THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A COACHING VISION OF MULTIPLE CHAMPIONSHIP WINNING HOCKEY COACHES

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Abstract

Recently, a line of research has emerged focusing on highly accomplished coaches who led their athletes/teams to multiple championships. To date, researchers have highlighted commonalities relating to the developmental pathways of these coaches, including the articulation and implementation of a coaching vision. However, researchers have yet to examine how coaches develop their vision, including the factors and barriers involved in its creation and implementation. The purpose of this study was to explore the development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision and its influence on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Six expert men's ice hockey head coaches whose experience included 20 national championships, more than 170 years as head coach, and over 4100 wins at the college/university level were interviewed for this study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the data was organized into themes and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that the coaching vision was developed and adapted over time. It was derived from life experiences and personal characteristics of the coaches, and was facilitated through continuous knowledge acquisition and personal improvement that led to the articulation of a vision of excellence. Notably, time spent apprenticing as assistant coaches alongside a successful head coach aided the development of their vision. Once established, this vision was refined and adapted using knowledge acquired from peers and successful coaches in other domains. Furthermore, the vision was strengthened after achieving the ultimate goal of winning a national championship, a feat that reinforced the understanding of the performance standards associated with a culture of excellence. In order to sustain this culture, assistant coaches, personnel, and athlete leaders enacted the vision. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of how multi-championship winning coaches organize, teach, and articulate their goals through their coaching vision. Furthermore, a framework has been created to provide coaches an opportunity to emulate the strategies and behaviours that lead to the development of a coaching vision that fosters a culture conducive to achieving sustainable success. Extending this, gathering the knowledge and experiences from this elite sample of coaches provided valuable information relating to the building blocks of success that can be applied by coaches and coach training educators in hockey and other team sports. In addition, the current findings provide practical information to first-year head coaches that are starting with a new team, as well as experienced coaches that aim to achieve better results with their current team over time.

Résumé

Récemment, une ligne de recherche a émergé avec une attention particulière portant sur des entraîneurs émérites ayant menés leur athlètes/équipes à plusieurs succès en championnats. À ce jour, les chercheurs ont souligné les points communs concernant le cheminement de développement de ces entraîneurs, y compris l'élaboration et l'implémentation d'une vision de coaching. Cependant, les chercheurs n'ont pas encore examiné comment les entraîneurs développent leur vision, notamment les facteurs et barrières influençant la création et l'implémentation d'une vision. Le but de cette étude était d'explorer le développement, l'élaboration, et l'implémentation d'une vision de coaching ainsi que son influence sur la création et le maintien d'une culture d'excellence. Six entraîneurs chefs de hockey sur glace pour hommes ont été interviewés pour cette étude, dont l'expérience cumulée incluait 20 participations aux championnats nationaux, plus de 170 ans comme entraîneur-chef, et plus de 4100 victoires au niveau collégial/universitaire. Les entrevues ont été transcrites textuellement et les données ont été organisées en thèmes et analysées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats ont révélé que la vision du coaching fut développée et adaptée au fil du temps. La vision a été dérivée des expériences de vie et des caractéristiques personnelles des entraîneurs. D'autres éléments ayant contribués au développement d'une vision d'excellence incluent leur formation continue ainsi que l'amélioration personnelle. En particulier, le temps passé à côtoyer des entraîneurs-chefs en tant qu'assistants a facilité leur apprentissage en plus de leur permettre d'élaborer une vision de coaching. Une fois établie, cette vision a été raffinée et adaptée grâce à des connaissances acquises par l'intermédiaire de leurs pairs et entraîneurs dans d'autres domaines. De plus, la vision a été solidifiée après avoir atteint l'objectif ultime de remporter un championnat national. Cet exploit a consolidé la compréhension des normes et standards de performances associés à une culture d'excellence. Afin de maintenir cette culture, les entraîneurs adjoints, le personnel et les leaders d'équipe ont adopté la vision. Les résultats de cette étude contribuent à une meilleure compréhension de la façon dont les entraîneurs ayant gagné plusieurs championnats organisent, enseignent, et articulent leurs objectifs à travers leur vision de coaching. De plus, un cadre a été créé pour offrir aux entraîneurs l'opportunité de répliquer les stratégies et comportements qui mènent au développement d'une vision de coaching favorisant une culture propice au succès à long terme. Les connaissances et les expériences de cet échantillon d'entraîneurs élites a permis de fournir de l'information pertinente concernant les éléments qui contribuent à leur succès. Par conséquence, des entraîneurs et éducateurs peuvent mettre en pratique ces concepts dans le hockey et d'autres sports d'équipe. De plus, les résultats fournissent des informations pratiques s'adressant à de nouveaux entraîneurs chefs en charges d'une nouvelle équipe et à des entraîneurs avec plus d'expérience qui visent à améliorer les résultats et performances de leur équipe.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Head coaching positions in professional and college sports are highly sought after and are limited to an elite group of individuals who have been able to ascend to the top of their profession. For example, there are only 176 head coaching positions in the highest levels of professional, major junior, and college men's ice hockey in North America (i.e., 31 in the NHL, 60 in CHL, 60 in NCAA Division 1, and 25 in U Sports [1]). While it can be argued that attaining a head coaching position at any of these four levels defines success, a coach can further distinguish himself as an exceptional member of this elite group by winning a single championship and even more so by winning multiple championships. Consequently, some researchers have begun to study the knowledge and strategies used by coaches who have had attained success with their athletes and teams on the field of play by winning numerous championships (Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Donoso-Morales, Bloom, & Caron, 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016; Wang & Straub, 2012; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). These people could be classified as *Serial Winning Coaches* (SWC), which is defined as individuals who have coached their teams or individual athletes to multiple gold medals or championships at the Olympic Games, World Championships, or major professional leagues over prolonged periods of time (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). To date, research in this emerging domain has revealed some commonalities among the knowledge and behaviours of SWC, however further investigation is required to study some of the specific areas of research that differentiate this elite group of coaches from their peers.

[1] There are currently no female head coaches in the NHL, CHL, NCAA Division 1 or U Sports men's hockey.

The term Serial Winning Coaches (SWC) originated from a pair of studies that interviewed 17 of the world's most successful coaches of individual and team sports from 10 countries (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Among the findings, these coaches were characterized by a common set of personal characteristics that included an exceptional work ethic, strong communication skills, a quest for continuous improvement, and effective leadership behaviours that inspired their athletes. While some of these characteristics have also been found in expert coaches that had not won (multiple) championships, one of the apparent similarities among SWC was the way they created and maintained a culture that fostered successful athletic performance (Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). For example, a recent study on a sample of exceptional Canadian University coaches that won at least one national championship found that they consistently exposed their teams to high-pressure situations in practice to better prepare them for the emotional demands of competition in national championship games (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017). In a similar manner, a case study of the New Zealand All-Blacks championship-winning rugby team revealed that their coaches created a vision or plan that constantly promoted athlete empowerment and autonomy while still maintaining their standards and standing as the top men's rugby team in the world (Hodge et al., 2014). Furthermore, Kerr (2013) detailed how the All-Blacks fostered a championship culture that was rooted in 15 lessons of success. This included coaches setting lofty standards for players as well as the creation of a shared vision that inspired athletes to improve their character and gave them a purpose to extend the team's legacy of success. In sum, empirical and non-empirical studies of SWC and championship-winning coaches have revealed the commonalities in their personal characteristics and a focus on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Elberse & Dye, 2012;

Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Building off this, the next section examines how a culture that breeds success stems from a well-articulated coaching vision.

A coaching vision is defined as a standard of excellence that the coach upholds throughout all aspects of their program by integrating their long-term goals and philosophy (Vallée & Bloom 2005). A coach must articulate and enact their coaching vision clearly and consistently to cultivate a high performance culture required to attain sustainable success (Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). For instance, research has shown articulating the vision was achieved by clearly setting team goals and guidelines; while enacting the vision was a continuous process that involved taking a genuine interest in the development of athletes personally and athletically (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). This was evident in the actions of one successful coach who enacted her coaching vision by verbalizing it and then systematically writing it as a *blueprint for success* that outlined the steps required for her team to achieve their long-term goal of winning a national championship (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). To date, the majority of the research on coaching vision has focused on how coaches implemented their vision, which does not take into account how they developed it (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Based on its importance, the coaching vision has been a part of various models that describe successful coaching. For example, understanding the processes by which championship winning coaches develop and maintain their success can be understood by examining aspects of the holistic model for athlete development (Vallée & Bloom, 2005), and the Coaching Model (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995).

Looking at these models more closely, Holistic Athlete Development considers that coaching success involves developing athletes on and off the field of competition by teaching life skills through sport (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Furthermore, this model suggests that creating a clearly articulated coaching vision can positively influence team culture, inspire athlete empowerment, and facilitate sustainable winning results. Next, the Coaching Model (CM) describes a coach's actions, thoughts and behaviours through the primary elements of training, competition, and organization (Côté et al., 1995). Most important to this study, the organization aspect of the model is guided by the coach's philosophy which includes an overarching vision. Taken together, these coaching models provide insight into how successful coaches can implement their coaching vision, however research has yet to specifically examine how this vision is developed, articulated, and implemented, especially by coaches who have achieved great levels of success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how expert hockey coaches developed, articulated, and implemented their coaching vision. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is your coaching vision?
2. What factors contributed to the development of your coaching vision?
3. How is your coaching vision articulated and implemented?
4. In what ways has your coaching vision changed over time?
5. What role does success play in your coaching vision?

Significance of the Study

The goal of this study was to contribute both theoretically and practically to the coaching science literature, specifically to the line of research on coaches who have led their

teams/athletes to multiple championships. To date, researchers have highlighted commonalities relating to the developmental pathways of these coaches (e.g., Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016), as well as the articulation and implementation of a coaching vision (e.g., Gavazzi, 2015; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). However, there is a need to further understand the development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision and its influence on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Along the same line, this study differs from previous coaching research because coaching vision is the central focus. Notably, the findings contribute to a better understanding of how multi-championship winning coaches organize and articulate their goals through their coaching vision. Furthermore, a framework has been created to provide coaches an opportunity to emulate the strategies and behaviours that lead to the development of a coaching vision that fosters a culture conducive to achieving sustainable success. Extending this, gathering the knowledge and experiences from this elite sample of coaches provided valuable information relating to the building blocks of success that can be applied by coaches and coach training educators in hockey and other team sports. In addition, the current findings provide practical information to first-year head coaches that are starting with a new team, as well as experienced coaches that aim to achieve better results with their current team over time. Coaching vision may also have applications outside of sport. For instance, organizational literature has studied the vision of leaders within business organizations, therefore research on coaching vision may have overlapping applications in organizational literature.

Delimitations

The following delimitations have been identified for the current study:

1. Participants are males who are currently coaching males

2. Participants are current and recently retired head coaches in the NCAA Division 1 and U Sports
3. Coaches must have won at least two championships in either NCAA Division 1 or U Sports as the head coach

Limitations

The following limitations were identified in this study:

1. Results may only be applicable to hockey
2. Results may only be applicable to male team sports
3. Results are based on the coaches' perceptions of their own actions without validation from outside sources
4. Results may only be indicative of North American coaches' views

Operational Definitions

Serial Winning Coaches (SWC): Individuals who won multiple gold medals or championships at the Olympic Games, World Championships, or major professional leagues with multiple teams or individual athletes over prolonged periods of time (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

Coaching vision: A standard of excellence that the coach upholds throughout all aspects of their program by integrating their long-term goals and philosophy (Vallée & Bloom 2005). This shared vision encompasses the team's core values and purpose (Collins & Porras, 1996).

Philosophy: A coach's personal worldview relating to their principles, values, beliefs, how they teach, and how they develop athletes (Gould, Pierce, Cowburn, & Driska, 2017).

NCAA division I hockey: The highest level of college hockey in the United States of America. This includes 60 men's hockey teams separated in to 6 conferences.

U Sports: Representing the highest level of university hockey in Canada, there are currently 25 men's hockey teams in U sports separated into 3 conferences.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will consist of four main sections. First, there will be a discussion of coaching expertise. Second, there will be an exploration of research on Serial Winning Coaches (SWC). Third, research on coaching vision will be explored, specifically relating to the articulation and implementation of the vision in connection to building team culture. Finally, an overview of the coaching models relevant to the present study will be presented.

Coaching Expertise

The development of empirical research on coaching has witnessed substantial growth since the 1970's (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). More specifically, Gilbert and Trudel's (2004) analysis of coaching science research revealed 610 articles published between 1970 and 2001. Notably, there was an increase from only 18 articles published between 1970 and 1977 to 241 articles published between 1994 and 2001. This trend continued between 2001 and 2008 with an additional 336 articles published during this period (Rangeon, Gilbert, & Bruner, 2012). More recently, the field has benefited from a comprehensive compilation of coaching research that was published in the *Routledge Handbook of Sports Coaching* (Potrac, Denison, & Gilbert, 2013). Taken together the field of coaching research has grown tremendously since research began in the early 1970's. Most recently, coaching science researchers have begun to focus attention on creating formal definitions for key terms and concepts such as coaching excellence, effectiveness, and expertise (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007).

Coinciding with the increasing amount of literature published in coaching science, researchers continue to develop new terminology to describe coaches characterized as highly successful. Specifically, positive coaching behaviours have recently been described using the

terms great, excellence, and expertise (e.g., Becker, 2009; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté et al., 2007). First, Becker (2009) applied the term *great coaches* in a qualitative study of 18 team sport athletes pertaining to their experiences with their coaches. Great coaches were consistent in their communication, actions, and preparation. Second, Côté and colleagues (2007) created a consensus definition for *excellence* in coaching based on the athlete's level of development and competition. For example, coaching excellence pertaining to late adolescents and adults was defined as a coach's ability to maximize an athlete's effort, preparation, and recovery. Additionally, this definition included the coach's ability to motivate his/her athletes to input the hours of deliberate practice that were required for them to excel in competition. Notably, an athlete's performance was a key factor when assessing excellent coaching in the competitive sport context. Conversely, when considering excellence for youth sport coaches, participation, engagement, and fun were key elements to the definition. From an athlete's perspective, excellent coaches were perceived as competent and knowledgeable in both the youth sport and competitive sport contexts. In summary, similar characteristics were displayed by great and excellent coaches which demonstrates the need for clarity in the literature regarding the terminology for highly accomplished coaches.

