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# Applied Coaching Project

# *"The formation, development and application of Coaching Philosophies"*

## University of Stirling
## MSc Performance Coaching

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**The following piece of work is submitted for the Applied Coaching Project on the MSc Performance Coaching programme at the University of Stirling. All the work is my own and University regulations and procedures have been adhered to throughout.**

**Thanks to my supervisor, Justine Allen, for her help during the process.**

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## Introduction

There has been a global expansion in coaching science (Gilbert, Cote & Mallett, 2006) which seeks to understand and document the reasons, influences and motivations behind coach behaviour. One common aspect in this pursuit is the area of Coaching Philosophy, which is a topic of pre-eminence in numerous coaching books (eg. Jenkins, 2010; Kidman & Hanrahan, 2011) and forms a core aspect of coach education (Cushion & Partington, 2016). Conceptually, Coaching Philosophy is believed to be key to understanding coach behaviour (Cassidy et al, 2009; Jenkins, 2010) and underpins all aspects of coaching (Nash et al, 2008), due to the common assumption that behaviour reflects one's set of values about coaching, sport and human relationships (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). It is argued that articulating and analysing a coach's Philosophy may offer much to understand and develop coaching practice (Cassidy et al 2009; Jenkins, 2010), which therefore aids our understanding of why coaches do what they do and will, subsequently, inform coaching practice, policy and education. This study will focus on considering how and why Coaching Philosophies are formed, how and why they change over time and the ways in which one's Philosophy impacts upon coaching behaviour.

### Coaching Philosophy – Understanding the term

The need for coaches to develop and articulate a Coaching Philosophy has had a history of support for a number of years (Carless & Douglas, 2011). It is important to first consider how, exactly, it is defined.

*Defining a 'Coaching Philosophy'*

Coaching Philosophy has been defined in various ways and with different emphases in literature. Kidman and Hanrahan (1997) defined Coaching Philosophy as "a personal statement that is based on the values and beliefs that direct one's coaching" (p32). Definitions often propose that Coaching Philosophy is reflective of one's personal values and beliefs (eg. Lyle & Cushion, 2017) with these terms used frequently in combination

(eg. Carless & Douglass, 2011; Kidman & Hanarahan, 2011; McGladrey et al, 2010; Burton & Raedeke, 2008; Nash et al, 2008). There is a recurrent emphasis on values in particular, with action and philosophy seen to be shaped by personal principles and values (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004; Hogg, 1995). However, other literature advocates a subtle difference, that the way coaches view their role, and the process undertaken to form their philosophy, is dependent on their knowledge, values and attitudes towards sport and coaching (Lyle, 1999; Jones et al, 2003; Potrac et al, 2000) in general, which implies a context-driven approach. In such a way, Jenny (2013) proposes more of a joint venture, asserting that how athletes are treated, and the intricacies of the coach-athlete relationship, more closely resemble a Coaching Philosophy. This is echoed in teaching research by Goodyear and Allchin (1998) who suggest that a statement of philosophy may describe how a professor and student work together to create a good learning environment.

Numerous guides for coaches reflect both this divide and, therefore, the mixed messages that coaches must interpret. Some align with the identification of personal values and beliefs, suggesting that the values one holds in highest regard, and that govern your life, should dictate your Coaching Philosophy (Guthrie, 2003), because such values provide guidance for everyday decisions (van Mullem & Brunner, 2013). However, others are undoubtedly context-dependent with Dieffenbach and Lauer (2009) suggesting that youth coaches should develop a philosophy that embraces the goals and values associated with the context in which they work, particularly elements such as character, teamwork, fair play and resilience. On a personal level, it seems that both are vital - that values and beliefs will heavily impact upon how you approach relationships with players and colleagues and that the sporting context will determine the ways in which these beliefs are applied.

*Issues in Defining 'Coaching Philosophy'*

These varying definitions in literature present issues not just for other academics, but also in educating coaches. The impetus to study coaching doesn't come from coaches themselves (Gilbert, 2007), but from researchers, leading to intellectual exploration that

is bound in personal research agendas, disciplinary outcomes and competition (Cushion & Lyle, 2010). This subsequently leads to a fragmented field of confusion, conflict and misdirection (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). The result is various definitions that don't have a clear explanation of meaning (Lyle & Cushion, 2017; Cushion & Partington, 2016). Such a failure to define clearly the terms used (Lyle & Cushion, 2017) means that each article has different interpretations of both Coaching Philosophy and its components. Indeed Allen's (2009) work on developing a youth Coaching Philosophy, aimed directly at coaches, fails to define Coaching Philosophy at all and pushes an agenda based on fun and loving the game. Whilst this may be an admirable stance, it doesn't help coaches to engage in deep personal reflection, nor does it provide conceptual clarity. It was previously identified that 'beliefs' and 'values' are two key elements in forming a Coaching Philosophy, but even these terms are often unexplored (eg. Camire et al, 2014; Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Nash et al, 2008). To further confuse matters, the relationship between 'beliefs' and 'values' is also inconsistent. Lyle (1999) argued that values underpin beliefs, but in contrast others (eg. Hardman & Jones, 2013; Kidman & Hanrahan, 2011) suggest that values and beliefs are related yet work independently of each other. The typical definition of Coaching Philosophy, and its components, in broad, general and abstract terms (Carless & Douglas, 2011) provides just a loose consensus (Cushion & Partington, 2016), which isn't necessarily a bad thing as it allows general principles to be applied to a wide variety of contexts (Carless & Douglass, 2011). However, it makes it incredibly difficult to establish, observe and demonstrate clear links between philosophy, personal experience (Carless & Douglas, 2011) and behaviour while further muddying the waters for academics, 'pracademics' and coaches alike.

