing squad was criticised and is contrary to previously identified best practice for driving change in elite sport teams (Cruickshank et al., 2015). A phased approach, where coaches identify the most pressing needs, is preferred (Cruickshank et al., 2014) rather than the all-encompassing bullish nature of change demonstrated by the Wildcats' coaches that was ultimately resisted by the players.

The lack of understanding and cultural sensitivity of the playing group was a key feature within this factor influencing the coaches' derailing. The Head Coach demonstrated a 'cultural

blindness' where he imposed his own national cultural experiences on the group. Adopting such an approach has been previously criticised in sports acculturation literature and can lead to misjudging individual needs, aspirations and motives that once again can damage coach-athlete relationships (Khomutova, 2016). A lack of due diligence and understanding of the people who make up the groups and sub-groups within the team was also part of this factor. Specifically, players' cultural background and history. Given the extent with which coaching has become a transnational career (Ryba et al., 2018) and the preponderance of Head Coaches being hired from *outside* of the environment (10 out of 12 Head Coaches in rugby union's Gallagher Premiership for example) it would make sense for an incoming coach to understand the team's cultural landscape (Cruickshank et al., 2014) as well as getting to know the background of the players (Peterson, 2007). Both elements were evidently lacking from the two new Wildcat coaches and again relate to the fundamental absence of coach-player relationships in taking the time to learn about their players (Din et al., 2015).

Compounding the coaches' cultural naivety was their 'one size fits' all strategy that failed to account for the different motivations across the team. Again, this contrasts with research that has investigated successful leaders. For example, Dohsten et al.'s (2020) examination of elite athletic coaches in Sweden who demonstrated the importance of treating everyone within the team as individuals, understanding their needs and how best to optimise their performances. This was also identified by Potrac et al. (2002) who impressed the importance of tailoring his interactions with players in order to gain their trust, respect and loyalty.

Finally, the failure to meet performance objectives, manifested in a failure to develop individuals within the team, is inextricably linked to, and perhaps a consequence of, the other four factors. This was arguably the final 'nail in the coffin' for the coaches' time at the Wildcats. In other words, the players might have accepted the fact that their winning ratio was

worse than the season before and indeed other failings of the coaching team *if* they had felt personal progress. The Wildcats' coaches, as per Potrac et al.'s (2002) study, might have viewed individual player development as secondary to team performance. However, as Côté and Gilbert (2009) outline, an athlete's level of competence in their sport is the most obvious outcome of coaching effectiveness and in this case, players perceived their form in the hands of the Wildcats coaching team to idle and at worst deteriorate. A reduced sense of accomplishment outlined by the players in this instance is an antecedent to athlete burnout (Raedeke et al., 2002) and can cause individuals to drop out of their chosen sport - the potential of which was highlighted in this research. In the player's descriptions of how their personal game felt constrained, they perhaps felt a lack of autonomy which is again closely linked to burnout (Lonsdale et al., 2009), so too their fear of deviating from the prescribed game plan and making mistakes (Gustafsson et al., 2017).

6.5.2 Applied Implications

The findings from this current case also highlight a number of applied strategies; specifically targeting 'what to avoid' and therefore frame potential management and support approaches for incoming foreign coaches.

For instance, in recruiting a head coach position it might be advised to explicitly examine the specific change management skill set and past experiences of successful change of the coaching candidate. This is especially pertinent if, like the Wildcats, a coach is hired to specifically improve the current environment. The lack of expertise in this area was a notable flaw for the Wildcat's Head Coach and seeking someone with greater expertise in change management might avoid this particular derailment factor. As part of the recruitment of assistant coaches, and as highlighted in this case, the balance of the coaching team should be considered. Coaches with diverse approaches might be more suitably placed to lead the team rather than the three 'bad cops' appointed to the Wildcats. With three differing styles there is

perhaps a stronger likelihood of creating coach rapport across the squad with players being drawn to a particular style. Diverse coaching approaches might also encourage diverse thinking that again, unlike for the Wildcats, would perhaps result in a more cognitive agile coaching team, able to adapt to the changing demands of a season long campaign and/or as a result of feedback from the playing group. Variety among the coaching team might also encourage critical debate with robust discussions ensuring the environment remains fresh and stimulating helping to optimise individual development and performance, rather than the drudgery and dread experienced at Wildcats.

Other strategies might include providing an explicit time frame for the new coach(es) to carry out their due diligence on the squad. There might be an assumption that some fact finding would have taken place by the coach as part of the recruitment process, but this additional time affords a more detailed gathering of information to base initial planning. This specific time taken as part of the coach's transition might also prove vital in establishing early relationships with key influencers among the playing group. Finally, and while not explicitly revealed within this case, is the ongoing support of the coaches from senior management such as a Director of Rugby for example. The key theoretical components of derailment could be utilised as a check list to frame the support of the coach's line manager, ensuring practices are in place to avoid potential derailers. The coach(es) too might use such a framework to ensure fatal flaws are being avoided rather than reinforced.