Third, researchers also attempted to describe successful coaching using the term *expertise*. For instance, Horn's (2008) definition measured athlete achievement or personal attributes of athletes. This was assessed through winning percentage or an increase in athlete enjoyment in the sport. From another perspective, several studies have associated coaching knowledge with expertise (e.g., Becker, 2009; Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Jowett, 2007). This was evident in interviews with athletes in Becker's (2009) publication. They perceived their coaches' expertise as stemming from their in-depth technical and tactical

knowledge. In light of this, the difference between Côté and colleagues' (2007) description of coaching excellence and coaching expertise can be explained using the example of an excellent first-year coach. Specifically, first-year coaches can provide excellent coaching, however they do not have the experience to demonstrate coaching expertise because coaching expertise is only achievable by consistently providing excellent coaching over an extended period of time (Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Adding to the list of definitions for expertise, Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) were one of the first to conduct a comprehensive study on this subject and established that expertise was attained through 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice in domains such as music, chess, or sport. Despite these well thought out definitions of coaching excellence and research from multiple authors, coaching science literature still lacked a cohesive definition for expertise until Côté and Gilbert (2009) brought these ideas together.

Building off multiple perspectives for terminology used to describe highly skilled coaches, Côté and Gilbert (2009) developed an integrated definition to make up for the shortcomings of the previous definitions. They emphasized the development of favourable athlete outcomes (i.e., competence, confidence, connection, and character) through professional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal knowledge. This integrated definition entailed three main components: athlete outcomes; coaches' knowledge; and coaching contexts. First, athlete outcomes were characterized by *competence* in sport-specific skills, *confidence* relating to a positive impression of one's self, *connection* relating to positive personal relationships in and out of the sporting domain, and *character* as displayed by empathy, integrity, and moral responsibility. Second, coaches' knowledge included the elements of *professional knowledge* that referred to a coach's ability to teach sport-specific skills to their athletes, *interpersonal knowledge* that referred to expert coaches establishing and cultivating relationships with their

athletes, and *intrapersonal knowledge* that referred to coaches' self-awareness and tendency towards self-reflection when improving their practice. Third, coaching contexts described the environmental settings that coaches created to facilitate positive athlete outcomes. In conclusion, this definition established that coaching effectiveness referred to increasing the competence, confidence, connection, and character of athletes while further defining expert coaches as those that displayed coaching effectiveness on a consistent basis. In summary, Côté and Gilbert's (2009) successfully tied together the common elements of previous research to arrive at a widely accepted integrated definition.

As demonstrated by Côté and Gilbert's (2009) publication, research has revealed similar characteristics that shape the personal attributes of expert coaches. For example, the athlete experiences in Becker's (2009) study revealed the positive athlete outcomes (e.g., competence, confidence, connection, and character) that were highlighted in Côté and Gilbert's (2009) integrated definition for expertise. In addition, both of these studies highlighted the importance communication played for coaches when establishing interpersonal connections with their athletes. Furthermore, research revealed that communication skills were developed over extended periods of time through coaching experience, success of athletes, personal success by the coach during his/her athletic career, and peer recognition for his/her expertise (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995). Extending this, Becker (2009) revealed that athletes felt athletic experience gave a coach more respect and credibility. Therefore, examining these common elements suggests that coaching effectiveness and expertise were characterized by well-defined coach behaviours and knowledge that were communicated through exceptional coach-athlete interactions (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). The literature on coaching expertise has provided an empirical base for a new line of research focusing specifically on winning coaches.

Serial Winning Coaches

The knowledge, strategies, and behaviours of coaches in high performance sport are a topic of interest for coaching science researchers (e.g., Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Fairhurst, Bloom, & Harvey, 2017; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016; Wang & Straub, 2012; Wooden, 1988; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Recently, a line of research has emerged that has focused on highly accomplished coaches who led their athletes/teams to multiple championships (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Of particular importance to this line of research, Lara-Bercial and Mallett defined Serial Winning Coaches (SWC) as individuals who won multiple gold medals or championships at the Olympic Games, World Championships, or major professional leagues with multiple teams or individual athletes over prolonged periods of time (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). This definition distinguishes this elite group of coaches by holding them to a higher standard of winning compared to the definition for expert coaches established by Côté and Gilbert (2009) that had no pre-determined requirements for winning championships.

Research on the intrapersonal characteristics and traits of SWC has identified an obsessive passion for coaching success, in-depth personal reflection, high emotional intelligence, and a quest for continuous improvement across multiple studies of coaches who fit this criteria (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). Looking at passion more closely, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) developed the term “driven benevolence” to describe the underlying passion that accompanies the single-minded pursuit of excellence of SWC. This driven benevolence was rooted in a coach’s personal philosophy and

included a dual responsibility pertaining to the coach to developing himself/herself as well as his/her athletes (e.g., Babcock & Larsen, 2012; Dorrance & Nash, 1996; Jackson & Delehanty, 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Wooden, 1988). Next, the act of guided and non-guided self-reflection has been consistently observed in studies on championship-winning university coaches and SWC in all phases of their job (e.g., Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006). This was evident both on the field of play and during their own personal time when coaches introspectively reflected on their actions and behaviours (e.g., Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Wang & Straub, 2012; Wooden, 1988). This act of non-guided self-reflection facilitated the development of self-awareness and self-study that contributed to the advanced levels of intrapersonal knowledge observed in SWC (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). In addition, high emotional intelligence was demonstrated through empathy, understanding, open-mindedness, and composure in high-pressure situations (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). For instance, a study of three-time NCAA Division I winning wrestling coach J Robinson revealed that his emotional intelligence allowed him to connect deeply with his athletes, recognize teachable moments, and manage conflicts (Gould et al., 2017). Finally, a continuous quest for self-improvement facilitated by an exceptional work ethic has also been demonstrated in coaches that won multiple championships (e.g., Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). This was exemplified in their persistent thirst for knowledge and ability to learn from mentors, books, athletes, and competitors (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Taken together, SWC and expert coaches demonstrated common traits and characteristics such as personal reflection and high

emotional intelligence (Côté & Gilbert, 2009), while also displaying continuous improvement and driven benevolence (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

In contrast with the many positive characteristics of SWC described above, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) also revealed one common attribute among SWC that may be characterised as undesirable. More precisely, they observed a "serial insecurity" in SWC that was described as a self-doubt that was fueled by the uncertainty of future success but grounded in past accomplishments. Moreover, this self-doubt helped SWC avoid complacency by keeping their focus on the current season and not being content with previous successes. Looking at this further, for some coaches insecurity stemmed from an unfulfilled ambition as an athlete that left them with a desire to "make amends as a coach" (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016). For instance, this was observed in several case studies of highly successful coaches that needed to constantly prove themselves in a manner that was only satisfied through consistent success (e.g., Gould et al., 2017; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016). Their insecurity led to the development of positive traits such as continuous learning and constant reflection while driving them to continuously improve on their own and their athletes' skillsets in order to remain at the top of their profession (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). In light of this, although insecurity is often viewed as a negative trait, insecurity as a characteristic of SWC appears to indirectly have a positive impact as a driving force that motivated coaches to pursue excellence even after achieving winning results with their athletes. In contrast to expert coaches, insecurity may be a defining attribute that underlies the passion required by SWC to be lifelong learners and continuously strive for excellence (Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

When assessing the factors that motivate SWC to strive for excellence, it is worthwhile to consider the role their development pathway played in their coaching progression. More

specifically, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) noted that although the pathway for each coach was unique, almost all the SWC in their study had a formal education background, attended clinics, and had attained the highest coaching qualification. Although they believed formal education was important as a springboard for their career, they placed higher importance on mentoring, on-the-job learning, and peer learning from conversations with other coaches. Similarly, other studies of championship winning university coaches found that mentors were beneficial for providing guidance for personal improvement, managing matters outside of sport, and choosing career paths (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Regarding career trajectory, SWC were found to be opportunistic and willing to take risks when coaching jobs arose, which appears counterintuitive to their usual nature of making well thought out decisions based on thorough analysis (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). It is possible that this risk was based on a strong belief in their abilities and a desire for personal growth. This was the case when Chantal Vallée took the head coaching position with University of Windsor women's basketball team, she was so confident in her abilities that she was willing to take the risk of coaching a team that had never hosted a home playoff game. She quickly implemented her coaching vision and turned the program into a perennial champion (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). The articulation and implementation of a coaching vision was evident in case studies of championship-winning coaches; however, this research lacked depth regarding how these coaches developed their vision (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Finally, Lara-Bercial (2016) were one of the first to outline the development pathways of SWC. Although the development pathways of SWC appear to have developed some trends such as a tendency towards formal education and coaching

certifications (e.g., Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016), more research is required regarding how these pathways lead to the development of a coaching vision.

In summary, SWC are an elite group of experts who have attained and remain driven to attain sustainable winning results that put them amongst the all-time greatest in their profession (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Similar to expert coaches, SWC placed a high importance on personal reflection and exhibited high emotional intelligence (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté et al., 2007). Conversely, research has shown that SWC exhibited personal characteristics that separated them from expert coaches, such as driven benevolence, serial insecurity, and unfulfilled ambition (e.g., Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016). Although Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) were able to define some commonalities relating to the development pathways of SWC, there remains a need to understand how these pathways relate to the development of a coaching vision and its influence on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Further to this, the next section will focus specifically on how a coaching vision influences championship cultures.

Coaching Vision

Coaching vision has been defined as a standard of excellence that the coach upholds throughout all aspects of a program by integrating long-term goals and the coach's philosophy (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). In order to properly understand this definition, it is important to differentiate philosophy from vision. As such, a coaching philosophy was found to be a unique set of principles that guided a coach's personal objectives and leadership style, while coaching vision set the direction and goals of the entire organization (Vallée & Bloom 2005; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Accordingly, an interview with National Championship winning NCAA football coach Pete Carroll revealed that his coaching vision established team's direction and goals while

his personal philosophy involved being a relentlessly optimistic, positive voice for his players (Voight & Carroll, 2006). Although there is some research that uses the terms philosophy and vision interchangeably (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Gould et al., 2017), this study will follow Vallée and Bloom's (2005) definition for coaching vision.

The myriad of factors that influence the articulation and implementation of a coaching vision for highly accomplished coaches has received increased attention in the literature (e.g., Gould et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Hodge and colleagues (2014) were one of the first to conduct an empirical investigation of how SWC implemented their coaching vision. Their case study of Graham Henry and Wayne Smith, coaches of the New Zealand All-Blacks, examined the team's motivational climate and revealed how these coaches created a vision that influenced a culture change that propelled the team to an 85% winning percentage from 2004 to 2011, five Tri-Nations titles, and the 2011 Rugby World Cup. Before Henry and Smith arrived, the All-Black's had fallen from grace as the world's premier rugby team due to poor performance on the field and off-field incidents related to excessive alcohol consumption. Upon arrival to the team, Henry and Smith realized that a culture change was necessary so they developed a vision of "better people make better All-Blacks" that promoted athlete empowerment and autonomy as a way of improving players both on and off the field. Expanding on this, empowerment was facilitated by a dual-management model that shared the leadership responsibilities between the coaches and players that enhanced the players' feelings of ownership with the team's goals. Moreover, Henry and Smith created an autonomy-supportive environment that promoted players showing initiative and independence by providing feedback in a non-controlling manner (e.g., Mallett, 2005). Furthermore, their vision incorporated an expectation of excellence that provided players a daily challenge to add to the

team's legacy of being the best in the world. Overall, Henry and Smith relied upon their personal philosophies and values to develop a coaching vision that inspired a change in the team's culture.

Similar to the case of the All-Blacks, coaching vision played a key role in several case studies of successful coaches from professional and university sport (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). For example, Vallée and Bloom's (2016) paper on building a championship culture in Canadian university sport focused on the extraordinary success of Chantal Vallée with the University of Windsor women's basketball team. She was able to turn a struggling program that had never hosted a home playoff game into a team that won five consecutive national championships. Reflecting on this accomplishment, she described four keys to success that included athlete empowerment, teaching life skills, lifelong learning and personal reflection, and of particular importance to the current study, enacting a vision. Specific to her coaching vision, she first verbalized her vision of "winning a national championship within five years" then wrote it down in a detailed "blueprint for success" so her players would understand the new direction of the program and accompanying change of culture (p. 172). A key aspect to creating a championship culture was selling her philosophy to her athletes and enacting her vision by clearly articulating the team goals and consistently communicating this message to her players. Similarly, findings from studies on SWC revealed that the coach's personal philosophy was a guiding factor that allowed them to create a vision that cultivated the high performance culture required to attain sustainable success (e.g., Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Hodge et al., 2014; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017). Furthermore, Vallée and Bloom (2016) emphasized that sustainable success involved not only creating a vision, but enacting the vision through effective player selection and management of the high performance environment. In summary, Vallée and

Bloom (2016) found coaching vision to be an integral part of attaining sustainable winning results.

Urban Meyer, former head coach of the Ohio State NCAA Football team, also explained and implemented a coaching vision while leading his team to three national championships (with two different colleges) (Gavazzi, 2015). More specifically, while at Ohio State University he achieved sustainable success by establishing a process-based incentive program that included three phases of development ranging on a spectrum from child, to adolescent, to adult. This involved a clear set of guidelines for expected behaviours and included rites of passage as players demonstrated the required competencies of each phase and created a culture of personal improvement within his team. Meyer's vision of "turning boys into men" provided his players with clarity on what it would take to succeed in his program. Furthermore, he focused on teaching life lessons that would benefit his players long after their playing career by incentivizing positive behaviours such as effective communication with teammates and coaches. In summary, Meyer's vision inspired a culture that rewarded positive behaviours and was able to create sustainable success by focusing on process-based player development.