**The Importance of a Coaching Philosophy**

Despite the lack of definitional clarity, Coaching Philosophy is largely viewed as an important step for all coaches and a pre-requisite to good practice (Cassidy et al, 2004). Furthermore, it is a key aspect in coach education (Cassidy et al, 2009; Nelson & Cushion, 2006; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005), featuring in various CPD courses (eg. British Cycling, 2009; The FA, 2017).

Having a Coaching Philosophy is said to produce a number of benefits for one's coaching practice, though it must be acknowledged that the evidence is varied and less robust than we might want. Initially, it is argued that it helps to clarify why one coaches, and acts as a vital foundation (Guthrie, 2013; Kretchmar, 1994), for 'how' and 'what' one coaches (Goodyear & Allchin, 1998). It serves as a guide for a coach's practice and conduct (Dieffenbach & Lauer, 2009). In this vein, Martens (2012) argues that it provides coaches with direction, assists decision-making, reduces the chance of surrendering to external pressures and increases the likelihood of success. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that a clear vision and understanding of one's philosophy provides stability and continuity (Goodyear & Allchin, 1998) to guard against overly reactive behaviour and provides boundaries within which the coach-athlete relationship can be located (Cassidy et al, 2004). Furthermore, it is a tool to question (Reynolds, 2005) and reflect upon one's practice (Schempp et al, 2006). Such reflection can inform and transform practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Cushion & Jones, 2014), and lacking a Coaching Philosophy results in less awareness as to why one's coaching was successful or unsuccessful (Jenkins, 2010). The potential benefits of a Coaching Philosophy are, therefore, wide-ranging, yet it's application to practice can be fraught with issues.

**Issues with Coaching Philosophy in Practice**

Despite this lack of coherence, the concept remains one that is embraced and promoted within coaching and coach education, with coaches openly encouraged to develop and apply their own personal philosophy. The reality of this process, however, remains inconsistent at best. The fragmented and diverse approaches to this aspect of coaching causes it to be "haunted and hindered" both conceptually and in practice (Lyle & Cushion, 2017, p234).

The reality is that many coaches struggle to engage with the process and attribute little value to it (Cassidy et al, 2009) because they are occupied by dealing with the tangible aspects of coaching practice, such as session content and organisation (Nash et al,

2008). The preference, instead, is to base coaching actions on experience, informal knowledge and developed assumptions, conceptualised by Cassidy (2010) as 'practice theories'. There generally appears little drive from coaches to understand the philosophical nature of coaching nor to gain a deeper understanding of their own practice (Partington & Cushion, 2013). This approach, combined with an underwhelming clarity in the presentation of Coaching Philosophy in literature, presents problems too for those who identify a personal philosophy, even if they are unaware of it themselves. The process of developing a Coaching Philosophy is complex and problematic (Cassidy et al, 2004), yet the education and support required for coaches to undertake this process effectively is limited. Coach Education presents the topic in a generalised manner (Nash et al, 2008) that doesn't allow participants to understand and grapple with such complexities and contradictions. It could also be argued that it may be inappropriate for coach education to propose a specific method or model due to the personal nature of coaching practice and the huge variety in contexts and domains within which coaches work (Jenny, 2013). The result is a swathe of coaches whose Coaching Philosophies lack the flexibility and credibility to be truly functional (Carless & Douglas, 2011).

As such, many Coaching Philosophies aren't philosophical in nature, but rather formed by a "speculative set of intentions" (Lyle & Cushion, 2017, p233) that have not been tested in the complex reality of coaching. This is further reinforced in research, whereby articles simply describe a coach's self-referenced perceptions of their Coaching Philosophy (Cushion & Partington, 2016). The numerous goals, external pressures, conflicts and moral compromises present within the coaching process are often ignored or unchallenged when writing philosophies. This causes a superficial adoption of stated values that are more reflective of politically correct value statements than a coach's actual practice (Cassidy et al, 2004). Coaching Philosophies, therefore, often bear little resemblance to actual coaching practice (Garringer, 1989; Lyle, 2002; Collins et al, 2011; Martens, 2012) with common inconsistencies caused by inappropriate behaviour, communication, playing time and an emphasis on winning (McCallister et al, 2000), not least due to the external influence of organisations, colleagues and parents on actual behaviour (Sproule, 2015). Such influences are more immediately impactful and tangible

for coaches (Kretchmar, 1994), meaning that philosophic statements are difficult to maintain and apply (Lyle, 1999).

The field is confused further by coaches, academics and the media who conflate Coaching Philosophy with technical or tactical philosophies and game strategies (Jenny, 2013). Such beliefs about training or performance do little to explain how a coach's core values guide their behaviour (Lyle, 2002). It is clear that the topic of Coaching Philosophy is one that struggles for consistency or agreement, both in theory and in practice, so this study aims to provide greater understanding as to how one's Coaching Philosophy is understood by coaches and applied within their practice.

**The formation and development of Coaching Philosophies**

Little is known about how exactly Coaching Philosophies are formed (Collins et al, 2011; Nash et al, 2008). Whilst values and beliefs are highlighted, we are not any further forward in understanding how values change over time (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Past personal experience is seen as key in the forming of a Coaching Philosophy (Hogg, 1995), particularly in combination with a personal belief system that is created early in life (O'Bryant et al, 2000). Philosophies are therefore based on dynamic beliefs formed through participation in sport as both a player and a coach, educational background and other life experiences (O'Sullivan, 2005). The influence of coaches during one's time as an athlete cannot be overstated (Kidman, 2005) in providing an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p 61), which informs future coaching beliefs and practice. Research in education found that a teacher's philosophic judgements were often made prior to their entry into teaching itself (O'Bryant et al, 2000). Teacher belief systems have repeatedly been shown to influence their practice, so it would be reasonable to assume that similar is true for coaches (Cothran et al, 2005). Therefore, this study hopes to further explore the experiences and reflections that cause coaches to create and develop their Coaching Philosophy.

