Team Building Interpersonal Relationships in Gaelic Games

By

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to illuminate the process of team building interpersonal relationships in the amateur competitive sports of Gaelic Games. Interpersonal relationships are a key influencer in all group types while in sports environments they have been shown to be both a performance influencer and success factor. Inspite of these, attention to date is sparse in sport psychology, with literature dominated by a cohesion focus. In order to address these gaps Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature on a range of team building modalities influencing interpersonal relationship development. It highlights the paucity of studies which have been carried out with a focus on interpersonal relationship development and the gap in the literature surrounding season long studies, multiple interventions and variety of sports team investigated. In order to address these gaps, Chapter 3 presents an action research study, whereby a range of acute and chronic interventions were undertaken with a competitive, elite team over the course of a full season and were monitored by both qualitative and quantitative methods. Results overall demonstrated that a combination of acute and chronic interventions and informal social opportunities were effective in developing interpersonal relationships to a satisfactory, functional level, in addition to incidental factors. Mixed methods were also shown to provide a comprehensive means of monitoring the team throughout the year. Irrespective of the popularity of Gaelic Games and increasing interests amongst many teams, particularly at the elite level, of implementing aspects of Sport Science for performance enhancement, research on the psychological preparation of GAA teams is sparse. Chapter 4 and 5 sought to illuminate the status quo in relation to team building methods for developing interpersonal relationships employed in Gaelic Games at both the elite intercounty and club level. Specifically Chapter 4 qualitatively investigated intercounty GAA coaches definition of team building via semi-structured interviews with experienced coaches. It also revealed current practices amongst intercounty coaches for interpersonal relationship development. The associated areas of team communications, conflict management and socialisation were also explored. Results showed that intercounty coaches understand team building as multifactorial including environmental knowledge development, cohesion, maturity, communications, performance efforts and the process based aspects. Intercounty coaches employ a range of both acute and chronic interventions to develop their teams. Chapter 5 qualitatively investigated club level GAA

coaches definition of teambuilding via semi-structured interviews with experienced coaches. The associated areas of team communications, conflict management and socialisation were also explored. Results showed that club coaches understand team building as cohesion, process aspects and the outcomes of improved playing attributes and mentality. It also revealed current practices amongst club coaches for interpersonal relationship development, featuring a range of both acute and chronic methods. Chapter 6 presents a range of ensuing recommendations relevant to a range of stakeholders.

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Abbreviations

ATG-S	Attraction To Group-Social
ATG-T	Attraction To Group-Task
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GEQ	Group Environment Questionnaire
GI-S	Group Integration-Social
GI-T	Group Integration-Task
NGB	National Governing Body
PDMS	Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing
SIQS	Social Identity Questionnaire for Sport

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

"Interpersonal relationships are a critical factor in every kind of group….Therefore, asking questions about the importance and effect of interpersonal relationships in sports groups is logical" (Sauer, 2017). An "interpersonal relationship" has been defined as a "strong bond between two or more people (Juneja, 2017), while Reich and Hershcovis (2011) designate it as "an individual's subjective experience of repeated interaction or connection with another individual". Correspondingly according to Juneja (2017) a number of features must present, specifically a set of shared goals and objectives, some similar interests, background and commonality of thinking; reciprocal respect of views, opinions; the attachment should be based on a healthful agenda and ultimately there must be a sense of trust and transparency. Several types of interpersonal relationship exist a number of which may be operating in the sports team environment. Predominantly the nature of this relationship will be of the 'professional' kind akin to those of the organisational environment, additionally 'friendship' may exist although not necessarily and in some cases a 'familial' relationship may be simultaneously present.

Much of the literature on the subject to date emanates from the organisational environment, which is considered to be somewhat, though not wholly transferable to the sports team settings. Much of that coverage has focused on documenting the gamut of effects of both positive and negative interpersonal relationships in such environments. Reich and Hershcovis (2011) summarising the effects of negative interpersonal relationships in organisational environments including behaviours such as aggression, incivility and social exclusion, refer to high levels of job dissatisfaction, negative mental health outcomes, deterioration of physical health and intent to leave. In contrast positive

interpersonal relationships were shown to be related to a range of better work-related and individual effects including personal fulfilment and satisfying the 'need to belong' (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008), social purpose (Jahoda, 1982), enhanced teamwork, cooperation and communication (Mainiero, 1989). Indeed a range of researchers have attested to outcomes such as higher organisational commitment and lower intention to leave, team cohesion, increased job involvement, performance and professional satisfaction (Feeley et al, 2008; Berman et al, 2002; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995; Winstead et al, 1995). Correspondingly where employees have shown high levels of identification with their organisation superior levels of compliance, motivation, cohesion and decreases in conflict have featured (Kramer, 1991). By way of explanation, Kostova & Roth (2003) explored the influencing mechanism, concluding that positive interpersonal relationships promote individual behaviours increasing both team efficiency and team efficacy which thereby result in augmented team performance.