Moving the discussion to professional sport, a case study of British football's most successful manager, Sir Alex Ferguson of Manchester United Football Club, also revealed coaching vision as a part of sustainable success (Elberse & Dye, 2012). For instance, Ferguson was able to draw from his extensive coaching experience to create an appropriate long-term vision that met the changing needs of his team. His vision embraced the legacy of his club by incorporating pictures of championship teams and captains on the walls of the training facility. Ferguson was able to demonstrate longevity and sustainable success due to his ability to adapt his coaching behaviours and overall message to his players through his coaching vision. In

another example of adaptability from professional sport, Bennie and O'Connor (2010) highlighted that a coach's philosophy and system should change over time to ensure long-term success. Taken together, highly accomplished coaches from multiple sports, whether it be at the professional or college level, demonstrated the importance coaching vision has on sustaining a culture of excellence.

Finding out how highly successful coaches use their coaching vision to create and sustain a culture of excellence is worth more investigation. As such, Donoso-Morales and colleagues (2017) studied six university coaches who had won more than 30 national titles to establish how they created a championship culture. They found that fostering a culture of excellence initiated with building championship habits beginning on the first day of training camp. Furthermore, nurturing this culture required commitment and an expectation of excellence in all facets of the program including competition and practice. Also, it was found that a culture promoting exceptional work ethic in practices prepared athletes for the rigours of competition. Moreover, championship winning coaches designed practices to mimic the emotional challenges and intensity of national championship games so players would be prepared for competition (e.g., Becker & Wrisberg, 2008; Dorrance & Nash, 1996; Gallimore & Tharp, 2004; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Wooden, 1988). Similar to the findings of this study, the literature has demonstrated SWC have commonalities such as developing athletes on and off the field, empowering athletes, creating a legacy and ownership, and continuous improvement (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom 2005; Voight & Carroll, 2006). In other words, a properly developed and maintained culture that focuses work ethic, commitment, and continuous improvement can lead to sustaining a culture of excellence.

In summary, findings from case studies of highly successful coaches revealed similarities relating to how they articulated and implemented their coaching vision. For instance, each coach had a clear vision that provided direction and long-term goals for the team (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Furthermore, their ability to enact their vision was accomplished by consistently and effectively communicating their goals to the team. Moreover, having a clearly laid out coaching vision played a role in empowering athletes to take ownership of the team's goals and influence the culture. Another commonality was how these coaches adapted their style to changing competitive environments while staying true to their core values (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Gavazzi, 2015). Also, these coaches relinquished a results-based focus in favour of a holistic view of athlete development that incorporated teaching life skills into their coaching behaviours. Overall, these results suggest that creating a clearly articulated coaching vision can positively influence team culture and facilitate sustainable winning results. As described in this section, the articulation and implementation of the coaching vision have been prevalent in the literature however, more investigation is needed relating to how coaches develop their vision and how that relates to the articulation and implementation the vision.

Vision in organizational literature. Comparisons have been drawn between high performance coaches and leaders in business (e.g., Fletcher & Arnold, 2011). For instance, Chantal Vallée saw her role as head basketball coach at her University as being similar to a CEO because both roles required the articulation of an overarching vision to ensure that their followers were united on a path to success (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Relating to vision, management expert Peter Drucker defined vision as the "clear, shared sense of direction that allows organizations to achieve a common purpose" (Covell & Walker, 2013). Building off this, organizational literature

has also implemented the concepts of vision and values for their importance relating to the success of their organizations (e.g., Abdullah, Hamid, Mustafa, Husain, Idris, Suradi, & Ismail, 2012; Collins & Porras, 1996; Covell & Walker, 2013; Crittenden, Crittenden, Ferrell, Ferrell, & Pinney, 2011; Ferreira & Otley, 2009). This can be aligned with how a coach sets the vision for his/her team. Furthermore, Collins and Porras (1996) created a definition for a corporate vision that combined the concepts of core ideology and an envisioned future. The *core ideology* refers to the enduring identity of an organization that remains the same regardless of changes in the external environment. This component is broken into core values and core purpose. The *core values* are the underlying principles that an organization embodies as part of its identity. These are timeless principles that include things such as hard work or encouraging creativity. The core values underlie the *core purpose* which is the reason an organization exists. This is different from goals or strategies because the purpose can never be fulfilled as it endures after goals have been achieved. The next component of this framework, the *envisioned future*, is broken into two main parts that include big goals and vivid descriptions. More specifically, Big Hair Audacious Goals (BHAGs) are bold statements consisting of challenging long-term goals that inspire growth and encourage engagement within an organization. Adding to this, BHAGs are accompanied by vivid descriptions of the goals that leaders passionately relay to members of the organization to help them clearly picture what it would look like to accomplish the goal. Considering this framework has been established for leaders in business (e.g., Abdullah, Hamid, Mustafa, Husain, Idris, Suradi, & Ismail, 2012; Collins & Porras, 1996; Crittenden et al., 2011; Ferreira & Otley, 2009), it is intuitive that the elements of the framework can be used by coaches that are developing their coaching vision through creating their own core ideology and envisioned future.

A direct link can be drawn between the elements of the vision described by Collins and Porras (1996) and the coaching visions found in case studies of highly successful coaches (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). First, the core ideology component of the framework described by Collins and Porras (1996) relates to a coach's personal philosophy where they establish the set of values that will shape the team (e.g., Babcock & Larsen, 2012; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Voight & Carroll, 2006). Next, the concept of core purpose was observed in case studies of Graham Henry and Sir Alex Ferguson where their vision included embodying the team's legacy as part of their culture to help create a sense of belonging to the team that led to players feeling like their actions had a purpose (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Hodge et al., 2014). Furthermore, relating to envisioned future, highly successful coaches were able to paint a clear picture of what they expected from their athletes. An example of this was Chantal Vallée's BHAG exclaiming that her team would win the national championship within five years of her hiring despite the team never having hosted a playoff game. A tangible vivid description of this goal was available in her blueprint for success (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Furthermore, Pete Carroll aptly encompassed the essence of vivid description of his goals and the ability to show his athletes the big picture when he stated that his job was to "visualize the desired performance level and tell the players and coaches that's what it will be like someday" (Voight & Carroll, 2006). In summary, Chantal Vallée's observation that a coach is very similar to a CEO is substantiated when it related to developing a coaching vision (Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

Taken together, Vallée and Bloom's (2005) definition for coaching vision and Collins and Porras' (1996) definition for corporate vision provide a broad-based understanding of the elements embodied in a coaching vision. For the purpose of this study, a coaching vision

encompasses a team's core values and purpose that remain fixed over time, while the manner in which the values and purpose are implemented adapts to changes in the external environment.

Coaching Models

In order to gain a further understanding of coaching vision, it would be helpful to examine various coaching models that contain aspects of a coaching vision. More specifically, two separate models that relate to aspects of this study will be presented: the Coaching Model (Côté et al., 1995) and holistic athlete development (Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

The Coaching Model (CM) was developed by Côté and colleagues (1995) as a way of understanding how coaches think, act, and behave. Originating from interviews with expert gymnastic coaches, the CM is based around the concept that expert coaches have an ultimate goal of developing athletes. In doing so, they develop mental models that can be described as thought processes that guide a coach's decisions. Looking at the CM in greater detail, there are three main components that make up what Côté and colleagues (1995) call the *coaching process*: training, competition, and organization. First, the training component involves a coach applying their knowledge to develop the technical and tactical skills of their athletes. Second, the competition component relates to coaches being able to maximize athletes' performance during competition. Third, the organization component involves creating a high performance environment that optimizes conditions for training and competition. Particularly important to this study, the organization component of the CM has been applied by coaching science researchers (e.g., Bloom, Stevens, & Wickwire, 2003; Côté et al., 2007; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Furthermore, case studies of SWC revealed that coaches focused substantial time and energy on building and maintaining an environment that fostered success (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010;

Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

Expanding further on the CM (Côté et al., 1995), the three components of the coaching process are influenced by variables such as the coach's personal characteristics, athlete's personal characteristics, and contextual factors. First, the coach's personal characteristics include the coach's personal philosophy and values that are shared with the team throughout the coaching process. Next, the coach must be cognizant of the athlete's personal characteristics such as their level of development and athletic potential to ensure they are providing them appropriate coaching. A final variable that influences the coaching process are the contextual factors, which are extraneous factors, such as politics or money to spend, that play a role in positively or negatively influencing the components of training, competition, and organization. In summary, the CM provides a framework for understanding what expert coaches are and how they develop mental models for developing their athletes.

Framed around the CM (Côté et al., 1995), Vallée and Bloom (2005) developed a holistic model of athlete development. Their qualitative study involved interviewing Canadian university coaches who had won either at least one national championship or five conference titles. Coaching vision was at the center of the model and was comprised of the three main components of coaches' attributes, individual growth, and organizational skills. Their model established that coaching vision included a coach's personal philosophy and goals that set the direction of the program. Interviews with coaches revealed that coaching vision originated at the time, or shortly after their first appointment as head coach. Furthermore, they posited that building a successful university program required a coaching vision that aligned with the goal of holistic athlete development. Further to this, holistic athlete development referred to teaching athletes' life skills

that helped them succeed inside and outside of sport. For example, these skills included leadership, communication, respect, trust, role acceptance, and being a team player. Notably, this model is significant because holistic athlete development was a recurring theme amongst studies of highly successful coaches (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). For instance, in a study of the coaching philosophies of highly accomplished professional rugby and cricket coaches, Bennie and O'Connor (2010) found that coaches believed that success on the field was a consequence of emphasizing the development of athletes off the field. Furthermore, legendary college basketball coach John Wooden was also known for this type of behaviour, including teaching his athletes how to properly put on their socks and becoming outstanding community citizens both during and after their basketball careers (Wooden, 1988). Moreover, in perhaps the most applicable example of this coaching model in action, Vallée and Bloom (2016) reviewed how Chantal Vallée was able to build a sustainable culture of excellence by focusing on holistic athlete development. Her focus on athlete development was never more evident than when she suspended three starters before an important game against the Argentinian national team because they broke rules that compromised team values. To sum up, although coaching vision was central to this model, there was little discussion regarding how coaches developed this vision prior to taking over a program. This is an area of research that requires further investigation. In conclusion, these three coaching models provide examples of the value and importance of coaching vision. Research has provided examples of coaches effectively articulating and implementing their coaching vision, however there remains a need for further examination of the development of the vision and how it relates to the articulation and implementation.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter will describe the qualitative methodology that guided the current study. The first section will highlight the epistemological and ontological viewpoints of the researcher. The second section will explain the methodology and methods used to gather data. The third section will cover the methods of data analysis and will present aspects of trustworthiness that guided this study.

Philosophical Assumptions

This study was framed by the epistemological and ontological approach of the researcher. Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge that includes its nature and origins, while ontology refers to the way knowledge in general is looked at (Crotty, 1998; Morse & Richards, 2002). Epistemology relates to assumptions regarding how knowledge is acquired and how it relates to research (Daly, 2007). This is the road map that guides how a researcher approaches his/her study. It ranges on a continuum from objective to subjective. The current study was based on the social constructionist epistemological framework because it allowed the researcher the subjectivity to use past experiences to analyze data. The social constructionist epistemology aligned with the ontological views of the researcher. This research was conducted through a relativist ontological approach as it allowed for some subjectivity and aligned with social constructionism.

Methodology

A methodology is the framework that guides all aspects of the qualitative study. For example, types of interpretive methodologies include phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narratives, and case studies (Creswell, 2013). Expanding on case studies, they are

characterized by inquiry into a real-life case (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, case studies can be broken down into instrumental, intrinsic, or collective (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). More specifically, *instrumental* case studies provide generalization or insight to an issue while *intrinsic* case studies are inherently interesting to the researcher without having the need to connect to a bigger concept. Furthermore, collective or multiple case studies refer to the process of jointly studying a group of cases to examine and compare a particular phenomenon (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). With respect to the current study, the *collective case study* methodology was chosen to answer the questions of "how" and "why" coaches developed, articulated, and implemented their coaching vision (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This methodology aligned with the epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher because it allowed leniency when interpreting the data and considered the researcher's influence on data collection. More specifically, the investigator's knowledge of coaching and experience as a professional athlete helped him build a rapport with the participants and allowed him to have a rich understanding of the data collected.

Participants

Six expert men's ice hockey head coaches were interviewed for this qualitative study. Their combined experience consisted of 20 national titles, more than 170 years as head coach, and over 4100 wins at the college/university level. Furthermore, it is notable that the selection of these six multi-championship winning coaches was derived from an overall sample size of 12 living members (i.e., seven total coaches in the NCAA DI, five U Sports).

Procedures

Recently, studies of expert championship winning coaches have focused solely on one case study (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014) or groups of elite Olympic,

World Championship, or professional coaches (e.g., Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Extending this line of research, this collective case study specifically sampled multi-championship winning men's ice hockey coaches. Head coaches were purposefully chosen (Creswell, 2013) from American college (NCAA DI) and Canadian university (U Sports) settings. Five interviews were conducted in person in various cities across Canada and the USA, while one was conducted via Skype (and included a follow-up Skype interview). The interviews ranged from 64 to 105 minutes (averaging 92 minutes) and resulted in a total of 64,583 words and 95 single-spaced transcribed pages. Aside from the sport in which they coach, additional selection criteria included: a) a minimum of ten years as head coach (Ericsson et al., 1993), b) at least two national championships as a head coach in the aforementioned leagues, and c) a career winning percentage over .550. Preference was made for current or recently retired coaches. Looking at these elements more closely, the term *expert coach* refers to the definition established by Côté and Gilbert (2009) that emphasized a coach's ability to consistently develop favourable athlete outcomes. Furthermore, the criterion of winning at least two national championships was included to ensure that the sample only included coaches who were able to repeatedly produce successful performance outcomes at the highest level. Additionally, a winning percentage of .550 was chosen to demonstrate the ability of a coach to produce consistent winning results over an extended time-period.