## Method

It is worth noting that this research was undertaken from an Interpretivist perspective as it tries to uncover the meaning that individuals ascribe to an event (Mallett & Tinning, 2014). This perspective is increasingly used to underpin inquiry in sports coaching because it better allows researches to consider how coaches understand and respond to the complexity of their coaching context (Potrac, Jones & Nelson, 2014). Such an approach typically relies on qualitative data such as interviews (Mallett & Tinning, 2014).

*Participants*

Seven UK-based sports coaches volunteered to take part in the study. All the coaches were male, aged between 21 and 48 (M= 30.4, S= 8.6). The coaches worked in a variety of domains, though none worked at the elite level of their professional sport. They had between 4 and 14 years of coaching experience (M= 7.3, S= 3.8). The group was made up of two full-time rugby coaches, three teachers specialising in rugby, one multi-sport coach and one triathlon coach.

*Procedure*

Prior to commencing the study, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Stirling. Seventeen potential participants were identified and contacted via email to explain the aims of the study with seven able to proceed. They were sent a formal 'Information Pack' which further explained the study and assured them anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were required to send back their consent form to advance. Convenient times and locations were organised to conduct the interviews, which lasted between 30-45 minutes. The participant coaches were given a code for the interview and analysis process (eg. C1).

*Interviews*

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews as this approach lends itself to research related to human behaviour (Denzin, 1989) and when studying phenomena that is too hard to convey with quantitative methods (Roberts, 2010). This has seen interviews often utilised in sports coaching research. It must be acknowledged that this method comes with limitations, including the potential differential between participant explanations and actions (Seale, 1998). However, this method was still selected as the exploratory nature of personal Coaching Philosophy necessitates a qualitative approach (Jenny, 2013), allowing interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002) and so providing a rich insight into their perspective (Purdy, 2014). An interview guide was produced in line with Hill et al (2003) utilising primary questions, secondary questions and probes related to existing research and the study's aims and objectives. This guide was used to ensure all participants were asked the same set of major questions (Gould et al, 1990), whilst also providing the freedom to elaborate further on certain topics as they arose (Patton, 2002). Pilot interviews ensured the clarity and suitability of the interview guide, with changes made where required. All interviews began with informal conversation so as to put the participant at ease (Fontana & Frey, 1995). The interviews were recorded, because this is the standard method of capturing interview data (Cresswell, 2007) and allows researchers to review and re-listen to dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), then transcribed verbatim and returned to the participants for validation so as to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

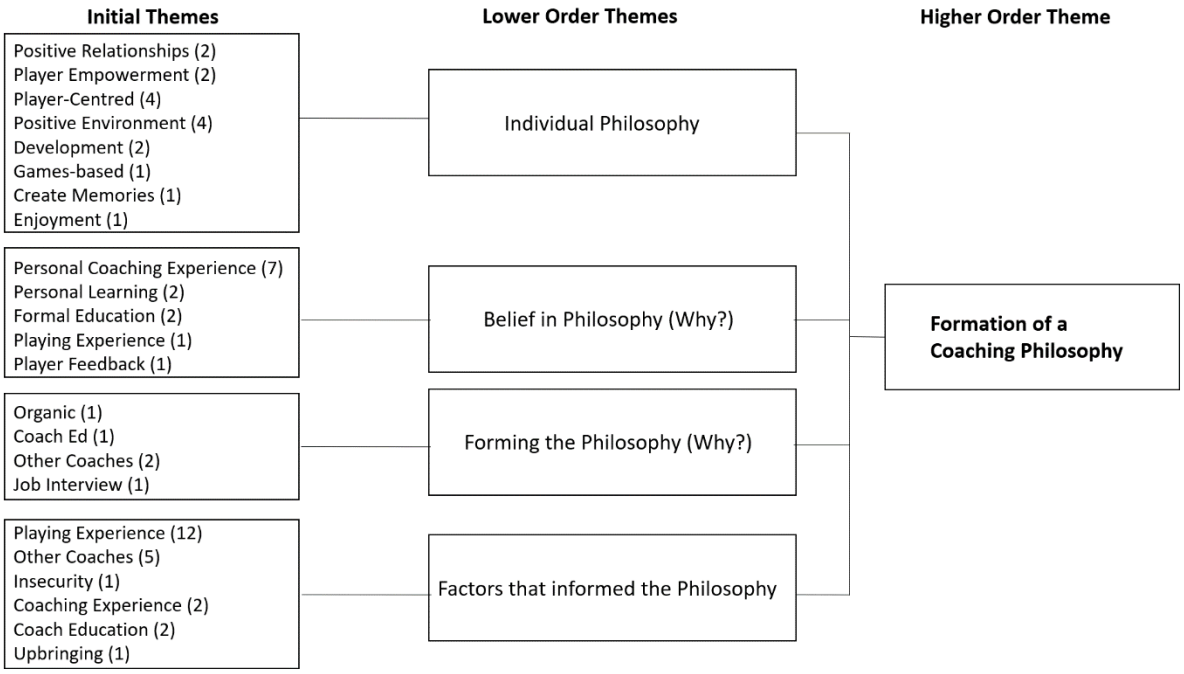
*Data Analysis*

The transcripts were read multiple times so as to increase familiarity with the content to be analysed. A thematic analysis was undertaken so as to organise and describe the data set in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process of open and then axial coding allows researchers to make connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 2007) and determine which elements of the data are the most, or least, important (Taylor, 2014). This coding helps to give "coherence to the emerging analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p60).