Sports experiences, according to Beaumeister & Leary (1995) represent a microcosm of human existence on a broader level, where individual wellbeing and significantly also individual performance, is dependent upon both the need to belong and engage in attachments of an interpersonal nature. Jowett (2005) concurs on the importance of relationship issues to athlete wellbeing. However, the volume and breadth of coverage of topics relating to interpersonal relationships in the sports psychology literature appears to be somewhat disproportionate to the recognised importance. Several researchers in the field have noted that interpersonal team aspects are a recognised performance influencer and success factor yet have been the subject of relatively sparse coverage (Jowett & Wylleman, 2006; Smith, 2003; Wylleman, 2000). Jowett (2005), a prominent contemporary researcher in the field of relationships in sports settings, observed that relationships don't reside within the individual but are the product of ongoing interactions

between at least two parties, as a consequence sport psychology research must address intra-team relationships and interactions in team sports.

Irrespective of recognition that interpersonal factors in sports teams can be both complex and pivotal and as such have been the subject of a volume of research thus far, it is accepted that gaps remain. The broad area of 'team building' has received consistent attention, as a range of intervention methods have been subject to testing albeit with limitations. Within this, to date a considerable focus has been on illuminating a range of factors surrounding team cohesion (Carron et al, 1985; Widmeyer & Williams, 1991; Carron et al, 2002; Sabin & Marcel, 2014). Further critique of these topics will be presented in Chapter 2. From the perspective of the applied practitioner working in the team environment and often tasked with influencing interpersonal factors in the team environment, it has been recognised that as of yet there is an incomplete understanding of intra-team relationship dynamics particularly from a social perspective (Dizdari & Seiler, 2020). Prior to this it was acknowledged that applied practitioners and researchers operating in the group environment face the challenge of working from a sparse base of literature relating to team measures and procedures (Kleinert et al, 2012). Indeed there has been acknowledgements at various time points that a disproportion exists between the importance of and development of interpersonal relationships issues in sports versus the attention being afforded to them (Iso-Ahola, 1995), the low numbers of journal publications on relationship issues (Vealey, 1993) and the development of psychometric tools available to practitioners (Ostrow, 1996) and the absence of presentations on "interpersonal relationships" at congresses.

Specifically in relation to this thesis, a literature search carried out to assess the state of attention to interpersonal relationship topics related to Gaelic Games teams of any level, proved negative. As an amateur competitive team sport operating with both elite and sub-

elite levels it was considered that investigating this area in this environment would lead to the generation of a body of accessible and transferable knowledge for coaches and practitioners working in an array of non-professional team sports.

1.2 The Gaelic Athletic Association

Gaelic Games, the product of the Gaelic Athletic Association are the indigenous sports of Ireland, traditionally designated with the aim of strengthening the national identity and are composed of Gaelic Football, Hurling, Camogie, Rounders and Handball. They are fast paced, interactive sports, predominantly of the team variety with the exception of handball. They are also of a wholly amateur ethos, with both elite and non-elite levels across intercounty, club and collegiate divisions. 2200 clubs are currently registered on the island of Ireland alone, with some additional clubs operating abroad, a quantity which is testament to the maintenance of the parochial roots of the games. 82,300 ticket holders fill Croke Park on each of the Hurling and Gaelic Football All-Ireland Final days and approximately one million viewers nationally watched each of those games on television in recent years.

By way of structural understanding, at the intercounty level counties are based on geographical boundaries and playing rights typically based on early years residence, with limited circumstances acceptable for transfer of county. Intercounty senior squads are comprised of approximately 32-36 players from clubs within the county, to provide 15 starters and 5 substitutes in match play. Counties also field competitive teams at Under20, Minor and in some instances Intermediate levels. Clubs, like counties, are also based on local geographical boundaries and typically have both an adult and juvenile division. Within the adult club, teams can be fielded at Senior, Intermediate, Junior A, Junior B, Under20/21 and Minor level. Akin to the intercounty situation transfers at club level are infrequent and subject to a narrow range of allowable circumstances, typically based on

long term relocation. With the vast majority of players engaging in lifelong relationships with one club and for the elites a single county, identity and a sense of representing and being motivated by performing with 'pride in the club/ county are strong features attacked to involvement in Gaelic Sports.