After obtaining approval by the McGill Research Ethics Board, the researcher contacted the purposefully chosen participants through a variety of methods that included telephone, email, and text messages (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The contact information of these coaches was gathered through the lead investigator's professional network that was developed during his athletic and coaching career, as well as through contacts with other members of his thesis

committee. An email recruitment script (Appendix A) and an informed consent form (Appendix B) were sent to each participant before the interview. The locations of the interviews were purposely selected to accommodate the busy schedules of these high performance coaches. While five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in both Canada and the USA, one was conducted via skype due to the distanced required to travel to his location. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and took place via one-on-one sessions with the audio recorded and transcribed. In-person conversations were chosen because of the potential to create a deeper rapport with the participant through active listening and taking cues from non-verbal body language (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Before the interviews took place, a biographical profile was made for each coach derived from documents such as biographies, game video, post-game interviews, and newspaper articles. Also, two pilot interviews were conducted with expert coaches from women's university sport. Each coach had won at least one national championship.

Data Collection

Interviewer biographical profile. The lead author for this study just completed his first year as an assistant coach in the American Hockey League (the second highest level of professional hockey in North America, after only the NHL). Prior to this, he spent four years as the full-time assistant coach for a nationally ranked Canadian university men's hockey team that won a league championship (Queen's Cup) during that span. His athletic experience included four years playing Canadian university hockey followed by six years playing professionally in top North American and European leagues. His professional experience included participation at three NHL training camps, winning a national challenge cup (Italy), and a national title (Italy). Additionally, as a university player he won one league championship and participated in two national championships. He has also coached in two national championship tournaments. This

biographical profile is important in qualitative research because an investigator's ontology will impact the data collected since it is his belief that interviews are "co-constructed" between interviewer and interviewee (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Furthermore, the subjectivity of the researcher was incorporated into the study by adopting a reflexive stance to allow his views to shape the research process (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Specifically, the researcher was overt regarding his knowledge of the coaching profession and acknowledged his role as coach during the interview process to allow participants to expand on experiences in a more robust manner. In summary, the lead investigator allowed his life experiences as a hockey coach and athlete to add value to the way he collected and analyzed the data in this study.

Interviews. Qualitative research includes a wide variety of options for data collection that includes interviews, focus groups, observation, and self-study (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For this study, semi-structured open-ended individual interviews were used to elicit data in the form of a purposeful conversation (Holloway, 1997). Looking at this in more detail, semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer some control when guiding the direction of the interview while allowing the interviewee the freedom to expand on their thoughts and experiences. As a result, a deeper understanding of the research questions was reached by utilizing this type of interview (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Elaborating on interviews, Smith and Sparkes (2016) explained that the goal was to reach theoretical saturation to a point that categories or themes were developed until a theory emerged. Extending this, data saturation arose when nothing new was generated from collecting new data. For this study, data saturation was reached after interviews five and six. After each interview the researcher made reflexive field notes to capture nuances of the relationship, unique responses, non-verbal communication, and the overall context of the interview (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Semi-structured open-ended interviews aligned with the qualitative nature of the research questions as well as the epistemological views of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). They allowed the flexibility to gain insight from the experience of both the participant and the researcher (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). While interviews are a valuable source for attaining knowledge from a participant, it is important to note that an interview is not a complete method for understanding experiences, however it is influenced by the interviewee's perspective and shaped by the sociocultural landscape (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). As a result, this will be a limitation of this type of research.

Interview guide. The interview guide (Appendix C) was divided into four sections. First, a list of opening questions was designed to nurture rapport between the researcher and the participant. The next part was the main section of the interview guide and follows the *main-branches-of-tree* structure as described by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Specifically, the core of the interview guide was grouped into five *main questions* aiming to answer the key research questions regarding the development, articulation, and implementation of a coach's vision. Subsequently, *follow-up* questions were designed to gain a richer understanding of each response. Next, a list of *probes* assisted with managing the conversation and ensuring the participant elaborated on areas related to the research questions. The third section included summary and conclusion questions that allowed the participant to communicate a deeper understanding of how their experiences influenced their coaching vision and to make any clarifications or additional comments. Despite the chronological order of the questions in the interview guide, the way the main questions are presented was not linear and was directed by the flow of the participants' responses.

Data Analysis

Data was retrieved in the form of collective case studies and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it identified patterns across data sets and allowed for flexible interpretation of the data's themes (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). Furthermore, thematic analysis can be broken into deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive refers to a process that is driven by theoretical concepts in a "top-down" approach while inductive follows a data-driven "bottom-up" approach. This study followed the inductive approach where meaningful patterns emerged out of the content itself. This bottom-up process of data analysis can be likened to walking up a flight of stairs. It started with systematically separating the data into meaning units, creating tags (i.e., codes), developing higher-level patterns (i.e., subthemes), then finally arriving at the top of the stairs with the overarching themes (i.e., themes).

Taking this a step further, Braun and Clarke (2006) detailed six phases on how to conduct thematic analysis. Phase 1, *immersion,* involved getting familiar with the material through actively reading the data while being cognizant of recurring meanings and patterns. They recommended reading through the entire data set at least once before coding. Phase 2, *generating initial codes,* involved systematically coding the dataset then compiling the list of codes to prepare for categorization. Phase 3, *searching for and identifying themes* involved a broader search for themes that started with the development of a list of candidate themes (i.e., subthemes) that eventually was refined into overarching themes (i.e., themes). To assist with sorting groups of codes into themes, a thematic map was used as a visual representation of how the data connected. Phase 4, *reviewing themes,* was broken into two levels. The first level involved seeing if the themes fit a coherent pattern or if they required further reworking to fit the complexity of

the data. The second level involved assessing if these themes meaningfully fit the entire data set and if they played a part in telling the story of the data. Phase 5, *defining and naming themes,* involved capturing the essence of each theme with an appropriate title. Names were concise and refined to the point that they gave the reader a good idea of how they fit into the story. Phase 6, *writing the report,* was an opportunity for the writer to tell the story of the data in a vivid meaning way. In summary, this systematic method of approaching qualitative inquiry gave this study thorough guidelines to follow when conducting thematic analysis. Despite the rigor of this approach, weaknesses can be found relating to the creation of themes. For instance, the researcher has the flexibility to create themes but cannot make claims about them. Additionally, the flexible nature of this approach could allow the researcher to produce unfounded themes within the data. In order to avoid unfounded themes, steps for quality control were followed. They are detailed in the next section.

Validity, Quality Standards, Trustworthiness

The refinement in the quality standards of qualitative research in sport and exercise psychology has continued to evolve as the field has developed (e.g., Burke, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith & McGannon 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The early work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) set the foundation for the field by separating quality standards for qualitative and quantitative research. Specifically, they introduced the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Further to this, Sparkes and Smith (2014) highlighted that the evolution of quality standards in this field has caused debate regarding which guidelines to follow. They encouraged the use of reflexivity in data analysis by recognizing the researcher's biases and unique perspectives. Continuing with this evolution of quality standards, Smith and McGannon (2018) posited that some of the most

commonly used validity criteria in qualitative analysis was ineffective in judging trustworthiness and should be replaced by member reflections and use of a critical friend. Therefore, this study followed the recommendations proposed by Smith and McGannon (2018) in addition to Sparkes and Smith's (2014) concept of reflexivity.

Critical friend. The use of a critical friend positively impacted the reliability of the results. This was used in place of the traditional method of inter-rater reliability based on the recommendations of Smith and McGannon (2018). While inter-rater reliability stresses the concept of being able to reproduce data, the use of a critical friend takes into consideration that an agreement on the information does not necessarily mean that the subsequent result becomes a universal truth. A critical friend is defined as someone who enhances reflexivity by encouraging reflection and challenging the views of the researcher so that they may develop a firm understanding of the data by exploring multiple interpretations (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Using a critical friend acknowledges that research strives toward reproducibility but takes into consideration that the data will be interpreted differently based on the interests and experiences of the reader. For this study, a committee member with extensive experience in qualitative interviews served as the critical friend and met with the researcher at each stage of the analysis.

Sensitivity to context. Appropriately defining the context of this study of expert coaches will increase credibility of the results (Burke, 2016). Ice hockey was chosen because the researcher has an in-depth understanding of the sport from both an athletic and coaching perspective. More specifically, the researcher was an assistant coach that interviewed a group of the most successful head coaches in university and college hockey. Since some of these coaches were still actively coaching at the time of the interview, it is important to acknowledge that they may have been unwilling to share experiences that they believed were trade secrets within the

profession. As such, the researcher relied on his experience as a coach to draw out the key information relating to the main research questions while remaining sensitive to the fact that the participants may not have been willing to disclose all of their knowledge. Concurrently, while the researcher gained a great deal of knowledge from meeting with these expert coaches, it is imperative to understand that the focus of the interviews was on addressing the research questions.

Commitment and rigour. Sparkes and Smith (2014) refer to commitment and rigour as the thorough application of the appropriate theoretical constructs relating to data collection and analysis. An example within this study is the purposeful selection of participants based on strict criteria derived from empirical research. Additionally, the use of video recorded pilot interviews allowed the researcher to learn from feedback from experienced members of his thesis committee. This was an effective means of learning how to conduct an interview with the purpose of creating discussion relating to the research questions. Furthermore, taking reflexive field notes throughout the data collection and analysis process increased the robustness of the interviews by capturing information that may not appear on the transcription or audio recording. Also, coaches were chosen from two different leagues to add rigour to the findings.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter will outline the results from interviews with six experienced and successful men's ice hockey coaches. The analysis of the interview data led to the identification of four themes (see Table 1) which were titled: personal foundation, vision of excellence, the vision in motion, and coach and athlete impact. Further to this, each theme is accompanied by two subthemes. This chapter will provide descriptions of the themes and subthemes identified in the interviews. Supporting quotations from the coaches will be followed by pseudonyms (e.g., Adam) to provide confidentiality. Taken together, the themes combine to construct a three-phase framework for the development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision geared towards the creation of a championship culture (see Figure 1). More precisely, in phase one the theme *personal foundation* aligns with the development of the coaching vision, in phase two the *vision of excellence* aligns with defining and articulating the vision, in phase three the *vision in motion* aligns with implementing and enacting the vision, and *coach and athlete impact* describes the role coaches and athletes play in the adaptation and implementation of the vision.

Table 1

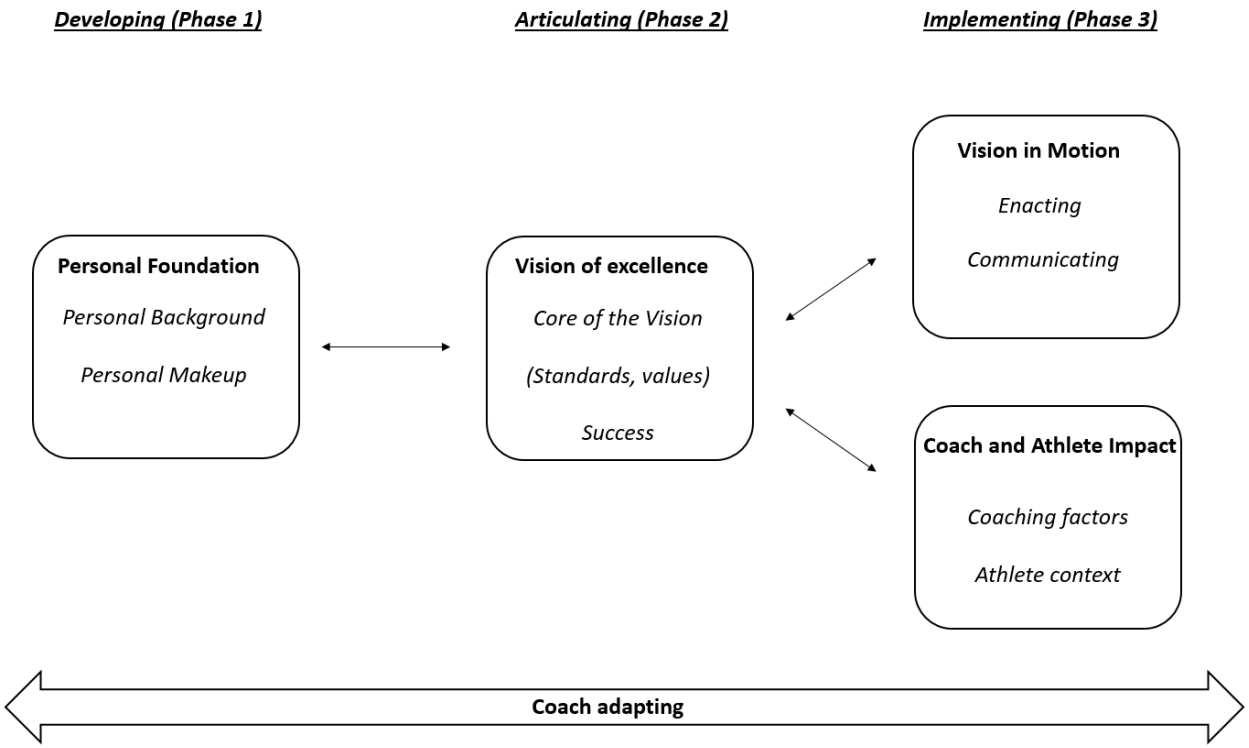
Codes, subthemes, and themes from data analysis.

CODES	SUBTHEMES	THEMES
1. Coaching journey (27) 2. Background in teaching (6)	1) Personal background (33): The athletic, academic, and early coaching experiences that shaped their inclination and interest to become a hockey coach.	1) Personal foundation (105): Life experiences, personal characteristics, and habits that influenced the development of the championship-winning vision.
1. Coach adapting (21) 2. Coach as CEO (3) 3. Coach personal characteristics (5) 4. Coach preparation (5) 5. Coach work ethic (3) 6. Lifelong learner (11) 7. Mentors (20) 8. Thirst for knowledge (4)	2) Personal makeup (72): Internal factors that defined who they are as a person and helped them develop the basis for knowledge acquisition and mastery in coaching.	
1. Articulated vision (16) 2. Holistic athlete development (17) 3. Academics (10)	4) Core of the vision (43): A clearly articulated message that encompasses the coaches' personal values with a focus on the holistic development of athletes and the aim of inspiring both the individual athlete and the entire organization.	2) Vision of excellence (156): A clearly articulated vision that includes a clear plan for the development of athletes, the values and beliefs of the coach, and a dedication to successful hockey performance outcomes.
1. Blueprint for success (13) 2. Overcoming adversity (13) 3. Role models – Crossovers (5) 4. Role models – Same sport (18) 5. Talented athletes (13) 6. Winning (28) 7. Winning legacy (23)	5) Success (113): Creating and sustaining a culture of excellence through adaptability and the consistent development of championship habits.	