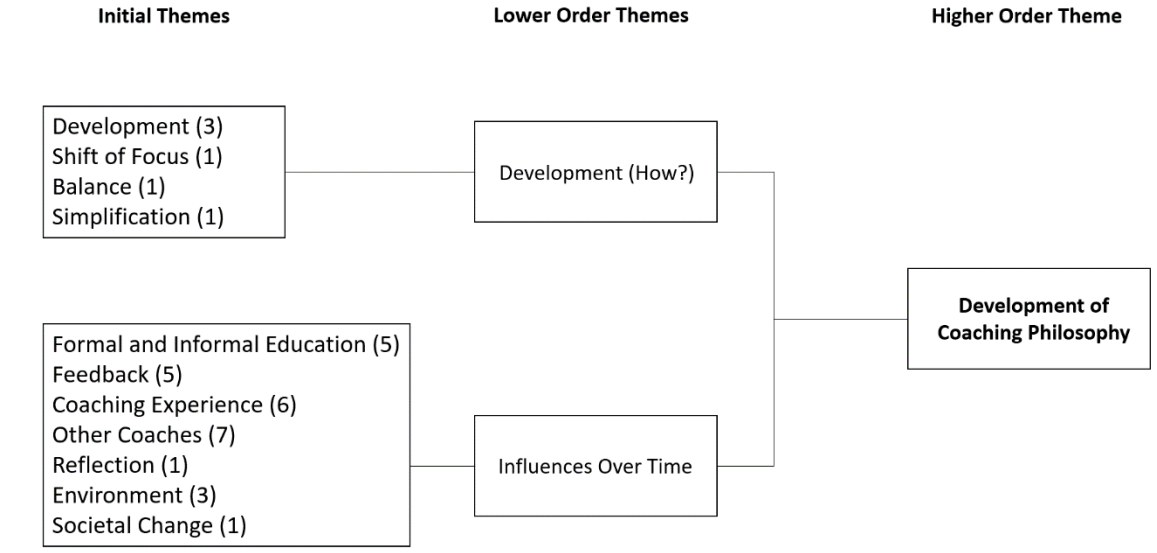
Preliminary themes were developed, analysed and organised into groups. This process resulted in establishing the higher-order themes.

## Results

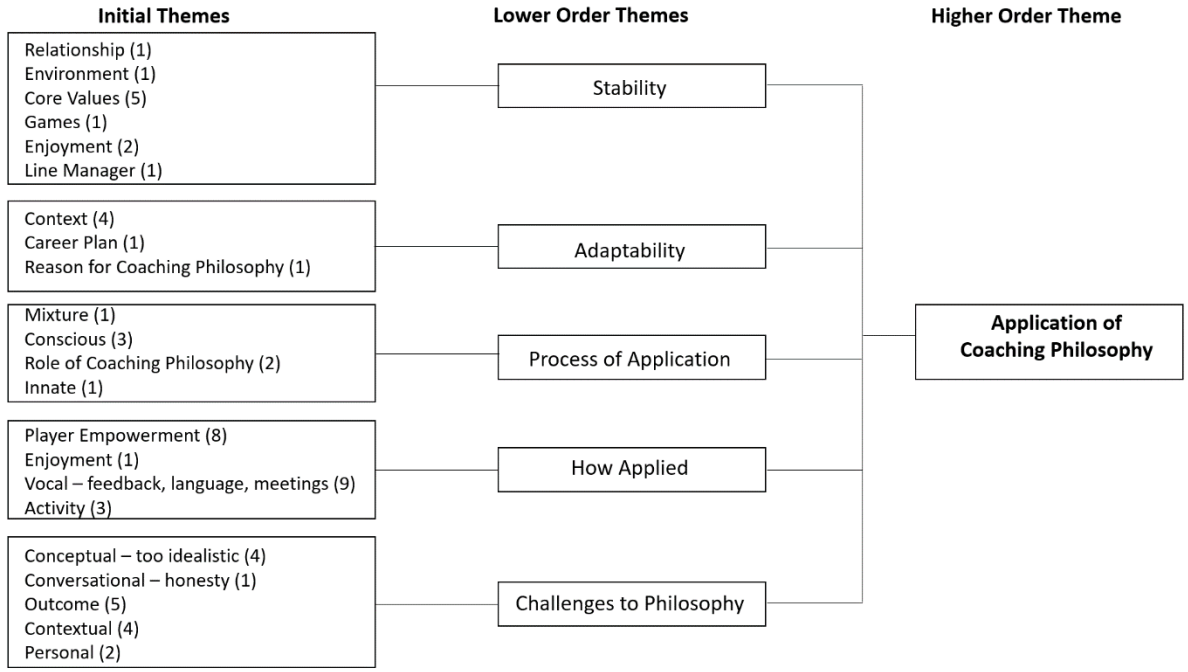
In accordance with the study, the discussions produced three higher order themes: Formation of a Coaching Philosophy, Development of a Coaching Philosophy, and Application of a Coaching Philosophy. These themes consisted of a total of eleven lower order themes, made from fifty-six raw data units. These are portrayed in Figures 1, 2 and 3. The total number of responses across all coaches that fit with each initial theme is represented in brackets. In the following section, each higher order theme is described with the lower order themes addressed in further detail.




(Figure 1)




(Figure 2)




(Figure 3)

## Formation of a Coaching Philosophy

All of the coaches interviewed were able to express their Coaching Philosophy. At times this lacked a fluid articulation, however coaches predominantly credited experience with validating why their Philosophy works. It was found that there is usually a trigger

that encourages coaches to form a Philosophy and that personal playing experience is vital in understanding how and why their Philosophy takes a certain form. This section will present four lower order themes that explain what the Individual Philosophy is, why the coaches believe in their Philosophy, why they formed it in the first place, and what factors informed this formation.