6.6 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to use the five factored themes of derailment as a lens to abductively examine the derailment of an elite rugby union coaching team. In meeting the need for more derailment research that sought the views of followers rather than the leaders themselves, this case offered unique theoretical and applied advances not least being the first study to use derailment theory as a lens to view elite sport coaching. As a reminder, the failings

of this coaching team were categorised as derailment, rather than the previously identified 'poor coaching' practice. This is confirmed through their previously held success on the elite provincial and world stage and that the coaches' sacking from their position at the Wildcats did *not* signify the end of their coaching careers (Leslie, 1995), rather all three acquired new elite coaching roles and went on to be successful in their respective fields.

Notwithstanding the credible advancement of derailment research within the elite coaching context, there are some notable limitations of the study that may inform future research within this domain. Firstly, the research investigated a *single* case of leadership derailment and as such it would be difficult to generalise these findings across other sporting contexts. Future research therefore may wish to consider multiple cases of derailed leadership in multiple sports thus providing a transferable model to be used across sport. Secondly, and while there was a need to explore followers' experiences of derailment, examining the coaches' as well as internal and external stakeholders' perceptions of the season in question may have provided a more holistic view of the coaches' tenure. Existing derailment studies, including this current case, have tended to focus on a single perception so future research, as a notable advancement to the literature, may consider acquiring *multiple* views of the factors that lead to derailment. Finally, the retrospective nature of this current case examined events prior to the now much improved understanding of what effective coaching processes look like within elite environments. The access to this knowledge may not have been available during the time of the failed Wildcats' season and perhaps mitigates the behaviours of the coaching team i.e., they knew what they knew. Future research may therefore wish to consider more contemporary cases of derailment to see which factors may have changed given the wealth of knowledge now available to coaches.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, GENERAL DISCUSSION, RECONMMENDATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTION AND RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS.

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 Overview

This thesis has aimed to meet the growing need for a greater understanding in the critical components of building and sustaining a high performing culture, within distinct sporting environments - specifically within an emerging rugby nation's team. Addressing this requirement, the objectives of the thesis were threefold:

1. To examine and evaluate the creation of a high performing culture within an existing emerging rugby nation

2. Given the global nature of today's sporting landscape, to investigate best practice in nurturing a high performing culture within multicultural teams and as a foreign coach

3. To investigate the 'opposite pole' of best practice to highlight what should be *avoided* when building a high performing culture as a foreign coach.

Four studies, across two phases, were designed to meet these objectives. The first phase, comprising of two studies, specifically examined an emerging rugby nation with phase two - a further two studies - accessing broader high performing expertise drawing on the relevant information for the emerging context. These findings aimed to provide pragmatic, evidence-based guidelines for creating a high performing culture in an emerging rugby nation, providing novel contributions to the field of organisational culture in sport, with the scope of transferring these findings across sporting milieus within the emerging context.

7.1.2 Study One

As one of two studies in the first phase of the research, and in meeting the first objective of this thesis, Hong Kong's Elite Rugby Program (ERP) was examined. In this study, a qualitative retrospective assessment of the ERP's transition from an amateur-based to a fully professional program from the perspectives of current ERP players, the Head of the ERP (HoERP) and the team's sport psychologist was carried out. Through the lens of uniquely combining Performance Management and Resource Based View, findings revealed key strategic considerations in building a high performing culture within this particular emerging context.

As well as unveiling previously recognised 'boundary-less' themes in creating a high performing culture, such as a clear vision and direction, an adaptive approach to leadership, the promotion of athlete empowerment and coach-athlete relationships for example, critical nuanced considerations for the emerging context were also found. For example, educating players and the player leadership group as to the expected performance behaviours of a professional rugby player and their responsibilities as leaders respectively. As inexperienced professionals, performance behaviours and leadership skills were not as embedded as one might expect of more seasoned professionals, so these learnings were required to be consistently delivered, serving as a constant reminder. A holistic focus on creating a dual career for players in conjunction with their progression as a professional player also emerged as a central consideration for the emerging context. This was especially relevant in Hong Kong given the distinct lack of professional rugby playing opportunities outside of the ERP and within the wider region.

Further considerations included the coach's requirement to exhibit an adaptive leadership approach, adopting styles across the leadership spectrum depending on the situation.

For example, the HoERP recognised the need to be more directive in his early tenure before switching to a more dispersed approach. Managing the expectations of external stake holders such as members of the board was another crucial element to the HoERP's leadership skill set and especially relevant in emerging contexts where the knowledge base of how to create high performing teams might be restricted to the Head Coach. The importance of player management was also revealed, specifically referring to the onboarding process and player recruitment. Linked to the education of players, in emerging teams and as revealed in Hong Kong, players might not be aware of their specific role as a professional so targeted meetings explicitly providing clarity is an essential onboarding process and one that was lacking within the ERP. The approach to player recruitment was another interesting finding for emerging nations. Where the talent pool might be smaller, making decisions on the recruitment of 'troublesome' players based on the balance of their positive performance contribution and potential negative cultural impact due to disruptive behaviour is an important consideration for Head Coaches. Finally, seeking ways to continually progress the team culture in the absence of a consistently competitive competition structure was another challenge for the ERP and potentially other emerging nations. Strategies adopted by the ERP included the public display of internal performance measures for example to help drive competition endogenously.