CODES	PROPERTIES	CATEGORIES
1. Communication (19) 2. Connecting with athletes (15) 3. Goal setting (18) 4. Team building (6) 5. Yearly theme (16)	6) Communicating the vision (74): Methods involved in directing athletes to have the discipline and work ethic required to attain and sustain the vision.	3) The vision in motion (144): Applying and adapting the vision of excellence to athletes and personnel.
1. Assistant coaches (17) 2. Buy-in – Athlete (11) 3. Buy-in – Team (15) 4. Recruiting (27)	7) Enacting the vision (70): Clearly articulating the role of athletes and personnel in fulfilling the facilitating shared ownership of team objectives.	
1. Coaching network (14) 2. Discipline (10) 3. Effective practices (12) 4. Focus on process (17) 5. Simplicity (7) 6. Team continuous improvement (7)	8) Coaching factors (67): Factors that are controlled by the coach that create the building blocks and standards for success.	4) Coach and athlete impact (128): Factors that impact the successful implementation of the coach's vision, with respect to both the coach and athlete.
1. Athlete accountability (17) 2. Athlete mental training (8) 3. Athlete physical training (7) 4. Athlete leadership (29)	9) Athlete context (61): Coaches facilitate an environment that provides athletes with the resources and support required for excellence.	

Figure 1

Visual representation of the framework for the development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision.



Personal Foundation

This theme aligns with phase one of the framework which includes the life experiences, personal characteristics, and habits that influenced the development of the coaches' championship-winning vision. This section is split into the subthemes of *personal background* and *personal makeup*.

Personal background. This section includes the academic and athletic background of the coaches that played a role in the development of their coaching vision. Relating to their formal education, all of the coaches pursued and completed graduate degrees in education, business, or psychology, except for one who was hired as a full time head coach before completing his

graduate studies. Relating to their athletic background, all of the coaches played at least at the junior level, and four of the six were team leaders with their university or pro teams. While each of the coaches had a deep interest in hockey from a young age, none of them described coaching as a profession they thought they would pursue while they were still playing: “I got the varsity job when I was 27 so it was kind of weird. It just happened to me. It wasn’t anything I had ever planned on when I was playing” (Darryl). Moreover, there was a transition period for each of the coaches from playing to coaching, which included spending time as the assistant coach for successful programs. More specifically, five of the six coaches were part of winning programs as either a player or as an assistant coach for a team that either won or competed for the national championship. This appeared to lay the foundation for the development of a coaching vision that included an understanding of the standard of excellence required to win against the toughest competition:

> While I was assistant coach at college, it was a huge disappointment if we didn’t get at least to the national championship game every year. We were that good every year. I look back and have to chuckle because it’s so unrealistic to think that you could be in the national championship game every year - those expectations are almost out of whack. The funny thing is that’s how we felt at that time. (Adam)

Furthermore, this experience added to their blueprint for a coaching vision and also built an understanding of the daily process required to achieve for success at the highest levels:

> I learned there was a vision that my head coach established, and it wasn’t just something that they threw up on a wall as a mission statement, it was something they worked on every day. I also learned very quickly that being organized was part of the vision. There was a summer plan for the team and the individual players, preseason was laid out with objectives for each day. Not only what goals we were going to meet but what expectations we were going to give the team. (Adam)

In conclusion, the background of these coaches involved early-life experiences that set a foundation for their interest in coaching. Prior to becoming head coaches, their life journey

involved experiences that influenced their coaching vision and that also demonstrated the standard of excellence required to win a national championship.

Personal makeup. Personal makeup relates to internal factors of the coaches that contributed to the development of their vision. This included exceptional work ethic, yearning for lifelong learning, and adaptability to almost any challenge or barrier. These personal characteristics had developed early in their life, beginning with a strong work ethic that helped to establish a foundation for their success:

> A big part of my vision can be summed up in a quote from the former mayor of New York, who said, "I'm not the smartest guy but I absolutely know I'm going to excel in my work ethic. I'm going to outwork anyone". I like to use that as inspiration to put my work ethic as being the foundation of what I do. (Brian)

In addition to work ethic, commonalities in these coaches' personal characteristics included enthusiasm, high energy, and an understanding of what it takes to excel under high expectations:

> Some coaches don't have the expectations we have. They're happy to have a job and have fun and give it what they can, but they're not losing sleep over it. They're not going to drive that extra mile or go through a blizzard to get up to northern Ontario or Quebec to get a player. (Frank)

Furthermore, lifelong learning was an internal factor that contributed to an ability to stay current with changing external environments over the course of a coaching career. This knowledge acquisition came in the form of learning from opponents, coaches in their network, books, and in their daily conversations with others:

> You're always learning and you can always pick up new things. Especially, at the peak, you need a great regular season to get to the nationals, but you're going to learn so much at that national tournament too. At the national championships you are learning exponentially more in a compressed period of time. (Brian)

> I always used to watch a lot of NHL games. These always gave me new ideas to share with my assistant coaches for the power play or other aspects of the game. I followed Scotty Bowman and his teams closely. Scotty was able to adapt over time and that was really important to his longevity. (Frank)

Moreover, adaptability was described as an important element of the vision that contributed to having positive performance results for an extended period of time. While some elements of the vision changed based on changing personnel and resources of the team, the core of the vision remained the same:

> You know the old idea of 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'. Well, after a while we realized that doesn't work with these guys, the way kids are now. Fix it even if it ain't broke! Change it. Because it's just more fun to do a different system this year, instead of doing the same old thing we did last year. So we would change different things on how we would fore-check and how we would breakout. (Darryl)

Overall, these life experiences and personal characteristics combined to lay the foundation for the development of their coaching vision. This development stage of the vision is where coaches gained an understanding of the standard of excellence required for success. Their career success evolved from early-life experiences that established habits of exemplary work ethic, lifelong learning, and adaptability. These characteristics were moulded and refined over their careers, which speaks to the dynamism and multi-directionality of the visual model included at the start of this chapter.

Vision of Excellence

This section refers to the second phase of the framework, articulating the coaching vision. It is split into two subheadings of *core of the vision* and *success*. In essence, the vision of excellence consists of a clearly articulated coaching vision that includes the core values and beliefs of the coach, a clear plan for the development of athletes, and a dedication to successful performance outcomes. Extending this, a clearly articulated vision can be likened to a compass that guides a team along the roadmap to long-term success. The vision of excellence is a defining factor for championship winning coaches. This section will begin by examining the core of the vision.

Core of the vision. Core of the vision is the central aspect of the framework. It includes the foundational elements of the coach's articulated coaching vision. Common elements of the articulated vision discussed by coaches included: a clearly defined long-term vision for the program, an annual short-term mission that included themes and goal setting, and the guidelines and principles for a culture that produced repeated success. These elements were derived from an understanding of the challenges and opportunities that accompanied the external environment and were built off a coach's personal values and philosophy. This section describes how coaches articulated the key elements of their coaching vision, how it changed over time, and the how they focused on the athletic and academic development of athletes. First, coaches defined their vision to include developing athletes athletically and academically:

> Our vision now is that we want someone to leave here with a diploma in one hand and a ring on the other hand. That's getting harder and harder with the good players that leave before they graduate. (Chris)

Furthermore, the coaches discussed how their personal values were embodied in their coaching vision and these core elements of the vision remained constant over time. These elements were described differently by each coach but commonalities included work ethic, communication, goal setting, connecting with athletes, and leadership. While these elements remained constant, there were elements that adapted to meet the demands of the external environment:

> Some elements of the vision don't change. That's for sure. The work ethic, the results, the objectives, those are the same. The way that you arrive there has changed. The technical aspects evolve, how we teach them and talk to the players has changed. Things that haven't changed are the focus on execution, the energy we put into motivating the players, that stays the same. (Eric)

Also, it was evident that these coaches valued having fun as an objective worth including in their vision:

> Our vision was that we wanted to be good, we expected to be great, we had to work hard, and we had to have fun. The fun came from the satisfaction of getting better, learning how to win, and being a team that competes for a championship every year. (Frank)

It was apparent that articulating the vision included helping players focus on the short-term process of improvement as opposed to the long-term outcome of winning. This was accomplished through having a thorough understanding of performance standards and communicating messages by using themes. For example, one coach articulated his vision to his players and personnel using the following theme:

> Our team's vision would be quite simple, it's about being the B.E.S.T. We are not going to talk that much about winning actually. We will talk about being the best every day. So the acronym would be *Better Every Single Time*. And, we've been selling that for 18 years now. (Brian)

Finally, another commonality that contributed to the articulation of a coaching vision was understanding their team, not only as athletes but as individuals away from the rink. This provided coaches an ability to articulate their vision in a relatable and meaningful manner. For example, one coach described the value-added that accompanied a deep connection with the players on his team:

> My strength was being truly interested in the players as individual people. As hockey players, yes, I was very capable to evaluate them, but everyone can do that. But what will you do as a player if I give you the torch? What will give you confidence? You want to do something good with that. You want to profit from that. You want to add that to your personal values. You will look for an understanding on my part and will receive a satisfaction for doing your part. I always looked to see what made each player different. (Eric)

Overall, these coaches helped their players understand the importance of winning but had them focus on the process of continuous improvement when articulating their vision. This was accomplished through connecting and developing athletes on a personal level while facilitating their athletic and academic success.

Success. Within phase two of the framework, articulating the vision involves combining the core of the vision with the element of success. More specifically, the life experiences of these coaches provided them with a reference point for the standard required to succeed. Due to this, they embedded success into their vision by building success into the process, recruiting talented players, and creating a culture where winning was part of the legacy. First, success was engrained in the vision by believing that winning was the result of doing things the right way over a long period of time:

> When your objective is to win, everything that you do along the way contributes to that goal. You can't accept finishing second or letting up in practice or games. It's almost like you are condemned by excellence. You can't accept being average to arrive at a good result. It's not possible to try to put it all together in January. (Eric)

Furthermore, one coach discussed how success was articulated on a daily basis through the high standards he demanded in his practices: "Every practice was like a game" (Frank). This involved creating situations where players were forced to overcome adversity. He also reiterated that this habit of effective practices was consistent with his championship winning teams when he himself was a player.

Coaches noted that having talented players was an integral element of their coaching success:

> One aspect of the vision that I learned very quickly was that you need to have great players. I knew right off the bat that a reason why our team is always good is because we always have the best players! If you want to be successful in this business, you have to get off the bus with the best team. You have to think of who you're going to put on the bus and you have to figure out where they're going to be seated. But they have to be good players! (Darryl)

Adding to this, coaches seemed to downplay their role in team success by stating that coaching is sometimes over-valued in winning teams because you need to have a combination of staying healthy, luck, and the "horses" to get across the finish line to win a championship. Along these

lines, it is worthwhile to acknowledge that some contextual factors such as recruiting advantages based on geographic location and the school's reputation invariably influence a coach's ability to attract talented athletes. Despite this, coaches in this study found ways to win regardless of contextual factors by either leveraging their recruiting advantages or building upon the legacy of their program.

Aside from recruiting talented players, an ability to create and sustain a culture of excellence was another commonality observed in the vision of these coaches. More specifically, culture played a role in having successful performance outcomes over multiple seasons. Over the course of time, the coaching vision contributed to building a winning legacy that created additional expectations for success. Coaches discussed upholding these high expectations and reinforced that players should not be content with less than extraordinary:

> The key to sustaining a winning culture is getting better every day. If you get better every day you have a chance. And if you don't get better every day then you're leveling off. So I think you go back to the pursuit of excellence. I think there's high expectations but I think that's good. Reporters always ask about pressure on players to continue our winning tradition. Well I say "we don't recruit players to our team to be underdogs". (Brian)

> Winning was so important to the culture. Anything less than that was not going to be enough. It sucked. As if it was like we would say "this isn't what it's supposed to be" when we lost. There was pressure on the kids but I think we put more pressure on the other team. (Darryl)

Furthermore, one coach described how the challenges that followed winning a championship were accompanied by a clearer understanding of the vision of what it took to win. This understanding allowed him to adapt and build upon his vision of excellence:

> After winning once, the target is squarely on your chest the next time around because you were the last team standing the year before. You're probably going to get everybody's best effort every game. On the other hand, there's that confidence that you have gained through that experience. The idea that as difficult as it was, we came out on the other end on top. We accomplished it. We did it. We know how to do it. We know the subtle things that work. We know the things we need to avoid because they don't work. As a result, the

> path is a little bit clearer. The belief in how you have to do it is there. You know that if you continue to do these things in a certain way on and off the ice that you will give yourself a great chance to do it, no matter if you had won it the year before. (Adam)

In sum, coaches described commonalities in their vision that included building success into their daily process, having talented players, and creating a culture where winning was part of the legacy. These factors contributing to success were succinctly summed up by a coach when asked what part of the vision drives him and his team to win again, he simply responded "To get better" (Brian).

The Vision in Motion

This section pertains to phase three, the implementation of the vision, and builds off the foundation of the coaching vision that was established in phase two. In this phase, coaches apply and adapt the *vision of excellence* to daily situations through communicating and connecting to players and personnel. This phase is separated into two parts, *communicating the vision* and *vision in motion.*

Communicating the vision. This section details how coaches used clear and concise communication on a daily process to implement their vision. This daily communication was effective because athletes bought-in to the vision. The importance of athlete buy-in was a commonality expressed by these coaches. Buy-in was created by creating an environment that supported athletes taking ownership of their own success and connecting with other athletes.