*Individual Philosophy*

As well as addressing the key features of the Philosophies presented, it is important to note the differing ways that the participants responded to the question. Five of the coaches were quickly able to articulate their philosophy, even if vaguely at times, in fairly short and succinct terms with a focus on enjoyment (C6) and the use of a games-based approach (C4). However, C2 conceded, "if you ask me off the top of my head word for word what my coaching philosophy is at any point, I probably wouldn't remember it" whilst C7 differentiated between the use of a short, conversational philosophy and a more extended, written philosophy depending on the circumstances and requirements. In a similar way, C4 wanted to refer to his written Philosophy to assist in answering the question, but was eventually unable to find it.

The most common aspects to the Philosophies were commitments to being player-centred and providing a positive environment. Furthermore, a desire to establish positive relationships, empower the players, focus on developmental factors through a games-based approach, creating memories and enjoyment were all referenced. These values represent a holistic view of coaching with a focus on placing the athlete's needs at the heart of the coaching process, with the coach's role to facilitate a positive and productive environment. C2 is open about this with the athletes, explaining that he makes it clear "that this isn't about me".

*Belief in Philosophy (Why?)*

The coaches believed in their philosophies in large part because they had coaching experience in which they perceived the philosophy to 'work', especially in relation to how they believed their sport should be coached or played. C5 commented that the

individualised focus of his philosophy worked in contrast to common bad practice within the sport, explaining “I think sometimes in rugby…there is a tendency to homogenise players and fit them into a model”. The coaching experience of C7 informed his view that an “open, positive environment allows people to be themselves and…allows them to be at their best”. In addition to coaching experience, both personal informal learning and formal education were highlighted, with C3 explaining how his degree made a big impression on him, where one lecturer “made this really…convincing case about kids’ motivation to play sport”. C6 also explained how player feedback indicated that his Coaching Philosophy was providing a positive cultural change for his players, whilst C3 believes in his philosophy by comparing it to his own interactions with coaches when he was a player. The latter point seems a personal and immeasurable justification for his philosophy, yet it provides a valuable starting point as to the importance of playing history and experience in considering the factors that informed Coaching Philosophies, which will be addressed later.

*Forming the Philosophy (Why?)*

Only one of the coaches started writing down a philosophy organically, “I gradually noted things down and moulded it as time has gone on” (C2). The other coaches experienced a trigger of some kind, exposing them to the idea and value of having a Coaching Philosophy. These triggers came from Coach Education, colleagues and other coaches, whilst C7 admitted that he first heard of the concept when he was asked to detail his philosophy during a job interview.

The experience of doing so seemed more complex than participants had expected. Four of the coaches explained that the process was hard to pin down in a meaningful way, explaining “trying to find a way of getting those values and phrases into a cohesive phrase as a philosophy is what I found quite challenging” (C5) and that it was tough to avoid “just a load of words on a PowerPoint that didn’t mean anything” (C3).

*Factors that Informed the Philosophy*

Playing experience was, by far, one of the most important factors that fed into the formation of a Coaching Philosophy. Six of the coaches credited their personal playing experience, and the coaches they had, as framing how they believed coaching should look and feel for players. Their personal enjoyment was crucial, detailing "I was always told what we're going to do and it's not always fun" (C1). Interestingly, even the perceived technical ability of the coaches wasn't enough if the players didn't feel empowered and challenged. In the case of C5, playing international youth rugby with high quality coaches left him feeling constrained rather than proud, saying "my skills weren't really allowed to show and I was always trying to be coached to a set model that they wanted". C6 had a similar experience of representative sport and credits his Coaching Philosophy as coming "from my own experience and a desire to change other people's experiences of the same situation". This desire to provide a better experience than they had was prevalent among all of the coaches.

Colleagues and other coaches also played a key role, whereby the participants were able to see peers in action and grasp what was working and why. This may be both negative, "I don't want to be that guy" (C2) or positive, considering "good coaches I've worked with, how did they go about it and why did they do what they do?" (C3). To a lesser extent, formal coach education was credited, as was coaching experience and the ability to see and understand "things that had worked" (C2). It may be of interest that only one coach mentioned their upbringing (C7) and one coach mentioned his insecurity that his lack of playing experience at the top level meant he had to find a different way to engage, challenge and relate to top players (C1).

**Development of a Coaching Philosophy**

The participants were quick to acknowledge that their Coaching Philosophy had developed and felt that it would continue to change over time. Working with or observing other coaches, coaching experience and feedback were influential in the

evolution of Coaching Philosophies. This section will address how they felt it had changed and what influences had been crucial to said change.

*Development (How?)*

C6 espoused that it is important for one's philosophy to change "as you get better, as you learn more, understand more, you take your experiences and you take your learning from elsewhere". This general course of development was felt by all coaches. When pushed as to how exactly their philosophy had changed, four of the coaches were able to detail how. C5 has shifted focus from the outcome to the process and "simplified it right down", whilst C2 believes his is now more "balanced" by bringing the athlete into greater consideration. It also appears that the coaches adopted a more holistic approach, with C5 stating that his Philosophy became "less outcome focused, but focusing on the experience they have around my coaching…how did they feel about the journey".

*Influences Over Time*

There were four key influences that encouraged coaches to adapt their philosophy over time: Other Coaches, Coaching Experience, Formal/Informal Education and Feedback. C4 actively tries to get outside of his own environment "to go and see other things, see what other coaches do" and C6 found this equally beneficial "looking at people like Russell Earnshaw and that Kiwi approach where players are allowed to do things a bit more unorthodox" in developing his philosophy. C2 credits experience as being the most valuable influence for him whilst C6 has seen his Philosophy and practice change through experience, too, and "understanding how simple it has to be". The ability to learn from others and personal experience is supplemented by education, whether eye-opening learning at university (C1) or "something I read or see online" (C7). Seeing, learning and trying new ideas then opens coaches up to receive feedback from peers and players alike, which provides a developmental opportunity, even if the feedback is initially unpleasant. C1 explains that honest feedback from his boss was tough at first, but that "although it's a bit of a knock, it's important to learn isn't it, go away review it,

reflect, come back and now I agree with him in the end". It is important to acknowledge that both C1 and C2 believed that they would have been unlikely to change their philosophy were it not for the external feedback that they received.