In terms of team preparation it is fair to say that significant variation exists amongst clubs and counties, in particular the latter. Issues such as attracting managers and coaches and access to sport science support are often a function of reputation, a history of success, success expectations and most often the availability of financial resources. This combination of factors and does serve to increase gap between the successful few and the rest. It is also then the case that without a transfer marketplace as per that of many professional sports, the GAA coach is faced with optimising their team from the available personnel. Many challenges are faced in this process including squad size, time, facilities, expertise and financial limitations, geographical spread amongst others. Clubs who have players involved in intercounty panels see very little of those players until the club championships are due to commence, thereby hampering club team preparations. In light of the range of challenges at both intercounty and club levels, alternative methods of gaining a competitive advantage are often sought.

1.2.1 GAA Competition Structures

Three main intercounty competitions are run in top tier Hurling and Gaelic Football annually. A National League operates from February until April as a standalone secondary competition. The provincial championships commence some weeks after and lead into an All-Ireland championship. Below the top tier competitions a number of lower grade competitions also operate. Intercounty competition structures remain under constant review and are subject to change. Club competition structures vary from county of county, culminating in the awarding of 'County Champions' in Senior, Intermediate, Junior A,

Junior B, Under 20/21. Champions from respective counties thereafter compete in provincial club competitions culminating in a club All-Ireland championship.

1.3 My Background & Current Role

At a personal level this research area was inspired by my experience of working with Gaelic Games teams consistently for in excess of twenty years. Having completed a B.A. in Recreation & Leisure initially my career started with a 'double-jobbing' approach combining full-time work as a Gym Instructor with a part-time GAA coaching role as part of county wide club0school partnership programme. During this time I also undertook a part-time course to train as a Sports Therapist, a qualification which led to my first role in intercounty GAA. I continued to work in the role of Sports Therapist with intercounty teams for four further years, an opportunity which led to considerable dressing room and side-line experience and via success in two All-Ireland championships it also served to 'whet the appetite' for more in kind.

Subsequently I gained a full-time position as a Coaching & Games Development Officer with the GAA. One strand of this role involved tutoring on GAA Coach Education courses. While the prescribed content of these courses focused on the technical and basic tactical elements of coaching the sports, invariably attention during coaching workshops turned to questions, discussion and debates on experiences and issues which would fall under the remit of team building and interpersonal relationships, but for which the course syllabus at that juncture was not equipped. Interesting nevertheless.

I completed my M.A. in Sport Psychology in 2007. Much of my applied work subsequent to the M.A. was of an acute nature; 'fire-fighting' remedial work, a 'relegation specialist' and the provision of 'team building away day' type interventions. The latter were typically booked without any specific aim, as a respite from the rigours of the pitch or with a vague 'team bonding' agenda. While lodging those early jobs in the bank of experience I had

ongoing doubts as to what if any enduring effects would be experienced in terms of team relations or especially transfer to the performance pitch? In 2015 I was offered a position with an intercounty GAA team. This provided an opportunity to increase my involvement via an immersion approach in team sport at intercounty level and to experience and influence team development in a more comprehensive way. I have continued to work in this role at the intercounty level with Minor, Under 20, Under 21 and Senior teams alongside my 'day job' teaching Further Education in Sport, Recreation & Exercise Studies.

1.4 Gaelic Games- The Necessity Of Addressing Interpersonal Relationships

Working in elite Gaelic Games, especially where I'm from involves a heavy focus on winning and a widespread fascination with the intricacies of the team dynamics of units that emerge successful or make headlines for reasons of interpersonal conflict, collective team collapse or managerial unrest. However, that public interest has scarcely been matched by research interests in Gaelic Games, both generally and specifically in terms of sport psychology. In a recently published scoping review Jackman et al (2023) specified the extent of the published literature to date on Gaelic Games with a focus on sport psychology research; with some notable findings. One of the primary recommendations with specific relevance to the work in hand emerged as a response to the identified lack of research on "interpersonal and social phenomena" (p.16) in GAA. It was therefore recommended that work be undertaken to study both group dynamics in teams and team environments. Also notable was the acknowledgement that while research on other team sports could be useful to GAA personnel, they may however present varying degrees of limitations owing to cultural and contextual differences, thereby also bolstering the necessity for sport specific research.