First, coaches fostered an environment for shared ownership of team success between the coaches and athletes. This environment was created through team building, establishing yearly themes, and goal setting:

> I define vision as an opportunity for a group of people to come together to strive and work towards a common goal. Every year I sit down and facilitate a meeting with our team and our staff to develop our vision for the year or our goals for the year. Almost every single one of those years has been successful in some way or form. It may not be a

> state title or a national title but we want to be able to accomplish certain things such as beating your rival, or finishing in the top three, or finishing as the number one team in your conference, whatever it may be. (Adam)

Looking at this more closely, the coaches did not all follow the same method when it came to setting a yearly theme and setting goals. Some coaches decided the theme and goals themselves, while other coaches allowed the players to choose the theme. Interestingly, both methods appeared to be effective at developing athletes' confidence, competence, connection, and character (i.e., Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Next, coaches were able to effectively implement their vision because they had created deep connections with athletes. For instance, coaches described how a trusting relationship between the coach and their leaders was essential to having the team buy-in to the vision:

> I wanted to make sure that the players would know that I was telling them the truth, that I was telling them what was on my mind. I wasn't conning them by telling them one thing one day and then coming up with something different the next. I wanted them to feel comfortable. (Darryl)

> You have to build trust with every one of your players but especially with your top guys because everything funnels down. So if your top guys are bought in, you don't have to coach the rest of the team as much because the coaching is done for you. And that's more powerful, them doing the coaching, than me doing the coaching. (Brian)

In sum, in order for athletes to effectively implement the coach's vision it was necessary for them to buy-in. The act of buying-in connected the theoretical concept of the vision of excellence described in phase two with the actual daily process of implementing the vision that occurred in phase three. This was particularly important for athlete leaders who could help coaches implement the vision with younger players. Once athletes bought-in, the vision was implemented through creating an environment that allowed athletes to take ownership of their own success, and by connecting with athletes.

Enacting the vision. This section relates to how coaches utilized people to help implement their vision. For this stewardship to effectively take place, athletes and personnel were guided by a thorough understanding of the clearly articulated coaching vision established in phase two. The ability to clearly articulate and pass on this vision was a commonality amongst coaches. Assistant coaches and athletes were particularly important in enacting the vision.

It was evident that assistant coaches had a clear understanding of the head coach's vision through all of their communications from current players to recruits. Relaying the head coach's vision was integral in the recruiting process since assistant coaches were often delegated with this task. This meant assistant coaches needed to be consistent with the team's vision in their messaging to recruits as well as their ability to find athletes that aligned with the vison:

> I would tell my assistant coaches that when they go out recruiting, they should meet the parents, because kids don't grow up like their neighbors! If the father is an asshole then the kid is probably going to be an asshole. (Darryl)

Next, success of the team required individual athletes to enact the coach's vision. Effective implementation by athletes required a clear understanding of how they fit into the vision. This was accomplished by coaches identifying and assigning a role that allowed players to maximize their contribution to the team's success:

> In my vision everyone doesn't have to do the same thing or think the same way. It doesn't bother me if someone says "no, I'm here for me". That's ok, I'm ok with that BUT you have a role to play amongst the others on the team. Part of that is to be ready to follow the rules because that's what the rest of the team has to do. There are basic rules and values that everyone on the team must adhere to. Everyone has to be in it. (Eric)

Furthermore, enacting the vision was accomplished by peer mentorship within the team and the use of two-way communication between athletes and coaches:

> When the players arrive, they have a lot to learn to adjust to the university life. I would use the leaders to help them make the transition. Each of the veterans would be in charge of one or two of the recruits. They would have to give me a report on them. It showed that the older players had an interest in the younger ones. It created an environment that

> facilitated a good team chemistry. It helped bring the players closer so they weren't going behind each other's backs, they were on the same page, they may have arrived at school with these ideas but eventually they were truly interested in the success of others. (Eric)

In sum, assistant coaches and athletes acted as stewards in the process of implementing the coaching vision. They accomplished this through communicating the key elements of the head coach's vision to players and personnel.

Coach and Athlete Impact

This theme encompasses examples of the specific factors that impact phase three, the successful implementation of the coaching vision, with respect to the coach and the athletes. These factors were evident in the day-to-day actions and interactions of the coach. This theme is split into two sections: *coaching factors* and *athlete impact.*

Coaching factors. This section discusses the factors that the coach personally controls that lead to the successful implementation of his vision. These factors are the building blocks for success and the underlying elements that contribute to the team implementing the vision. Three coaching factors that arose from the analysis of the data included discipline, team continuous improvement, and personal continuous improvement.

First, relating to discipline, one coach (Chris) stated that discipline was embedded in his vision as part of a winning culture. This was reinforced by holding players accountable to general rules with the understanding that breaking rules would lead to the possibility of a player being taken out of the lineup, no matter who it was:

> You don't have to spell out all the rules. For example, the new athletic director said "coach we would just like to have your set of rules that you give to the players". I told him that I have one rule, you don't embarrass your school or your hockey team. "Well what about curfew and this and travel and alcohol". It's all encompassing. That covers everything. Because otherwise the players would say "you never had THAT rule", you know. (Chris)

Discipline also showed up in the form of punishment for poor performance that didn't align with team standards. Notably, coaches displayed an ability to take drastic measures to maintain the standard of excellence required to win. For instance, one coach (Darryl) kicked his captain off the ice during a practice because he wasn't meeting the required standard. Another coach disciplined his entire team immediately after an unacceptable performance during a game:

> I don't believe in after-game discipline, but after one game I just said to myself something had to give. That group, they're all good people but there was just something missing. They weren't gritty enough. It was a calculated move because we discussed it for 20 minutes as coaches and finally I said "ok, let's go, let's get back on". (Brian)

Next, coaches implemented their vision through a process-focused approach to team continuous improvement. Demonstrating this, one coach (Chris) described how successful teams had high expectations from themselves and could not be satisfied with a performance that was merely good and not great. He encapsulated this in a metaphor:

> There are things that separate teams that have repeated success. The expression we use is that 'rust never sleeps'. You always need to do something to get better. Your car could be brand new but it's going to rust if you don't use it. So you're always striving to get better. You can be satisfied with just winning. That's fine, but then it just passes you by. So every year you need to be ready for it. It's not permanent the culture, it needs to be fostered, like clay, it's got to be moulded every year. (Chris)

In addition to focusing on continuous improvement of the team, these coaches demonstrated the characteristic of learning from people around them. This contributed to coaches adapting their vision over time to remain relevant (i.e., this process of continuous improvement and adapting demonstrates the multi-directionality associated with the visual representation of coaching vision). For example, four coaches discussed having a coaching network that they interacted with on a regular basis and learning from successful coaches in other sports. These interactions provided an opportunity to learn from their peers and develop ideas that fostered success:

> I had a couple of close friends that I coached against and we socialized a lot. We talked a lot about different systems once in a while. We would play each other but of course we already knew each other's systems so we weren't giving anything away. We would say 'what do you think'. So we learned from each other. (Darryl)

> Relating to mentors, earlier on in my career it was more hockey people but as I have developed its more of the crossovers. For example, I look at how Doc Rivers was so successful with the Celtics. Or when Chuck Daly was getting good runs with the Pistons. You can look at the All-Blacks and how they have instilled their culture. Now I'm looking at, 'what is Belichik doing so well?'. So I think some of those types of coaches in different sports have always been an influence. (Chris)

Overall, coaching factors that contributed to the implementation and adaptation of the coaching vision included discipline and continuous improvement of players and the coach.

Athlete context. This subtheme relates to the athletes' role in the implementation of the coaching vision that was articulated in phase two of the framework. More specifically, for successful implementation of the vision in phase three, athletes were required to demonstrate leadership, accountability, and meet high standards for physical and mental training.

All six of the coaches discussed athlete leadership as playing a role in their vision of a successful team. Leaders were utilized as an extension of the coaching staff as a means of relaying the vision to the players:

> I gave my leadership group confidence by helping them understand that they had an important role to play. If your captain and three assistants are sharing the same voice as the coaches then it's not just one person trying to get everyone on board, it's eight people steering the ship in the right direction. This is far more effective than standing in front of the team and demanding that they do what you want. (Eric)

Extending this, one coach (Chris) described developing strong captains because athlete-leaders helped him build leadership qualities in younger players and pass on the winning culture to the rest of the team. Furthermore, coaches discussed how leaders were seen as conduits for two-way communication between the team and coaching staff. For instance, captains were given the responsibility to manage small issues that occur in the locker room: "They can handle all the

small fires, I don't need to hear those things. But if something is important you need to come in to me." (Chris).

Implementing the coaching vision required leaders that held their teammates accountable. One coach described his vision of the type of leaders that could lead a championship team:

> Every day these guys had to be the hardest workers, the most demanding of themselves, but also the most demanding of their teammates. I sat down with both captains of our championship winning teams after the season was over and both of them told me that it was without a doubt the most difficult year in their entire hockey career. This was because they were not just monitoring themselves but they had to motivate, encourage, discipline, demand, and drive their other 22 teammates. They were on call 24 hours a day with what's going on. They had to have a strangle-hold on that locker room and when their teammates left the locker room they had to know what was going on there as well. There was a great respect these guys had developed but those guys also demanded and pushed their teammates so hard. (Adam)

Finally, coaches discussed physical and mental training as key elements contributing to the successful implementation of the coaching vision. For instance, one coach discussed the link between physical training and confidence:

> Confidence is key in our world today, especially in the hockey world. The best way you get confidence is being in the absolute best physical condition of your career. So our key this time of year is to prepare to come back as your best ever physical condition because I think that when you're fit you can eliminate a lot of excuses that your mind sets. (Brian)

Another coach described how he used training sessions to create a mental edge:

> I wanted it to be an atmosphere where we would work them hard but they were going to know why we were working them hard. They were also going to know that there should be some rewards at the end of the rainbow is you're going to outwork the other team. We wanted them to think they were the hardest working team. I didn't know how hard anyone else was working. But I wanted them to think they were working harder than the other team! So that was something that we always had as a focus. Our guys were going to work harder than anybody else. It paid off for a long time. (Darryl)

Overall, coach and athlete factors impacted the successful implementation and adaptation of the coaching vision. Leadership, accountability, and physical and mental training were key elements to the coaching vision of a championship winning team.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision and its influence on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Growing interest on the strategies and behaviours of successful coaches has uncovered the elements of a coaching vision from various perspectives including how it was developed (e.g., Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Carter & Bloom, 2009; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016), articulated (e.g., Babcock & Larsen, 2012; Dorrance & Nash, 1996; Jackson & Delehanty, 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Wooden, 1988), and implemented (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). While previous research has successfully detailed these elements individually, there remained a need to tie these elements together to holistically understand the vision of highly successful coaches from its inception to its completion. The results from the current study indicate that the participants had an ability and capacity to understand, define, and implement a vision that included a wide range of elements that contributed to the team's success. The following discussion will explore coaching vision and success in relation to previous literature on successful coaches. This chapter will be divided into four sections. The first three relate to the development, articulation, and implementation of the coaching vision while the fourth addresses coaching vision as it relates to a culture of excellence.

Developing a Coaching Vision

This section will focus on two main findings related to the development of a coaching vision: pursuing formal education and experience as an assistant coach. First, a penchant for

lifelong learning contributed to the development of the coaching vision of participants in the current study. The coaching literature describes lifelong learning in the form of learning from other coaches, mentors, books, clinics, and experiences (e.g., Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Carter & Bloom, 2009; Donoso-Morales, Bloom, & Caron, 2017; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). Specific to lifelong learning, research on Serial Winning Coaches (SWC) found that a strong background in formal education provided a platform for developing tools and mental frameworks that could be applied to coaching (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). The current coaches were also lifelong learners who carefully chose educational paths that had a direct impact on their coaching knowledge and behaviours, which in turn, were utilized in the implementation of their vision. For instance, five coaches pursued graduate degrees in educational psychology, counselling, social work, or business administration, while the remaining coach attained two undergraduate degrees with one in pedagogy. Consequently, this list aligns with previous research that highlighted the importance of improving pedagogical and communication skills (e.g., Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016), expertise that undoubtedly proved to be useful for coaches in the current study when articulating and implementing their coaching vision. This drive to enhance their skillset by pursuing higher levels of formal education may have been one indicator of a forward thinking mind-set or approach to learning that these coaches adopted compared to many of their peers. This aligns with research on SWC that describes them as striving to attain excellence in a deliberate manner (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Overall, the vision of the coaches in the current study embodied the pursuit of excellence that was exemplified through lifelong learning and motivation to pursue self-improvement in the form of higher levels of formal education.

The current results revealed that experience as an assistant coach was crucial to the development of a coaching vision. In the same manner that previous studies have highlighted athletic and coaching experience as effective methods of knowledge acquisition (e.g., Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Bloom & Salmela, 2000; Carter & Bloom, 2009; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Mallett, Rynne, & Dickens, 2013), the current study is among the first to directly connect valuable experiences (e.g., mentoring) as an assistant coach as an important precursor to becoming a multiple championship winning head coach. More specifically, the participants developed their vision through mentorship experiences from a successful head coach with a proven track record of success. For example, one participant apprenticed under a coach that won multiple Stanley Cups, two participants were assistants for national championship winners at the college level, one lost in the college national championship final, another won the University league championship then lost at the national championship, and the other was an assistant for a head coach that went on to win the league championship the year after they coached together. This finding aligns with literature on the relationships between elite head coaches and assistants that described a mutually beneficial relationship between them (e.g., Rathwell, Bloom, & Loughead, 2014; Sinotte, Bloom, & Caron, 2015). Extending this literature, the current findings suggest that this relationship provided a springboard for the development of their own coaching vision by being exposed to successful hockey environments while they were an assistant coach. While it is common practice for head coaches to aid the career development of their assistants (e.g., Bloom et al., 1998; Rathwell et al., 2014), it is less common to have mentorship, guidance, and connection with a successful coach that has an in-depth understanding of the process involved in winning championships. This finding may be particularly important when differentiating the vision of championship winning coaches from

other successful coaches. As such, the coaches in this study benefitted from seeing first-hand the standards of excellence required for success and how that coach applied his own vision to his successful team. While it may be impractical to infer that success as an assistant coach is a predictor or precursor to success as a head coach, it should be considered that experience as an assistant coach in a team environment led by a successful head coach may aid the development of an articulated vision of their own. Therefore, coach training programs that connect high performance coaches with coaches that have an established track record of success could aid in the development of a coaching vision that incorporates championship-level standards of excellence.