Less common influences were also found. C5 noted that "my philosophy has changed predominantly when I've moved to a new environment and the needs of the group has changed". The same coach also cited societal change as something that is impacting his philosophy currently and that he thinks will continue to do so in the future, explaining that the current generation "are going into a very different world…their needs are very different".

**Application of Coaching Philosophy**

To gain further understanding regarding the participants' philosophies, it was important to consider how they believe their Coaching Philosophy is applied within their practice. The results indicate that coaches have a clear understanding of the link between their Coaching Philosophy and their actual coaching practice, although there was less understanding as to how and why this link functions in the way that it does. Furthermore, every participant was able to identify challenges that they face, which may occasionally cause their actions to be incongruous with their Philosophy. Lower order themes are highlighted, which focus on whether a Philosophy is stable or adaptable to context, whether it plays a conscious role in their practice, how it is applied, and the challenges present which impact the application of their Philosophy.

*Stable or Adaptable?*

Six of the coaches felt that their philosophy would remain stable regardless of their coaching context. Good relationships (C1), a positive environment (C2 and C7), a games-based approach (C4) and enjoyment (C6) would all remain a high priority regardless. This was expanded upon by other coaches who believed that their Coaching Philosophy wouldn't change because, as a reflection of their core values, it was simply part of who they are, "the core values of it…who I am as a person" (C3), or because putting people at

the heart of their philosophy would apply in any context (C7). C6 also believed that alignment in thinking with his work place superiors would provide stability too.

In contrast, C5 felt strongly that one's Philosophy was indelibly linked to the context they are working in. He explains, "I would say some information I've been given on coaching courses where they'd said your coaching philosophy is stable but your playing philosophy changes, and I would probably argue that that is not the case…my coaching philosophy changes with my environment because the outcomes of that environment and the kids within it are very different". He does, however, clarify that his own Philosophy was therefore adaptable rather than needing wholesale change. C1 contradicts himself slightly, conceding that some elements of his philosophy would change depending on his context. C7 adds further nuance by referencing the distinction between his verbal and written philosophies, which are slightly different, stating that what he would outwardly put forward depends on "what is being asked and by who". It could be suggested therefore that there is a potential difference not just between one's philosophy and one's practice, but also between a philosophy as believed internally and as offered externally.

*Conscious or Natural?*

To gain a deeper understanding into how their philosophies were realised in a practical sense, it was important to consider whether this transfer was a conscious or subconscious/natural process. C1 stated that it was "probably a bit of both" in that he was naturally an open coach, but that he had to choose the right moment to consciously use questioning, which is part of his philosophy. C2, C4 and C6 felt that living their philosophy within their coaching was very much a conscious process, whether part of planning sessions or during the session itself. In contrast, C5 was the only participant who believes that applying his Coaching Philosophy came naturally because it was an innate part of who he is as a person, meaning it would automatically impact his decision making and review processes without him realising.

*How Applied*

All of the coaches were able to express ways in which they felt their Coaching Philosophy shone through within their practical coaching. The most common response centred around the manner in which they communicated with their players, whether by encouraging feedback, having one-to-one meetings, their choice of language when coaching or simply through informal conversations. C1 believes these interactions with players were crucial to forming a good relationship, explaining "taking moments during sessions, before sessions, after sessions, to ask questions, ask how they are and get to learn about their life a little bit" with C7 echoing a similar sentiment, "coaching isn't just when you are on the pitch…it's every interaction with the player". The type of language used is critical for the participants, whether focusing on the process over the outcome or allowing players to make mistakes and be fearless. C5 expands on this, "we would talk a little bit less about values and more about behaviours" to encourage players to take the school's values and work out what behaviour makes that value relevant to them personally.

Another common response from the participants was actively trying to empower their players by forming joint goals (C1), letting them lead their own warm up (C3) or encouraging them to explore and be creative (C6). This player empowerment includes a focus on self-awareness and players taking an active role in their development. On this note, C5 explained how powerful it was when asking players to consider what they would want people to say about them at their 21st Birthday celebration. Coaches also referenced the use of games and constraints to foster enjoyment and creativity as a way of explaining their philosophy.

*Challenges to Philosophy*

Every coach was able to recall occasions when they felt their philosophy was being challenged or when their behaviour did not align with their stated philosophy. These were grouped as being Conceptual, Outcome, Conversational, Contextual or Personal/Internally based. The most common response revolved around the importance

of the competitive outcome changing their behaviour such that it no longer reflected their philosophy. This was particularly felt by C3 during big Cup games where “there is an expectation and some pressure to win from kids, parents, staff and trying to make sure that all the kids get…fair opportunities to play” becomes tough. One’s perception of said others is also important, as referenced by both C1 and C6, the latter stating that “sometimes it feels like…people are watching…watching my style and I feel like people are going to be critical about what you’re doing”. Both C3 and C5 described such situations as a “conflict” between adhering to their Philosophy versus winning the match or adhering to expectations. C6 vividly recalls “a game where we lost and I was, honestly, getting quite pissed off with what was going on…[even though] our biggest thing is development over winning and winning doesn’t matter…the kids probably didn’t see me…but in my own head I thought ‘next time I need to make sure I keep conscious of the fact mistakes are going to happen, we’re encouraging mistakes therefore we have to allow that’ “.

Three coaches found that their Philosophy had, at times, been almost too idealistic to work effectively consistently. C1 realised that his philosophy had ended up neglecting areas of the game, the “nitty gritty”, and so wasn’t effectively preparing his players. This had some overlap with contextual challenges whereby the Philosophy didn’t prepare players to excel in all conditions, with C6 admitting that was “probably where I was challenged – on a nice dry day it works, the kids are confident but the [weather] conditions can be a challenge”. This caused both coaches to re-think their philosophy and, by extension, their practice.