Finally, identifying and operationalising the teams' resources as a competitive advantage is another worthwhile endeavour. For Hong Kong it was the management of the financial capital resource, generated through the annual Hong Kong Sevens event, that enabled them to fund their physical and human capital resource. For other emerging nations, critically assessing which resources can help to create their 'unfair advantage' is an additional feature revealed in this study.

This study was the first of its kind, providing much needed knowledge into the nuances of developing a high performing culture in an emerging team context. Notwithstanding the

unique findings there were some notable limitations to the study. To begin with, the researcher's inside status - while a key feature of the pragmatic approach (Giacobbi et al., 2005) - may have influenced player participant's answers through impression management and therefore may have effected some of their responses. Secondly, only a selection of the ERP group were interviewed so caution must be made in generalising the opinions of the 11 players as a representation of the entire ERP squad. Finally, although the focus of the research was directed towards the on-field team, obtaining the views of board members to examine how they perceived the process of change would have also been a useful element to the results.

7.1.2.1 **Rationale for Study Two.** Following the unique qualitative insight into the development of the ERP's team culture over a four-year period and in further meeting the thesis's first objective, the second part of the first phase of the thesis aimed to quantitatively examine the *current* status of the ERP's culture. This quantitative approach afforded the opportunity to present potential intervention strategies for areas of the culture that may have been viewed as weaknesses or areas to improve.

7.1.3 Study Two

This second study in the first phase also aimed to meet the first objective namely; examining and evaluating the creation of a high performing culture within an existing emerging rugby nation. Triangulating the findings from the previous study, the specific aim for study two was to quantitatively evaluate the evidence-based features of an effective rugby talent development culture in Hong Kong. The tool used for this purpose was Martindale et al.'s (2010) Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ). The benefit of complimenting the previous qualitative findings of study one with a quantitative approach provided an opportunity for players to feedback completely anonymously, against a backdrop of evidenced-based items (i.e., features of the environment that have been shown to be relevant for effective development environments). Although not an explicit cultural assessment tool,

the TDEQ appeared to be appropriate for this current sport context due to; 1) its focus on identifying environmental strengths and weaknesses to inform intervention needs; 2) its factors and items are representative of effective TDE culture in sport and 3) the evidence of strong ecological validity and reliability in this context and its applicability through a range of sports.

Results from the TDEQ indicated a number of cultural strengths of the ERP, such as the regularity with which players' performances were reviewed; the effectiveness of the integrated, accessible and approachable support staff; the robust planning of training and training content and the extent with which players' dual careers were developed through the ERP's 'Earn or Learn' scheme. There were also several items that were identified by the players as areas that required improvement. These individual items were themed to help shape potential intervention strategies. The four themes were 1) role models and peer pressure; 2) forward planning and welfare; 3) clarity of required process focus and 4) player empowerment.

Examples of intervention strategies included introducing more peer-to-peer discussions and sharing of players' respective 'signature strengths' to help mitigate the lack of role models within the team and the region. Further intervention proposals included specific education of the player leadership group ensuring key messages from the HoERP were delivered throughout the group, promoting clarity and adherence. Impressing the importance of players engaging in a dual career was another key intervention strategy. Despite the ERP's operational 'Earn or Learn' policy it was suggested that more was needed in specifically stressing the importance of this given the dearth of professional playing opportunities within Hong Kong. The ongoing need for the HoERP to spend more time engaging players about their life outside of sport was another area to improve. Although wellness and wellbeing processes were a regular feature of the ERP, specific attention was made towards improving foreign and domestic player onboarding processes - the current lack of formal processes in this regard may have led to 'weaker' well-being item scores.

For the final two themes, interventions were centered around a process rather than outcome focus and player empowerment. Firstly, the players felt there was an over-emphasis on performance outcome at the expense of a process focus. A suggested intervention strategy in this instance was making more explicit references to effort in training and games. That was not however at the expense of developing a winning mentality. Player empowerment was the final aspect of the ERP that purportedly required improvement. Suggested interventions in this instance targeted a carefully managed degree of dispersed leadership - managed due to shortcomings of the leadership group revealed in study one.

In meeting the first objective of the thesis and the methodological need for more mixed methods approaches within this context (Cupples et al., 2020; Gangsø et al., 2021; Yauch & Steudel, 2003), the triangulation of studies one and two have helped to provide a more rounded understanding of the ERP's culture - how it was created, developed, its current strengths as well as identifying areas for improvement. The use of the TDEQ, as an appropriate tool to assess team culture within an emerging nation, was encouraging although there were notable limitations of its continued use, for this specific purpose, in its current form. The need to contextualise some of the items towards the specific environment being one recommendation, as well as removing items that would be irrelevant for senior emerging programs and emerging nations such as references to performer's school and/or direct influence of parents. There might also be a requirement for more specific references to aspects of the culture, such as Schein's (1990) Three Levels for example.