The pervasiveness of the key role that issues centred around interpersonal relationships play in day to day functioning in Gaelic Games is experientially evident and also supported within the limited body of extant research. Specifically, positive interpersonal relationships in clubs can be contributory to retaining players as increasing numbers of clubs report being barely able or unable to field teams due to population influenced tight playing numbers and dropout. In a GAA based study within the juvenile division Sheridan et al (2020) demonstrated that both peer support and friendship were impactful in leading to continued participation. While the aim of this volume of research wasn't based on influencing retention, gaining further insight into the realm of interpersonal relationships in GAA teams may very well indicate whether this is also impactful at adult level.

Gaelic Games at club level are essentially recreational sports opportunities, therefore the potential value of quality interpersonal relationships and social support structures in contributing to the mental health of players cannot be overlooked, nor indeed can the antagonist situation whereby negative interpersonal relationships contribute to the deterioration of player mental health. While the issue of mental health is one of few psychological themes to feature amongst sport psychology research in Gaelic Games, the bulk of the work to date has focused on specifying the mental health challenges experienced by players and quantifying prevalence (Gouttebarge et al., 2016; Sheehan et al., 2018; Hannon and Fitzgerald, 2006). It hasn't yet however been examined from the perspective of team relationships as moderators. The effect of social support in general in the maintenance or bolstering of mental health has been identified for some time now (Hisada, 1987). In team sport terms it hasn't universally been shown to provide mental health benefits. Hagiwara (2017) and Graham et al (2000) both found inconsistencies in the effects, specifically improvements in female athletes but no improvement in their male counterparts. Significantly, rationales for this disparity has been explained to be inferior relational skills in males and fewer supportive relationships. Consequently, it would

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suggest that deliberate attention to developing interpersonal relationships in GAA teams would be a worthwhile endeavour from this perspective additionally. While again such is not the specific aim of this thesis, encompassing the first volume of research on interpersonal relationships in GAA teams may provide some indicators of such value and further impetus for specialised examination.

The intercollegiate GAA environment gives rise to its own particular interpersonal requirements as college clubs aim to convert potentially hundreds of players, from a wide range of clubs and counties nationwide, into a few competitive and sociable playing units and then maintain their involvement for the duration of their college career. Similarly, but with more consequential gravity, the intercounty division seeks to create a fusion of approximately three dozen talented, competitive club rivals into a cohesive, competitive unit and under the pressure and spotlight of a nation of spectators, supporters and media. Irrespective of the team circumstances the commonality in Gaelic Games is that fact that all ply their trade on a part-time basis in an amateur sports environment where the opportunity of addressing human resources problems in a transfer window cannot be solved. Taking all of this into account and considering that there can only be one winning team in each league or championship, additional support is found for prioritising the development and recognition of the importance of interpersonal relationships via promotion of the 'relational narrative' whereby the value of sharing the sporting journey with others is advanced as a worthy outcome of sports involvement, according to Douglas & Carlass (2006). It is considered that this advance would most likely require a redirection of coach education and re-education, given the competitive focus of the games across the various levels.

On the whole, it is testament to the timeliness of the following volume of research that its preparation coincides with a call for work into the area emanating from a complete review of sport specific research.

1.5 Adopting The Pragmatic Philosophy

The overriding aim of this thesis is to produce a volume of accessible knowledge, practical insight and guidance for applied practitioners and coaches operating in the amateur team sports environment. As such this research is underpinned by a pragmatic philosophy under the belief that no absolute truth would be discoverable nor relevant. Pragmatism, a product of the late 19th and early 20th century is a philosophy of knowledge construction, which prioritises practical solutions to applied questions and the consequences of enquiry (Giacobbi et al, 2005). It is based on the belief that research should focus on the practical understanding of real-world issues as opposed to discussions on the nature of reality and truth (Patton, 2005, p153) and according to Dewey (1938) the value and meaning within data can then be assessed as a function of their practical consequences.

Research conducted under the pragmatic paradigm recognises the centrality of the social setting in which individuals operate and according to Farjoun et al (2015) it affords the capacity to offer a more realistic and richer view of human behaviours as one of the key strengths over alternative paradigms. As a consequence of this dynamic social world, actions and changes can be experienced differently, a feature which necessitates flexibility of research techniques (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005) as the researcher shifts between theory and practice throughout the process (Kelemen and Rumens, 2012). Given my position of practitioner- researcher and the fact that sports teams constitute an immensely dynamic social environment that is very often results driven and necessitates

acute responsiveness to emergent situations; then the fit of the pragmatic paradigm becomes immediately evident.