C2 also found conversational and interactional challenges based around the importance of honesty in his Philosophy. The use of white lies to enhance or maintain a player’s confidence have caused him issues, even if he can ultimately justify it, explaining “I may still feel slightly uncomfortable about doing it but overall I think it’s the right strategy to do at that time”. Personal, internal processes were also at play to drive behaviour that was at odds with their philosophies. C5 conceded his “selfish” drive to have a noticeable impact on his new team by introducing an attack structure – “I immediately limited each individual’s ability to act outside their role. Because I did that they weren’t necessarily

able to maximise their own development". C4 found that filming his session caused nerves which impacted his coaching and enactment of his philosophy, "I went away from my normal philosophy because I was nervous, I think nerves play a big part in terms of that, in terms of if you're nervous you go back to what you're comfortable with". It is interesting here that he implies his philosophy is, in some form, not something that drives his behaviour, but rather an idealised philosophy that he tries to live up to.

## Discussion

The aim for this study was to gain greater understanding regarding the formation, development and application of one's Coaching Philosophy. The results of this study particularly provide insight into the process of formation that is lacking in existing literature, that Coaching Philosophy exists as the result of some form of trigger and is comprised of an idealised balance of what coaches believe in, largely resulting from personal playing and coaching experience. This is particularly true of coach recollections of how the sporting environment felt for them when they were a player, a crucial point that adds to our understanding of how they remember and interpret experience to inform their Philosophy. The study makes it clear that one's Philosophy is constantly evolving alongside one's experience and impacted by interaction with players, coaches and stakeholders. Finally, for the participants of this study, it was clear that one's Philosophy cannot override all contextual challenges and that coaches are constantly having to compromise between their Philosophy and their perception of the social reality, demands and pressure of the situation. These findings contribute to the existing research.

*Formation*

Whilst this study provides insight into the formation of one's Coaching Philosophy that is lacking elsewhere, in many cases it supports some of the assumptions about the process that are present in literature. Firstly, there is no existing research that tackles why coaches form a Philosophy in the first place. The results here suggest that, in the majority of cases, there is a trigger that causes the process to begin. Coach Education, informal learning and discussion with other coaches has been put forward here, though further research is required. This is an interesting element of the topic because there is an implication that most coaches are 'doing' coaching before they are aware of the notion of Coaching Philosophy. It would be intriguing to explore how the process of forming a Coaching Philosophy changes a coach's behaviour, or whether the Philosophy

is merely an idealised reflection of what they already do. This latter point could lead to the understanding that Coaching Philosophies are often a declaration about an aspect of coaching practice (Cassidy et al, 2004). This would appear to be supported within this study, whereby the coaches were quick to proclaim clear values that they believed in, however in doing so their Philosophy lacked nuance as to when that value was used and why. This is clear within C2's response, which lacks an explanation of what "success" actually is whilst the practicality and appropriateness of "honest" communication can also be questioned. Such statements of intent are too vague and too far removed from coaching reality to have much effect (Cassidy et al, 2004). Even as such Philosophies provide complications, all coaches demonstrated a Philosophy that was grounded in their practice and were able to establish a clear link between the two. This will be discussed in more detail later, however it is important here because the coaches were quick to justify their Philosophies because they had seen it work. That their experience perpetuated their belief in their Philosophy supports Lyle and Cushion's (2017) proposition that coaches rely on anecdotal accounts of 'what works'. Finally, it was not surprising to find that the formation of one's Coaching Philosophy was largely impacted by their personal playing experience. The role of experience was largely assumed in literature (eg. Hogg, 1995), however the participants brought this to life with their ability to explain how their coaches behaved and, most importantly, how this made them feel as players. It is widely reported that coaches are heavily influenced by their personal experiences of sport (Potrac et al, 2000; Salmela et al, 1993; Sage, 1989) and such vivid experiences were clearly impactful in providing the participants with an idea of how they felt coaching should be, something they endeavour to live up to as coaches themselves. This has implications, however, for coaching practice as such experiences could lead young coaches to uncritically adopt the behaviours of those they played under or of more experienced coaches that they encounter early in their career. In this way, Lyle and Cushion's explanation of the conflation between Philosophies and Ideologies becomes relevant as coaches' beliefs and justifications of existing and ongoing practice have not been subject to rational reconsideration (2017).

*Development of Coaching Philosophy*

There seemed to be a clear correlation between coaches amending, adapting and developing their Coaching Philosophy in line with their ongoing learning and experience as a coach. When first formalising their Philosophy, coaches are influenced not just by their experiences as a player but also the context current to the creation of the Philosophy. In this way, coaches can be influenced by the beliefs and practices of the organisation they work within, their current level of knowledge and beliefs, as well as the perceived relevance of the Coaching Philosophy to their practice (Fraser-Thomas et al, 2008; Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). In addition to their coaching context, their ongoing learning as a coach also seems to impact upon the development of their Coaching Philosophy. There could be a number of reasons for this. Primarily, when forming a Coaching Philosophy, it can be difficult to comprehend that it will need to continually adapt and be flexible enough to mould to different contexts (Cassidy et al, 2004). However, with greater experience coaches are more likely to re-examine their practice and embrace new approaches (Butler, 2005), which would require them to adjust their Philosophy too. Greater experience seems to increase coach awareness regarding the holistic nature of coaching. This was evidenced in some of the participants' responses as presented in the results. As shown in this study, coach learning is heavily reliant on learning on the job and from watching more experienced coaches (Griffey & Housner, 1991) with such informal learning situations a well-established learning pathway for coaches (Cushion & Nelson, 2013). This is problematic as there remains an assumption that experience is always a reliable source of authentic knowledge (Lyle & Cushion, 2017), and without reflection coaches uncritically accrue experience without it meaningfully impacting on their practice (Cushion et al, 2010; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). Yet, for the coaches in this study it appears, albeit a self-referenced perception, that their learning over time has impacted both their Coaching Philosophy and their practice, though it is unclear how these factors interact with each other.