7.1.3.1 Rationale for Study Three. In order to build on the previous two studies, and to add value for the purpose of identifying practice guidelines, further work was required. As per the ERP, and other sports in Hong Kong, there might be a need for other emerging teams to manage a squad of differing national and cultural backgrounds. In the second phase of this thesis therefore, and in meeting its second objective, study three investigated best practice in

nurturing a high performing culture within multicultural teams as a foreign coach. Specifically, the experiences and perceptions of established, expert high performing rugby coaches who had previous success in developing and managing multi-cultural squads and/or coaching in foreign countries. Both multi-cultural squads and foreign coaches are typically associated with emerging nations and, as such, lessons may be relevant for the purposes of helping to identify 'best practice' guiding those responsible for teams and/or programs in the emerging context.

7.1.4 Study Three

The aim of the second phase of this thesis was to access broader high performing expertise by drawing on the relevant information for the emerging context. For this third study, its purpose was to examine five elite rugby union head coaches' experiences as a 'foreigner' and using Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework. Specifically, to explore their personal acculturation challenges as well as understanding how they managed their respective acculturation environments; that is how, as *hosts,* they best supported incoming foreign players. Through synthesising these findings, real world evidence-based recommendations were made for the acculturation of foreign coaches and the management of their multicultural squads within the emerging nation context.

Following the coaches' respective interviews, results revealed several critical considerations for coaches of teams in emerging nations. For example, and in a similar theme to the previous two studies, there may be a need for an incoming coach to educate incumbent staff as to the necessary practices and behaviours required to build a high performing environment. Managing the potential negative feeling directed to the new incoming coach, particularly as a foreigner and 'outsider,' was also an important factor for the new coach. Building relationships with senior management and even elements of the media were seen as key ingredients through this process. Developing a shared acculturation environment was another important theme for emerging nations, particularly in the likelihood of a multicultural

squad. Shared acculturation was shown to positively impact the adaptation of foreign players, lending itself to positive performance. Finally, and again in a similar finding to study one, the robustness of the emerging team's recruitment policy is central consideration, ensuring high-quality but potentially problematic players are afforded the opportunity to develop. Creating innovative and creative selection and/or talent identification strategies were seen as an important feature of this.

Although study three offered some pertinent insights for emerging nations into the management of multicultural squads as a foreign coach, there were some notable shortcomings. First, other relevant opinions outside that of the coaches (e.g., player's experience) were missing, therefore cross examination of the coaches' experiences with significant others was not possible. Future research may therefore wish to consider a more holistic representation of a sporting environment that includes player, assistant coach, support staff and senior management opinion. Second, the sample was dominated by male coaches working within the United Kingdom, coaching fifteen-a-side teams. Developing the research even further, consideration could be given to a broader spread of both male and female coaches from the top leagues across the world and a wider selection of seven-a-side coaches, as well as work within other sporting contexts.

7.1.4.1 Rationale for Study Four. The previous three studies have revealed important considerations of how to effectively create and develop a high performing culture in an emerging rugby nation. As beneficial, is examining the 'opposite pole,' by exploring coach leadership capabilities through the lens of what *not* to do. By assessing failures, further emphasis can be directed to 'what works' as well as revealing aspects of inadequacy that may be inhibiting the performance environment. Using derailment theory, the final study therefore examined the leadership failings of an elite rugby union coaching team.

7.1.5 Study Four

Targeting the third objective of the thesis, through the lens of leadership derailment, the failures of an elite rugby union coaching team were explored through the perceptions of the players. Derailment is a special case of leadership failure as it involves people who, prior to failing, were very successful (Capretta et al., 2008). Through abductive analysis of the data, several fundamental findings were revealed.

Central to this model was the coaches' failure to develop relationships with the players. This failure was manifested as a lack of respect for the players and constant negative feedback. Feeding into the central theme were four further failures. The first was ineffective player management and referred to coaches' autocratic style and oppressive training regime that resulted in some players reporting psychological damage. The second failure was an unwillingness to adapt their approach. The coaching team were described as 'three bad cops' adopting a one size fits all strategy particularly in motivating players. The coaches' third failure was a lack of change management skills. Given the potential requirement for coaches to change the culture within an emerging team - *a la* Hong Kong's ERP - this is a particularly relevant finding for the emerging context. Lessons of not what to do included the sweeping changes that the coaching team implemented, rather than a more staged approach, and without engaging or seeking buy-in from the playing group. The fourth and final failure factor was the coaches' cultural blindness. Again, for an emerging team's coach this is an important behaviour to avoid particularly with the potentially multicultural nature of the squad. The coaches in this study made the fatal flaw of lifting strategies from their own culture and forcing them on a team that was from a distinct sporting and national culture. Further, they purportedly did nothing to learn about the team's culture nor the people within it.

A derailment feature that inextricably linked the previous four factors was the failure to develop individuals. Despite the coaching team's poor results the players did not mention this team failure, rather they noted how their personal progression at the hands of the foreign

coaches had stalled and, in some cases, regressed. It was suggested that this was the final nail in the coaches' coffin - players might have accepted other failings had they felt they were developing as a professional.

The study suggested several strategies that might help mitigate the potential of derailment for an incoming coach of an emerging nation. For example, given the likelihood of the emerging team's environment requiring cultural change, the new coach would need to show previous experience of successful change management as part of the recruitment process. Affording incoming coaches necessary time to 'fact find' about their new team, team members and particularly its national and team culture might also be a worthwhile endeavour helping to avoid the cultural mistakes demonstrated by the derailed coaching team.