With respect to coach mentorship, it is worthwhile to explore the foundational literature on mentor role theory that described the functions involved in mentor/mentee relationships (e.g., Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985). More specifically, Kram and Isabella (1985) found that mentees benefitted from career advancement functions (i.e., coaching, challenging assignments) and psychosocial functions (i.e., role modeling, counselling) that facilitated personal growth and increased managerial effectiveness. Kram (1983) also described four phases (i.e., initiation, cultivation, separation, redefinition) relating to how the mentor/mentee relationship changed over time. These phases can be linked to the three phases of the coaching vision (i.e., development, articulation, implementation). Notably, the initiation and cultivation phases were characterized by mentees developing close connections with their mentors through frequent and meaningful task-oriented relationships (i.e., coaching, challenging assignments, and modeling). These phases of mentorship align with findings from the current study relating to the development phase of the coaching vision where the personal growth of participants was enhanced by modeling their performance standards and vision while apprenticing with a successful coach. Next, the

separation and redefinition phases of the mentor role theory signified a transition towards the mentee becoming more autonomous, leading to the physical separation from the close bonds that accompanied earlier phases in the relationship with the mentor. As such, these two phases can be aligned with the articulation and implementation phases of the coaching vision where participants took their first job as a head coach and formulated their own vision.

Similar to Kram's (1983) research on the phases of the mentor relationship, current participants demonstrated that as they progressed into their head coaching careers, the nature of their mentoring relationships evolved. This evolution of the mentor/mentee relationship aligns with coaching research that documented how successful coaches benefitted from the guidance and advice gleaned from mentorship relationships throughout different phases of their careers (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017). Similarly, Chantal Vallée (Vallée & Bloom, 2016) described how acquiring a mentor in her fifth year as head coach after losing in the 2010 national final was an integral factor in transforming her into a coach that won the next five national championships. In addition to mentor relationships, organizational research has established the value of developmental networks (i.e., people who aided in personal development and career advancement) (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Within these networks, peer relationships provided developmental functions that filled the gaps left by mentors, such as providing feedback, developing strategy, and building friendships (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Similarly, in the current study, the nature of their relationships with mentors evolved toward resembling conversations amongst peers (e.g., Kram, 1983) after participants had an understanding of how to implement the vision. Taken together with organizational research on mentoring (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985), current findings suggest that mentorship relationships were important to developing the vision (i.e., apprenticing as assistant coaches) and implementing the

vision (i.e., maintaining contact with mentors). Noting the importance of mentors and developmental networks, coaches desiring to develop a vision of excellence should carefully choose their mentors and peers in order to enhance their personal growth and career development.

Articulating the Coaching Vision

Results revealed that coaches in the current study organized their values, beliefs, goals, standards, and philosophy through an articulated vision that was derived from habits and personal values developed from early life experiences. This finding was consistent with previous literature that outlined the elements of an articulated coaching vision to include: defining the vision (e.g., Collins & Porras, 1996; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016), adapting the vision over time (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015), building the vision around holistic athlete development (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014), and reinforcing the blueprint of success after winning their first national championship (e.g., Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). An examination of the Coaching Model (Côté et al., 1995) assists in explaining how the current participants organized these elements into their coaching vision. For instance, the Coaching Model (Côté et al., 1995) described expert coaches' ability to develop advanced mental frameworks that aided in organizing plans for holistically developing athletes (i.e., athletically and personally). For the coaches in the current study, the coaching vision was the mental framework that helped align their plans for team success with the development of their individual athletes. Considering that previous research has connected the holistic development of athletes to successful performance outcomes (e.g., Côté et

al., 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), the current study extends this by further clarifying precisely how coaches articulated this concept through the framework of a coaching vision. For instance, findings revealed that the overarching direction for the program was articulated through yearly themes and goals surrounding the concept of developing athletes both athletically and personally, while incrementally increasing performance standards with each passing year. While previous research linked advanced mental frameworks and holistic development of athletes to successful coaches (e.g., Côté et al., 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), the current study is among the first to recognize coaching vision as the specific framework that connects the holistic development of individual athletes to the overall success of the team. This finding is particularly important because it provides a framework and guidelines for coaches to develop a vision that can lead to sustainable success for their teams.

Coaches in the current study revealed that the way they articulated the vision adapted over time while the core values, beliefs, and philosophy within the vision remained constant. This finding aligns with previous research on successful professional coaches who demonstrated an ability to adapt over time to meet the changing needs of their team while continuing to achieve success (i.e., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). For example, Sir Alex Ferguson was able to sustain extraordinary success throughout a 26-year career managing Manchester United by utilizing the perspective he gained from his extensive experience towards adapting his vision over time. This ability to adapt was evident prior to the start of the 1995 season when he approved the departures of three of his team's veteran players without replacing them in the transfer market (which was the norm at the time). This move signaled a shift in philosophy from paying for high priced transfers to developing talent from within the organization's development system. This change propelled the team to win

five of the next six English Premiership titles with a group of core players that were developed in Manchester United's system. Similarly, the current participants provided valuable perspective into how articulating the vision evolved and adapted throughout their careers in order to meet the changing needs of different generations of athletes. For instance, results revealed that the way coaches interacted with players and the methods they used to teach new concepts evolved to stay current with changes in social trends and technology while their core values remained constant. Notably, as coaches advanced in their careers, they started to utilize annual themes as a way to bring new life into the way the vision was articulated. These insights were particularly important considering the six participants coached an average of 28 years at the college/university level.

A unique finding in the current study related to how coaches described the exact moment when their vision was first articulated. For instance, Vallée and Bloom (2016) described articulating the vision immediately upon being named head coach then systematically writing down the vision in a blueprint one year later. Conversely, the current participants did not follow a well-defined timeline for articulating the vision; instead they described the vision becoming clearer over time, particularly after they won the national championship for the first time. For example, one coach (Darryl) discussed not having a clear vision when he started as a head coach but refined it over time. Another coach (Adam) adapted his vision while apprenticing as an assistant coach for a national championship winning team. He then described how his vision became clearer after winning the national championship for the first time which reinforced the belief that his team could repeat this feat. Similarly, immediately after winning the national title, another coach (Chris) described how he reflected upon his season and then wrote out the blueprint of success from that season. As such, it appeared that further refining of the vision after winning a national championship, either through reflection or physically writing out the process,

may have contributed to repeated success by clarifying the pathway and process. Therefore, this suggests that understanding how serial winning college/university coaches articulated their coaching vision might be the first step towards replicating a coaching vision that encompasses the elements common to championship winning coaches. This includes defining values, beliefs, and philosophy in addition to outlining the long and short term goals required to meet the standard of excellence required to win a national championship (e.g., Collins & Porras, 1996; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016).

Results provided tangible examples of how serial winning college/university coaches created and sustained cultures of excellence through an articulated vision. More specifically, coaches in the current study articulated their vision with a clear plan for the development of athletes, a dedication to successful performance outcomes, and holistically developing athletes personally and athletically (e.g., Vallée & Bloom, 2005). While previous case studies focused on the behaviours, knowledge, and strategies of championship winning coaches from amateur contexts (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Gavazzi, 2015; Kimiecik & Gould, 1987; Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Wooden, 1998; Yukelson & Rose, 2014), the current study is the among the first to specifically explore the articulation of coaching vision from a group comprised solely of college/university coaches that had won multiple national championships. For instance, one coach articulated his vision by stating that he expected his athletes to leave the program with a diploma in one hand and a championship ring in the other. This impacted the culture by providing athletes with clear expectations for personal and athletic growth by helping them see their envisioned future (e.g., Collins & Porras, 1996). Furthermore, this vision extended to prospective recruits by ensuring that they understood the team's culture and expectations before making a commitment to join the program. As such, by

the time an athlete graduated, they completed a lifecycle that started with first assimilating the team's vision and values during the recruiting process (e.g., Vallée & Bloom, 2005) then enacting the vision and influencing culture as an athlete leader. Overall, these findings suggest that an articulated vision influenced a continuous cycle of athletes assimilating and enacting the vision and consequently fostering a culture of excellence.

Implementing the Coaching Vision

Coaches in the current study implemented their vision through daily communication of consistent messages that were reinforced by athletes, assistant coaches, and other personnel. These results tie together previous literature outlining the elements relating to implementing a coaching vision which included effectively communicating their vision (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), creating and sustaining a culture of excellence (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), setting high expectations for their team and recruits, (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), creating an autonomy supportive environment that supported setting goals and developing leaders, (e.g., Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett & Coulter, 2016), and utilizing support staff such as assistant coaches and other personnel to enact a vision that permeated the entire organization (e.g., Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006). While it may appear complex to apply all of these elements in a coherent manner, coaches in the current study demonstrated an ability to utilize the framework of the coaching vision to simplify these concepts to ensure their messages were effectively communicated on a daily basis. More specifically, it appeared that participants utilized the vision as a form of heuristic to quickly make sense of and arrive at solutions for complex problems by interpreting

them based on the core values of the team. The vision helped extend this heuristic to athletes and personnel. For example, one participant noted that instead of having a long list of rules, his vision included one all-encompassing rule that aligned team values and set the expectation for players not to embarrass their school or team. Similarly, the act of finding simplicity amidst complexity was a commonality of SWC when implementing their vision (e.g., Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). For instance, after completing an analysis of the pitfalls that led to a slide in performance, the coaches of the New Zealand All-Blacks embodied their new performance and character standards within the vision statement of "better people make better All-Blacks" (Hodge et al., 2014). Derived from an in-depth understanding of the organization, the All-Blacks' coaches developed this vision statement as a simplified message that would be a beacon to guide players and personnel to long-term success. While vision statements have been described in previous coaching literature (e.g., Desjardins, 1996; Hodge et al., 2014), the current findings are amongst the first to suggest that highly successful coaches used their vision as part of the decision-making process to help focus energy and resources in a directed manner towards constantly building upon the team's core values and beliefs. As such, the vision was found to be an effective tool used to address problems, concisely communicate values, and assist with decision making of athletes and personnel.

Along the same line, findings from the current study revealed that the role of the coach could be likened to a CEO that aligns an entire organization through their vision. For instance, several coaches described their role as extending beyond the normal everyday duties of a coach to include managing support staff and other personnel with respect to their coaching vision. By enacting the vision through athletes, assistant coaches and support staff, the strength of the vision was amplified and further reinforced on a daily basis by multiple members of the organization.

This finding extends research by Vallée and Bloom (2016) relating the role of a university basketball coach to a CEO of a corporation where all facets of the job were done with the vision in mind. In addition, this finding also aligns with case studies of successful professional coaches who inspired their athletes and personnel through their vision (e.g., Hodge et al., 2014; Walsh, Jamison, & Walsh, 2009). For example, Bill Walsh orchestrated the turnaround of a last place team into three-time Super Bowl champions by ensuring his vision permeated the entire organization. This meant each member of the organization understood their role and contributed to the team's success whether they were athletes on the front lines or the grounds crew mowing the grass (Walsh et al., 2009). This finding suggests that a commonality of winning coaches may be their ability to implement a vision that connects everyone within an organization to the team's success. As such, it is recommended that high performance coaches that aim to sustain a culture of excellence ensure that their vision extends past the players and connects the entire organization to the team's success.

Coaches in the current study demonstrated the discipline to hold athletes accountable to implementing the performance standards set out in their vision. This finding aligns with research on SWC that described them as being driven in their pursuit of implementing their vision while maintaining a focus on excellence (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Building off this research, the coaches in the current study offered examples of using unconventional coaching methods to reset the vision when performance standards derailed. For instance, one coach kicked his captain off the ice during practice while another forced his team to return to the ice after a game to do a conditioning skate. This suggests that part of what makes these coaches successful may be their inclination to take drastic steps when their teams are not meeting the performance standards required to succeed. As such, the fact that these coaches demonstrated an unrelenting drive to

implement the standards of the vision may be a factor that separates serial winning college/university coaches from the rest of the pack.

Vision and Culture of Excellence

The current findings suggest that the coaching vision was the basis for teaching the foundational principles that contributed to creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Participants taught these principles in a process-focused approach that involved continuous improvement for both the athletes and coaches. This habit of continuous improvement was a commonality in case studies on coaches who won multiple championships at both the college (e.g., Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Gavazzi, 2015; Mallett & Coulter, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016) and professional (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Elberse & Dye, 2012; Hodge et al., 2014) levels. For example, Urban Meyer's vision included clear guidelines to progressively develop athletes (i.e., athletically and personally) into leaders and contributing members of the college football team. By developing these positive behaviours as part of the daily routine, the team created a culture that reinforced the values and beliefs that were congruent with coaching vision, which helped strengthen the vision with each passing year. Extending previous research, the current results suggest that the culture of excellence was reinforced by coaches focusing specifically on improving the principles and processes involved in the vision as opposed to focusing on performance outcomes. For instance, coaches discussed how they improved their processes by learning from conversations with other coaches in their network or by using successful coaches in other sports as benchmarks. One coach discussed bringing in leaders from other successful organizations (i.e., NFL coaches, NBA coaches, MLB coaches) as guest speakers to give team members new perspectives and reaffirm methods in their own processes. Another coach spoke often with an NHL coach to continue to develop the vision of success for

his team to develop innovative ideas. Consequently, coaches in the current study were able to build upon their past successes by continuously improving the principles and processes within their vision. While previous research emphasized how continuous improvement (i.e., personal and team) facilitated a high-performance environment that enabled athletes to excel over the course of multiple seasons (e.g., Hodge et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Yukelson & Rose, 2014), the current study is among the first to attribute coaching vision as the driving force behind constantly redefining the benchmarks for personal and team success. In sum, the current research extends previous literature by explicitly defining coaching vision as a contributing factor to creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

The current study found that creating and sustaining a culture of excellence was facilitated by personnel and team leaders acting as stewards in the process of enacting the coach's vision. For example, participants established a culture where assistant coaches, personnel, and team leaders were instrumental in ensuring athletes bought-in to the team's values and principles. While previous research has discussed vision from the perspective of motivating athletes and assistant coaches (e.g., Hodge et al., 2014; Rathwell et al., 2014; Sinotte et al., 2015), the current study is among the first to link vision to influencing members of the team outside the athletes and assistant coaches. Notably, the current study found that assistant coaches and team leaders were particularly important in getting team members to buy-in to the vision. For instance, assistant coaches were involved in selling the vision when they were recruiting talented players who would eventually become leaders on the team. In an example of athlete leaders, one coach told a story of his strength coach walking into the weight room to find his captain chastising a first-year athlete holding him accountable for not meeting the team's performance standards while the coach was not watching. This finding suggests that the culture

of excellence was strengthened by assistant coaches and athlete leaders who bought-in to the vision then added value to the vision by selling it in their own manner. In sum, it appeared that serial winning college/university coaches demonstrated an ability to sell their vision to athletes and personnel that assisted in strengthening team culture by keeping messages consistent and holding athletes accountable to team standards.