*Application*

It has been asserted that coaches often do not connect their Philosophical beliefs with their tangible coaching approach (Nash & Sproule, 2009), however this study found the opposite. The coaches found it quite easy to provide and explain practical examples of how their Philosophy is lived out in their practice, whether through their use of language, how they interacted with or sought to empower their players and more. It would be naïve, however, to expect this to tell the whole story and the participants' recollections of times when their Philosophy has been challenged are further evidence of the difficult, problematic and troublesome environment of coaching (Jones, 2006). At times, in the case of C1, such challenges will lead to a slight tweak or re-framing of their Philosophy, whilst others seem to accept the challenges as simply part of the job, unwittingly rendering their Philosophy a simplified, sanitised list of statements reflecting how they perceive they are supposed, or how they want, to act (Cassidy et al, 2004). It could be argued that this is in part because coaching can never be objective enough to allow their Philosophy to drive behaviour (Lyle, 1999). Whilst coach values and ideals develop early and remain prominent, over time they are susceptible to the influence of networks and forces, which become ever more complex and compelling (Green, 2002). Coaches therefore face a wide range of external factors, which pressure coaches to act in ways that are incongruous with their Philosophy (Stewart, 1993). For example, the feeling of being watched, and judged, by others was identified in the results.

Such results clash with much of the current understanding of Coaching Philosophy, whereby it is stated to underpin everything that a coach does (Lyle & Cushion, 2017), that it informs coaching (Cassidy et al, 2009) and that it is central to understanding coaching behaviour (Cassidy et al, 2009; Jenkins, 2010; Jones et al, 2004). For the coaches in this study, their Coaching Philosophy is a reflection of the elements of coaching and self that they hold dear, yet they do not allow themselves to be bound by their Philosophy as they attempt to manage the intricate, multi-faceted and wide ranging social system of coaching (Jones et al, 2004; Jones & Wallace, 2005). One's Coaching Philosophy can clearly explain some of their behaviour, some of the time - the coaches in this study are quick to draw such a link, however the reality of coaching

requires constant compromise so as to deal with external pressures. In this way, it has been found that top-level coaches are able to manage the dilemmas between Philosophy and practice in that they are realistic and practical about their goals while retaining a strong personal set of values and standards (Lyle, 2002). However, what remains unclear from this study and wider research is how and why one's Philosophy impacts their behaviour, especially to a greater or lesser degree in different circumstances and when faced with varying challenges.

## Application to Coaching Practice

On a personal level, the study has led me to critically reflect on my coaching knowledge, practice and what drives my coaching behaviour, particularly looking through the lens of Coaching Philosophy. In considering my Philosophy, it became clear that it was formed around key preferences and ideas that were very similar to those of the participants, and that are promulgated within coaching circles currently. I believe in the value of these ideas and can clearly see that they impact my practice, yet it would be hard to deny that the overall viewpoint is ideological rather than philosophical in nature. Therefore, many coaches are putting forward Philosophies that are presented as a "logical chain of propositions" (Jones et al, 2014, p3). In isolation this may not be an entirely bad thing as it can provide a useful signpost for focus and reflection, however it is problematic because it neglects the social and cultural influence on one's subjectivity. This means that Coach Philosophies are a reflection of their lived experience, rather than the abstract and rational conceptualisations that are necessary for true Philosophical enquiry (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). That some participants mentioned different espoused Philosophies according to verbal or written explanation, or according to who was asking, is evidence for the fact that they are likely to be simplified statements of interpretation, rather than the cause of their thoughts and actions (Lyle & Cushion, 2017).

It may seem to be an issue of semantics, yet the existing approach to Coaching Philosophy limits the potential for myself and other coaches to truly deconstruct who we are and the social environment within which we work (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). This is particularly relevant for many in terms of formal Coach Education, whereby the UKCC Level 3 for Rugby requires a statement of Coaching Philosophy as part of the application process to the course. It is hard to imagine that the gate-keepers don't have preconceived ideas about what they want to see, which has a number of consequences. It can either lead coaches to genuinely buy-in to favoured ideas at the expense of others in an uncritical manner, or force them to align publicly with ideas that fit these unchallenged beliefs, regardless of their true outlook. It could be beneficial for Coach

Education to address the topic on-course, rather than during their application process, so the learning experience can try to be critically transformative (Thompson & Zeuli, 1999), so as to equip coaches with the ability to engage in meaningful reflection about their beliefs and free them from the shackles of what they believe coaching should look like. This process has given me a greater desire to understand why I coach in the way I do in the hope that I can mediate the impact of historical and cultural expectation in providing the best possible learning environment and experience for those that I coach.

## Conclusion

This study has found that coaches begin to formalise their Coaching Philosophy some way into their coaching career, normally as the result of an external trigger such as a colleague or education. As such, this process can often offer only a surface level of reflection into understanding why they coach in the way that they do, and how their Philosophy will inform their practice going forward. In most cases, personal experience as a player, or the observation of other coaches, is heavily influential in this process so as to form a combination of what felt beneficial as an athlete and what seems to work as a coach. Rather than driving their behaviours and actions, Coaching Philosophy seems to operate as a personal grounding post or reminder and serves as statement to others as to what one's coaching looks like. The coaches in this study were quick and eloquent in explaining how their Coaching Philosophy is evident within their practice, yet equally able to explain occasions where the ever-changing coaching environment causes a conflict with their values which must be managed. Further research is required into how coaches manage this conflict, considering how and why pressures reach a tipping point to force or enable a coach to act in a way that is incongruent with their Coaching Philosophy.

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