7.2 General discussion

The following sub section explicitly draws upon the central learnings from the four studies, will highlight the original contribution to the development of theory and, in meeting the global aims of the thesis, provide pragmatic, evidence-based guidelines for building a high-performing culture in an emerging rugby nation. The three recommendations are 1) the need for program wide education of players, staff and external stakeholders; 2) a coordinated recruitment and the management of players and 3) the management of personal acculturation and the acculturative environment.

7.2.1 Recommendations

7.2.1.1 Program wide education. Made explicit through the first three studies, is the ongoing need for Head Coaches of teams in emerging nations to educate those individuals who are directly and indirectly linked to the performance of the team. Namely, the players, coaches/support staff, senior management and/or boards of directors. Although this thesis has focussed on *team* culture (i.e., personnel directly responsible for on field performance) to dismiss the influence of individuals such as the board of directors would be an oversight given

the evidence through the studies. The positive by-product of educating personnel directly and in-directly involved with performance can also engender buy in towards the vision and direction of the team. As the findings from study four showed, *not* informing or educating individuals on your 'why' can have a divisive effect.

Considering the early career nature of the players within the ERP, and a challenge potentially faced within other emerging teams, findings highlight the importance for the Head Coach to educate players, and potentially staff, on the expected performance behaviours of a professional both inside and outside of the working environment. This process could potentially take place as part of the onboarding process of new players. This clarity was missing within the ERP's player onboarding processes and is a critical component of player's socialisation and integration into the environment (Benson et al., 2016). For the ERP, the player education included constant reminders of exhibiting winning habits such as those described in previous high performing teams (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2014). The education of players also included rationalising particular training phases and/or methodologies and, as Yukelson and Rose (2014) summarised, providing such clarity is a key feature of team success. This critical aspect was also a notable omission in study four where players acknowledged that at no point did the coaches make a case for their chosen training approach. For the staff, as the HoERP demonstrated, this education may take the form of how to assist the Head Coach in continually driving the vision and key messages within the environment through their own behaviours and practices. This ruthless pursuit and intense uncompromising attitude to creating a performance-based culture might be typical of high performing environments (Collins & Cruickshank, 2012) but in an emerging context such a change in approach might be a significant shift for staff (and players). This might require particular attention and careful consideration for a Head Coach within the emerging context, especially if they have come from a more established environment. The HoERP for instance

demonstrated walking the balance of the need to 'ruffle a few feathers,' to get the required swift change in behaviours, while maintain staff buy in and engagement.

Further education of players may need to take a more holistic position and, for the emerging context, impress the importance of developing a dual career especially if, like Hong Kong, professional sport opportunities within the area are rare. The development of elite athletes' dual careers has gained wide attention over the last 20 years (Li & Sum, 2017) and this holistic approach was a central tenet of the ERP, through their 'Earn or Learn' policy, as well as a key feature in a number of talent development environments (Henriksen et al., 2010a; Larsen et al., 2013) and a recognised key pillar to building a championship wining culture (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). In the ERP, a Performance Lifestyle Manager was employed to help manage this process. Although other emerging nations might not have the capital resource to employ someone specifically for this purpose, at the very least developing the dual careers of athletes should be formalised with players offered direction and support rather than being left to chance.

As study three revealed, the player leadership group also had an important role in educating players, particularly new players to the environment, regarding expected behaviours and culture of the team. However, as studies one and two highlighted, in an emerging nation, there may be a need for the leadership group themselves to be educated as to their roles and responsibilities as team-leaders. For example, and as the opening two studies demonstrated, educating them how to effectively communicate key messages from the management to the wider group - a shortcoming reported within ERP. Also, given the potential of a lack of external role models in the emerging context, as highlighted in study two, educating the leaders as their role as *internal* role models, driving standards from within, also seems to be a worthwhile undertaking. Although the development of shared leadership has been positively linked with team effectiveness (Fransen et al., 2017), for emerging nations an assumption that

player leadership group would know how to function optimally with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities might be considered an imprudent approach. As the research has demonstrated (Fransen et al., 2020) striving to develop an empowered group through shared leadership is a worthwhile undertaking. However, as revealed in the opening two studies, in the emerging context it should be recognised of the need for perpetual educating of the player leaders, and indeed the wider group, ensuring ongoing clarity of roles and to ensure continually development of the leadership group.

Educating personnel who are in-directly responsible for team performance - such as senior management and the board of directors - is another key concern and, as shown in studies one and three, a core responsibility for the Head Coach. The management of external stakeholders is critical across sporting milieus (Cruickshank et al., 2015). However, it is particularly relevant to teams in the emerging context due to the potentially unrealistically high expectations set by the board, especially if an experienced and credible coach has been externally recruited from an established and successful team. As the coaches in study three revealed carefully managing and educating this key group as to the likely trajectory of progress is critical to managing the coaches' longevity within the role. This can at times be a challenge however given the potential conflicting views of senior management and coaches (English et al., 2020)

7.2.1.2 Coordinated Recruitment and the Management of Players. Given the potential for emerging nations being impacted with a reduced talent pool (Bennett et al., 2019) the importance of recruiting new players and the management of existing players appears a crucial consideration for teams within this context. The strategic recruitment of assistant coaches is also worthy of attention not least the right mix of staff. Having a culturally and cognitively diverse coaching team can have positive impacts on performance (Lee & Cunningham, 2019; Syed, 2019) and at the 'opposite pole,' as starkly demonstrated in study

four, getting the *wrong* mix of coaches can be damaging. Finding the right balance of support/coaching staff may be a specific responsibility for a new incoming Head Coach.