Chapter 6

Summary

The search to understand the knowledge and behaviours of successful coaches has led to a line of research that has focused specifically on coaches that have won multiple championships (e.g., Elberse & Dye, 2012; Gavazzi, 2015; Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014), however literature examining the coaching vision of these individuals is limited. Coaching vision has been defined as a standard of excellence that the coach upholds throughout all aspects of his/her program by integrating his/her long-term goals and philosophy (Vallée & Bloom 2005). Additionally, the coach must include the team's core values and purpose in his/her vision (Collins & Porras, 1996). The purpose of this study was to explore how coaches developed, articulated, and implemented their coaching vision and how it related to their unprecedented team success (i.e., winning multiple championships).

Upon approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board, six expert men's ice hockey head coaches were interviewed for this qualitative study. Their combined experiences included 20 national championships, more than 170 years as head coach, and over 4100 wins at the college/university level. The six participants coached an average of 28 years at the college/university level**.** It is noteworthy that there are only 12 living coaches in NCAA Division I and U Sports Men's hockey (i.e., seven in NCAA Divison I, and five in U Sports) who have won more than one championship.

The current qualitative study followed the collective case study methodology to answer the questions of "how" and "why" coaches developed, articulated, and implemented their coaching vision (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Semi-structured open-ended individual interviews

were used to elicit data in the form of purposeful conversations (Holloway, 1997). Interviews were transcribed verbatim then analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it identified patterns across data sets and allowed for flexible interpretation of the data's themes (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016).

The current analysis revealed four over-arching themes: *personal foundation, vision of excellence, the vision in motion,* and *coach and athlete impact.* These themes contributed to a three-phase framework for the development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision of championship winning coaches (see Figure 1). More precisely, in phase one the theme *personal foundation* aligned with the development of the coaching vision, in phase two the *vision of excellence* aligned with defining and articulating the vision, in phase three the *vision in motion* aligned with implementing and enacting the vision, while *coach and athlete impact* described the role coaches and athletes played in the adaptation and implementation of the vision. Each of the three phases will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Phase one related to the *personal foundation* theme which included the makeup and background of each coach, and included life experiences, personal characteristics, and habits that influenced the development of their championship-winning vision. Phase two of the framework, *vision of excellence*, included the subthemes of core of the vision and success. The articulation of the coaching vision in phase two set the standards and guidelines of what would be implemented in phase three. More specifically, a clearly articulated vision included a plan for the development of athletes and a dedication to successful performance outcomes. This articulated vision was derived from the values and beliefs of the coach and placed importance on the development of the athlete academically and athletically. Phase three of the framework involved the implementation of the vision and included the themes of *vision in motion* and *coach and athlete*

impact. Vision in motion included the subthemes of communicating and enacting the vision. Methods such as goal setting, team building, and having a yearly theme were common ways of achieving buy-in and communicating the vision. Also in phase three, *coach and athlete impact* referred to specific factors controlled by the coach that impact the successful implementation of the vision. From the coach's perspective, this involved discipline and continuous improvement by the team and coach.

Conclusions

Taken together with previous research, the current study is among the first to specifically bring together an outline of the elements involved in each of the three phases of coaching vision. The following is a summary of the elements included within each phase of the coaching vision:

Development

- Their personal makeup included exceptional work ethic, yearning for lifelong learning, and adaptability to almost any challenge or barrier. These characteristics helped establish high personal performance standards that were continuously improved upon.
- Lifelong learning was evident in the form of attending clinics, pursuing higher education, learning from peers, apprenticing as assistant coaches, and learning from mentors.
- A strong background in formal education provided a platform for developing tools and mental frameworks that could be applied to coaching. The current study extends this finding to assert that pursuing graduate degrees or additional undergraduate degrees were commonalities with the current sample of coaches.
- Intrapersonal knowledge (i.e., self-awareness) contributed to participants' personal feedback loop which helped produce a cycle of continuous improvement and adaptability of the vision.

Articulation

- The articulation of the vision started with an ability to clearly define the standard of excellence that is upheld throughout all aspects of an organization by integrating long-term goals, purpose, and the leader's philosophy and values.
- The core of the vision remained constant while certain elements adapted over time based on changes in the external environment.
- After winning the national championships, participants further clarified their blueprint of success which contributed to sustained excellence.
- Participants demonstrated an ability to clearly communicate their vision and keep it fresh by articulating it in different ways over time.

Implementation

- Creating and sustaining a culture of excellence appeared to influence the ongoing success of the participants in the current study.
- High expectations, a legacy of winning, creating an autonomy supportive environment, setting goals, integrating themes, developing leaders and recruiting talented athletes were all commonalities of the participants.
- Participants utilized assistant coaches and other support staff to enact the vision. A commonality was the ability to implement a vision that permeated the entire organization.
- Participants had the discipline to hold athletes accountable to standards when producing sub-par performances.

Theoretical and Practical Applications

While research on coaching vision has begun to investigate successful coaches, the current study is amongst the first to address coaching vision as the central aspect of a study that focuses specifically on Serial Winning College/University Coaches. The results of this study add to the current line of research on SWC by specifically outlining the elements of a coaching vision that can be replicated by high performance coaches who aspire to create and sustain cultures of excellence.

Results of the current study described a framework for coaching vision that involved developing athletes athletically and personally. This finding extends previous coaching models describing the behaviours of successful coaches (e.g., Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). For instance, the Coaching Model (Côté et al., 1995) described how successful coaches organized their plans for holistic athlete development through advanced mental frameworks, while Vallée and Bloom (2005) described coaching vision as central to a model of holistic athlete development that connected the coaches' attributes, individual growth, and organizational skills. The current findings add to this line of research by suggesting that the coaching vision was the specific framework that organized the coaches' plans for holistic athlete development and galvanized the team to take action toward the pursuit of excellence. Furthermore, the current results brought together previous research on coaching vision to reveal the specific elements involved in articulating and implementing the vision (i.e., values, philosophy, goals, accountability, support personnel). As such, the results provided more depth into explaining where the vision came from, how the coach sold this vision to the team, and the factors that influenced the vision adapting over time. These results are of particular interest to high performance coaches desiring to create their own vision as they provide insight into how

coaches organize their plans and offers examples of the specific elements involved in the coaching vision.

Unique to this study, apprenticing under an extremely successful head coach proved to be valuable for the development of a coaching vision. More specifically, apprenticing as an assistant coach provided participants the opportunity to experience the standards of excellence required to produce sustainable success. This finding is particularly important for coaches searching for mentorship opportunities. It suggests that mentoring under a highly successful coach could provide valuable learning opportunities, personal relationships, and insights (i.e., standards of excellence, exposure to culture/vision) that could lead to the development of their own personal vision of success.

Limitations and Recommendations

While the current study offered important insights into the coaching vision of successful coaches, some limitations need to be addressed. First, the results were based off interviews with college/university coaches and, therefore, they may not extend to coaching professional athletes. Second, the current study does not offer information about the coaching vision of coaches who did not win championships. As such, it would be valuable to gather information from college/university coaches with losing records and/or teams that produced successful performance outcomes without winning the national championships to see if there are any differences or similarities. Third, the results were not validated by outside sources such as athletes, assistant coaches, and personnel. Considering that findings suggested that the vision permeated the entire organization, it would be worthwhile to investigate perceptions of coaching vision from these sources. Fourth, the findings may be limited by the sample size. For instance, the current study involved six out of a total population of twelve men's college/university ice

hockey coaches that won multiple championships. While findings suggested they articulated their vision based on the concept of developing athletes athletically and personally (i.e., holistic athlete development), there remains a possibility that the six remaining coaches in the sample may have applied their coaching vision differently. Therefore, future research could focus coaching vision from a perspective that does not involve holistic athlete development. Fifth, while the findings outlined common elements associated with the coaching vision of successful coaches, they do not offer any predictive value. For example, while an exceptional work ethic, dedication to lifelong learning, high level of intrapersonal knowledge, and articulated vision may have been commonalities in the current study, the presence of these characteristics alone may not necessarily be precursors to winning multiple championships.

Additionally, the findings may have practical applications outside of sport. For instance, business leaders can benefit from understanding how a well-articulated vision applies to excellence within their work environment. More specifically, the findings of this study relating to the elements of an articulated vision (i.e., articulating vision, creating an autonomy supportive environment, developing leaders, establishing a culture of excellence) could provide a guideline for business leaders to build an organizational environment suited for success. Furthermore, findings can be extrapolated to suggest that an organizational culture revolving around developing team members professionally and personally (i.e., holistic development) contribute to an environment that fosters success. Considering this, future research could explore the how findings on coaching vision can be applied to the organizational context to assist business leaders with creating and sustaining cultures of excellence.

In conclusion, the current study is among the first to define and explain the three phases of the coaching vision (i.e., development, articulation, implementation) and outline elements

within each phase. More specifically, this research adds depth to understanding how serial winning college/university coaches organized their plans for success through the framework of the coaching vision and adapted this vision over time to produce sustainable excellence within their programs. Given the growing line of research focusing specifically on the knowledge and behaviours of coaches that won multiple championships, future research testing the elements of the three phases of the coaching vision could lead to the creating of a model for developing and implementing a coaching vision for high performance coaches who aspire to attain excellence in their programs.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is David Urquhart, the current full-time assistant coach of the McGill Redmen hockey team. I am currently working towards a Master's degree in sport psychology under the supervision of Dr. Gordon A. Bloom at McGill University. Based on your exemplary coaching credentials and ability to produce consistent winning results, we are contacting you to invite you to participate in our research project on how coaches develop, articulate, and implement their coaching vision.

The McGill University Ethics Board has reviewed and accepted this study for its adherence to ethical guidelines. Any information you provide during this study will remain confidential. If you choose to participate, I will conduct a 1-2 hour interview with you at a time and location of your choosing. If more information is required, then a follow-up telephone conversation may occur.

Should you have any questions concerning this study, please contact my supervisor or myself using the information provided at the bottom of the page. The McGill Sport Psychology Research Laboratory has a history of producing influential research on sport coaching and leadership. Please visit our website if you would like to learn more about our research: http://sportpsych.mcgill.ca.

Thank you for considering participating in this research project, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
David Urquhart

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Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for David Urquhart, a graduate student in sport psychology in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. We would like to invite you to participate in our study titled, "The Development and Implementation of a Coaching Vision of High Performance Coaches". If you choose to participate in this study you will be requested, without payment, to partake in a 1-2 hour audiotaped interview where you will be asked to discuss your experience with how you developed, articulated, and implemented your coaching vision. If more information is necessary, then a follow-up telephone interview may occur.

At the end of the interviews you will have the opportunity to clarify or edit any comments you made. You will also receive a typed transcript of the interviews, which may be edited at your discretion. Prior to publication, you will receive copies of the results and conclusions of the study. Any and all information you provide throughout the study will **remain confidential**. Only the principle investigator, David Urquhart, and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon A. Bloom, will have access to identifiable data. All audio files and the digital copies of interview transcripts will be securely stored in encrypted folders on a password-protected computer for a period of seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted to digital files. After ensuring they were converted accurately, the paper copies will be destroyed. Seven years after the study ends all the data will be destroyed. The information will be used for publication purposes and scholarly journals or for presentations at conferences. Your name and identity will not be revealed at any time. The McGill Research Ethics Board has reviewed this study for compliance with its ethical standards. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory. You are free to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from participation at any time, for any reason without penalty or prejudice.**

After reading the above statement and having had the directions verbally explained, it is now possible for you to provide consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this research project based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form for your records. Please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831, or Lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca, if you have any questions or concerned regarding your rights and welfare as a participant in this research study. Please sign below if you agree to participate in this study.

I agree to the audio-taping of the interviews with the understanding that these recordings will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing these sessions. Yes □ No □

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

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Appendix C

Interview Guide

Pre-Interview Routine

- Introduction of researcher
- Overview of the study

Opening Questions

1. Briefly tell me about your athletic career. Please include any experiences winning championships.
2. Briefly tell me about your academic (university degrees) and coaching educational background (formal, clinics, etc)
3. Briefly tell me about how you started your coaching career.

Main and Follow-Up Questions

4. Can you explain your coaching vision
5. How did your coaching vision develop?
    a. What (key moments) influenced this?
    b. How long did it take you to develop your coaching vision?
    c. Has it changed over time? If yes, how and why?
6. Who has helped you shape this vision?
    a. Are there any coaches, individuals, or leaders in other domains that you tried to emulate throughout your coaching career?
7. What role does your coaching vision play in your team's success?
    a. How has your vision influenced your team culture?
    b. How do you get players to buy-in to the vision?

8. What is the most important factor in successfully implementing your vision?
    a. How important was this vision to the success of your championship teams?

Summary and Concluding Questions

9. Is there something that we didn't cover in the interview that you would you like to add?
10. Do you have any final comments or questions?

Probes: Key phrases to stimulate reflection

- Can you expand on that?
- Can you clarify that?
- That's interesting, tell me more about that
- Could you please tell me more about this