Regarding a coordinated recruitment of players, adopting an innovative and flexible strategy, as described in study three, may be an important step for teams in the emerging context. Providing opportunities for candidates to show their capabilities across a range of situations was previously adopted by the Canadian Air Force in selecting their air demonstration team (Martin & Eys, 2019). Such an approach might provide a clearer understanding of whether an individual would be a good cultural fit. Also, given the constraints of a limited talent pool and perhaps the need to select talented but disruptive players, as revealed in the ERP, a recruitment process that involves speaking to the player with their family or partner, for example, and obtaining the opinions of other coaches might reveal circumstances and situations where the player could develop and adapt their behaviour to fit the team culture. This wider approach might also reveal specific coaches who have a connection with the player. Fostering this and coach-player relationships can be a key factor in reducing conflict and mitigating the negative impact of the disruptive player (Leggat et al., 2018)

The ongoing management of players, especially potentially disruptive talent, within the environment is another key implication from this research. Once again linked with the paucity of talent within the emerging context, teams may wish to consider alternative approaches to disruptive players rather than removing them from the team. Leggat et al. (2018) previously offered useful guidelines which may be considered in this context. For example, they showed how engaging the disruptive player at an individual level, providing them with specific goals and/or opportunities for explicit praise as part of a wider aim of solidifying coach-player relationships were useful strategies. Involving problematic players within the leadership group was another potential tactic. As Leggat et al. (2018) highlighted, having disruptive talent in a leadership group may serve to a) encourage buy-in from the player towards the goals and vision

of the group, particularly if they have been part in creating the goals and b) improve social bonds with teammates. A third strategy outlined by Leggatt et al. (2018) is being conscious of the nomenclature used to describe potential problematic players. Terms such as 'team cancer' for example may engender a sense that these types of players need to be dealt with rather than being encouraged to seek solutions as to *why* a player might be disruptive and subsequently aim to work with them more effectively. An important final consideration, although every effort to engage a potentially disruptive player is recommended, this process might require an 'end point' where, for the benefit of the wider group, the disruptive player may have to be removed from the environment should their behaviours not shift sufficiently.

7.2.1.3 The Management of Personal Acculturation and the Acculturative Environment. Given the transnational nature of professional sport, highlighted through this thesis, and the likelihood of multicultural squads being managed by foreign coaches, understanding and preparing for the possible acculturation stresses that one might face as a foreign coach and/or the stresses of players entering the acculturative environment is paramount. Such an understanding can help maximise the desirable group outcomes associated with culturally diverse teams (Lee & Cunningham, 2019).

A critical first step in this process would be for an incoming coach would be to gain a deep understanding of their society of settlement (Berry, 1997) or rather *team* of settlement helping them to inform their practices accordingly. This was a glaring omission from the foreign coaches in study four that had a significant negative impact on the playing group's perception of their coaches and levels of engagement. In contrast, the coaches in study three demonstrated an acute awareness of the cultural differences within their respective squads through due diligence carried out prior to and in the early stages of their tenure, managing their behaviours in a way that have been previously shown to positively impact culturally diverse groups (Duchense et al., 2011). Gaining a deep understanding of the cultural landscape of the

team, and as again demonstrated in study three, enables the coach/coaches to make informed decisions on aspects of the environment such as performance behaviours for example. This 'working the culture' (Byrne & Cassidy, 2017) was evidenced by one of the coaches in study three with their 'Village Time' and is an example of the type of culturally informed leadership that is central to managing a team in an emerging nation. Of note however, this was not at the expense of the non-negotiable behaviours that all players had to adhere to. An understanding of the team of settlement can also help guide any change management strategies led by the coach, including what to change and when. The bullish, sweeping changes made by the coaches in study four being the opposite pole for effective change (Cruickshank et al., 2015). Finally, there appears a need for a coach to prepare for potential antipathy towards them from certain members of the host country. This has previously been a concern for athletes where incoming 'star players' are seen as a threat by the local player base (Khomutova, 2016) and was an issue for one of the coaches in study three. As revealed, regular and open dialogue, managing external and internal messaging, is a key strategy for coaches in this regard (Cruickshank et al., 2014).

In the management of the acculturative environment adopting a *shared* approach is seen as the most effective way of assisting newcomers into the environment, leading to integration and ultimately better performance (Schinke et al., 2015). Having a mixture of formal and informal processes is another important consideration rather than relying solely on informal and arguably ad-hoc processes displayed within the ERP. This is particularly important given the negative impact acculturative stress can have on the players (Schinke et al., 2011). Examples of these formal and informal processes might include peer mentoring, highlighted in study three and previous research (Battochio et al., 2013; Schinke et al., 2011), where athletes are paired or grouped with those of similar cultural backgrounds to assist the newcomer in 'finding their feet.' Other examples to consider might involve the celebration of the various

cultures through stages of the season such as the culinary themed approach adopted by the NHL where various national dishes were offered in the team's team room (Battochio et al., 2013) or perhaps the Christmas gathering hosted by one of the coaches in study three. Utilising the leadership group as part of the socialisation of newcomers is another important strategy that has been shown to enhance the engagement of newcomers (Ryba et al., 2018).

7.3 Future Directions

Throughout this program of research, three objectives have been examined. As Carron and Eys (2012) recognise, there is strong potential for what happens in one group to be relevant in other groups. It is reasonable therefore to assume the findings of this thesis could extend to other emerging rugby nations (Martin & Eys, 2019). Future research however may still wish considering the following broad avenues of study.

Given the paucity of research within the emerging context, there is still a need to identify the unique challenges for other teams in emerging nations when establishing a high performing culture. Future research therefore may wish to consider, not only other rugby nations, but also those across a number of other sporting milieus. Combining the performance management and resource-based view may also prove to be a useful lens to see where a particular team might hold their specific advantage. In addition, given the specific challenges of limited playing opportunities combined with acculturation stress, the pressures on well-being within the emerging context appear to be magnified. Work focussing on this element of an emerging culture may well be of value.

Adapting and validating the tools and frameworks utilised through this thesis might be another worthwhile direction. Adapting Martindale et al.'s (2010) Talent Development Environment Questionnaire for example as a specific cultural assessment tool. Contextualising Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework for the sporting domain may also help to specifically manage the acculturation experiences of both coaches and players and building a sport specific

model of derailment might be used to help mitigate and prevent the derailment of future foreign coaches.

7.4 Summary

This research program offers a number of original contributions in the field of organisational culture in sport. Specifically, helping to meet the growing need of understanding the critical components of building and sustaining an effective high-performing culture in teams of emerging nations (McDougall, 2017; Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018).   The pragmatic philosophy adopted throughout the research revealed critical practical guidelines for future coaches/program leaders within the emerging context. In addition to the 'boundaryless' factors associated with effective high performing cultures – applicable across sporting domains - key context specific considerations for the emerging context were also presented.

7.5 Reflections from the Researcher

In addition to the novel contributions this thesis has attempted to make in the field of OC in sport, specifically team culture within an emerging nation context, the research has also afforded me the opportunity to reflect on my own coaching practice and that of a researcher. Particularly, how my understanding of team culture, and indeed my role as a researcher, has developed through the PhD and, upon reflection, how I might have adopted alternative research approaches. This has occurred while 'living and breathing' the ERP's team culture *in vivo* through my day-to-day role at the HKRU over the last six years.

As well as affirming several key principles of my personal coaching philosophy, such as providing a challenging and supportive environment as part of an interdisciplinary team, the importance of providing players with a rationale as well as engendering a holistic approach to player development for example, the key learnings from the research were invaluable for my ongoing work as a practitioner and perhaps that of a researcher. The critical lessons were four-fold.

Firstly, although there exists a wide-ranging array of definitions and contrasting conceptualisations of OC, a consistent theme throughout the research, and indeed the findings of this thesis, is the central place *people* have within the construct. More specifically, the *relationships* one develops. At times during my professional work, particularly in leading the ERP, I found myself getting caught up in systems and structures failing to recognise, however robust and clear these systems and structure were, how they impacted the players and staff 'on the ground.' The simple habit of 'checking in' with players and staff at a more informal level through the week became a key change in my behaviour. These micro meetings also afforded me the opportunity to develop my personal relationships with the players and staff. The importance of this simple but meaningful habit was reinforced through the participants' answers during the interview process of study three in particular – and of course study four where such relationship building appeared non-existent. The extent to which successful coaches emphasised the fostering of deep relationships with people within their environment as central to their team culture was stark and is something that I will certainly look to replicate in roles moving forward.

The second critical learning was the need as a leader to adopt an 'it depends' approach rather than relying on 'text-book' suggested methods. Study one was particularly insightful in this regard. As a reminder, the HoERP's early leadership approach was directive and autocratic and may have been criticised for failing to adopt a more transformational and altruistic position. On reflection, and as argued in the chapter, the HoERP's choice of approach was exactly what was needed for that particular group at that particular time. As the context and the dynamic of the ERP group evolved, so did the HoERP's approach. This was a big lesson for me. Yes, I will adopt a leadership approach that is authentic to my values and one that I feel with enhance the environments I am in however, I will also be aware in my future practice of the absolute

necessity to slide up and down the leadership spectrum to accommodate and effectively lead the specific situation I and the group may find ourselves in.

Thirdly, although I would have previously been a strong advocate of culture needing to unequivocally shared, the research has brought my attention to the notion of *degrees* of sharedness, that can still lead to an effective team culture. This is particularly pertinent for the culturally diverse environment with which I worked and, I think provides sufficient flexibility and autonomy for individuals to express themselves in their own way. That is not to say that I do not hold value for certain non-negotiable behaviours and providing clear parameters in which people can express themselves, rather I have perhaps become more tolerant to individual's nuances within the environment.

Finally, in my role as the researcher through my PhD I have a newfound appreciation of the types of challenges this work can present. For example, when asking participants to reflect on potentially traumatic situations as per the fourth study. At least five of the participants openly shared the misery their time within that environment caused and attempting not to get caught up in the emotion of those interviews was at times challenging. Being an engaged and empathetic listener was a key part of the process, so too having the interview guide with to help me centre towards the task in hand. Also, having the interview guide through all qualitative studies served as an important cue, helping me keep the interviews 'formal' in nature rather than overly conversational - a potential risk if left unchecked given my familiarity with the contexts under study and at times some the participants.

In further reflections on *how* I conducted my research I have become aware of some alternative approaches that may have been adopted. In considering different approaches this has specifically revealed how I might have mitigated the challenge of researcher bias given the weight of value I placed on my role as an insider researcher and a co-constructor of knowledge. To recap, my role as the researcher for the first phase of the thesis where ERP was examined,

could be described as a total insider (Greene, 2014) where the researcher shares multiple identities and/or profound experiences with whom they are studying. As one of the coaches within the ERP at the time of research and having experienced the journey of the ERP's inception through the World Cup qualifying failure and beyond, the total insider approach appeared an accurate fit. For the second stage of the analysis, where the experiences of participants outside of the ERP and Hong Kong were sought, a partial inside status (Chavez, 2008) was adopted. In this instance, as a former professional rugby player and coach, the single identity I shared with the participants included a degree of detachment and distance between the studied community – i.e. I was not embedded within the research.

Both inside approaches offered several advantages in carrying out my research and linked well with my overall pragmatic philosophy that recognises the importance of the researcher's experiences as a co-constructor of knowledge. Advantages included getting access to the respective environments and, due to this familiarity with the context under study, there was no need to orientate myself with the research environment or people and as a 'familiar face' I was able to blend into the studied environments without disturbing the social setting (Greene, 2014).

With relation to managing researcher bias however, inside research is not without its challenges. In helping me to walk the terrain between these two approaches, and mitigate any research bias, I therefore adopted several key strategies. For instance, a challenge for the insider is that they are too close to the research, leading to making assumptions based on their tacit knowledge. Mitigating this potential bias was my rigorous reflexive thematic analysis where my PhD supervisors – critical friends - worked independently and together with me to ensure the results were the participants' story rather than my personal account. Further strategies, during phase one for example, included the explicit assurance that players' feedback in their interviews would not impact future selection and/or contracting and indeed their

comments might prove useful in taking steps to improve the environment. A 'measure' for the success in this approach was demonstrated in the results section where, far from being devoid of criticism, the participants openly challenged the coaches (me included) and their behaviours during the high-stake World Cup qualifying tournament.

Across both phases, asking open ended and non-leading questions during the interview stage as well as pre-empting the 'do you know what I mean' responses from participants was also key. The latter strategy was pertinent given my understanding of the researched environments and therefore the potential assumption by the participants that I did indeed 'know what they meant.' As recommended by Greene (20014) my approach to these comments was to ask the participant to *not* assume that I understood and to treat me as a 'first timer' to their setting resulting in a more explicit participant response and avoided the need for me to 'join the dots' and impose my personal view.

Although these strategies may have helped mitigate the bias within my research, adopting an entirely different research approach might also be equally beneficial in tackling this issue. For example, rather than retrospective studies, I might have chosen an insider ethnographic approach where, as the researcher, one is immersed within the participants' setting (Champ et al., 2020). This type of approach helps develop greater understanding of cultures into more meaningful contexts (Champ et al, 2020). A method often used within ethnographic research is observations and involves the systematic recording of human behaviour within particular environments (Thorpe & Olive, 2016). Combining observations with interviews is also common within ethnographic research and triangulating the data can not only mitigate research bias, but also provide a deeper understanding of an environment. For instance, observations may reveal elements that participants may not be willing to share in an interview setting as well as revealing themes that may be explored further in interviews (Thorpe & Olive, 2016). Central to the quality of observational research, and another important

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feature to mitigate bias, is the researcher's reflexivity. By being critically reflexive the researcher acknowledges their how their subjectivities – past experiences, race, gender, age, nationality - impacts the various stages of the research process (Thorpe & Olive).

Reflecting on one's nationality within the research process is of particular relevance in ethnography and especially when studying multi-cultural contexts such as my research. More specifically, and an approach I may have implemented, adopting a postcolonial lens as an ethnographer. Postcolonial theory is concerned with critiquing colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism that sees the world through Western eyes, viewing non-Western individuals as uncivilised and inferior (McSweeney, 2019). Shifting to a postcolonial approach permits Indigenous peoples' specific knowledge through their vastly difference worldviews to those of Eurocentric/Western thinking (McGuire-Adams, 2020). In the context of my research, and specifically for the phase based in Hong Kong, adopting a postcolonial lens may have encouraged me to critique my "Western gaze" through "imperial eyes" (McSweeney, 2019, p125). This further reflexivity may have assisted in mitigating my research bias by challenging my underlying assumptions acknowledging that my own Western view in how to create a high performing team culture in an emerging rugby nation may differ significantly to the indigenous community's worldview, theories and epistemologies (McGuire-Adams, 2020).

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