As a reflection of this a mixed methods approach was formulated for this research guided by the belief that it would yield the most useful blend of data in line with the stated research objectives and my parallel professional role responsibilities. It was considered that the positivist position based on the belief that knowledge is only legitimate if it emanates from objective, controlled, observable and typically quantitative data (Giacobbi et al., 2005), was severely handicapping in terms of generating the breadth and volume of insight desired. At the opposite end of the continuum a constructivist paradigm was also deemed as limiting in light of the presenting objectives owing to its core tenet that peoples realities are wholly constructed in the human mind as a function of experience; a position deemed particularly limiting to the adoption of a functional set of data collection methods.

A fundamental feature of pragmatism as a research methodology is that it doesn't dictate the use of any specific research method but advocates instead for the selection of those most suitable to solve the problem in hand. In addition to gathering data in response to my research objectives, my professional role needs in terms of influencing team development and competitiveness, responding the emergent team situations required the freedom to act in the best interests of the team and goals. The latitude presented by pragmatism to adopt a mixed method approach was therefore key. Mixed-method research "involves a combination of procedures where two or more data collection techniques and forms of analyses are used and both contribute to the final results" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Chapter 3 presents an action research design using both qualitative and quantitative methods to illuminate the season long process of developing interpersonal processes and relationships via both acute and chronic interventions with a

competitive elite amateur Gaelic Games team. Qualitative methods involved a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of team personnel at a pre-season and competitive season timepoint alongside journaling ongoing observations in the field environment. Quantitative measures took the form of a series of validated questionnaires issued at three time points throughout the season. Chapters 4 & 5 employed semi-structured interviews with coaches operating at both elite and sub-elite levels of Gaelic Games to gain insight into existing interpersonal relationship development practices amongst GAA coaches. The semi-structured interviewing method employed across studies was in keeping with pragmatism in that it allowed flexible, needs driven investigation and the opportunity to probe emergent topics at a deeper, richer level.

As stated, the aim of this project is enlighten and inform future understanding and practice amongst coaches regarding the interpersonal facets of team development. Therefore a pragmatic dissemination strategy which supports this goal will be centred on the development of a series of coach education workshops, which fill the existing gap in the GAA coach education syllabus and on a broader level help to inform the practices of coaches in other amateur team sports.

1.6 Thesis Objectives & Structure

In line with the previously specified thesis aims, a range of research objectives have been formulated. As a practitioner who works from a dual perspective, that is working directly with the player cohort on team developmental needs but also through coaches, either a function of my team involvement or in the delivery of coach education, I am keen to provide a body of work which addresses some of the main limitations of the field thus far. Specifically, I wish to avoid the limitations of the short duration, single intervention study and provide insight into the whole development of a competitive team over the course of a full season. As stated, we currently know nothing beyond anecdotal accounts of the

methods used by Gaelic Games coaches to the develop the interpersonal aspects of their team units. This thesis will also illuminate such operations, by looking at both the elite and sub-elite sectors. Therefore the following research objectives are presented:

1. To critically investigate extant literature relating to interpersonal relationships development in team sports.

2. To implement and illuminate the development of the interpersonal aspects of an intercounty GAA team throughout the course of a full season.

3. To investigate acute and chronic methods used by elite GAA coaches to develop interpersonal relationships in their teams.

4. To investigate acute and chronic methods used by club level GAA coaches to develop interpersonal relationships in their teams.

5. To consider the implications of findings and provide a set of practical conclusions and recommendations which will serve to inform and develop coach and practitioner practice going forward.

In order to address the first objective, Chapter 2 examines the literature base on a range of team building modalities that relate to interpersonal relationships development and maintenance. It identifies the gaps that present in the literature to date along with several professional practice and logistical issues relating to the application of interventions. In order to address short comings such as short intervention time scales, a predominance of collegiate teams, single intervention studies and pre & post qualitative measurement reliance; Chapter 3 presents an action research study carried out with an elite Gaelic Games team, aimed at developing interpersonal relationships performance purposes throughout the duration of a full season. A mixed methods approach will be presented and in-depth insights into the process.

In terms of illuminating the status quo in interpersonal relationships development methods amongst intercounty Gaelic Games coaches, Chapter 4 investigates their understanding of team building, the methods currently employed and their perspectives and practices on a range of associated aspects of team interpersonal development and maintenance. Intercounty and club GAA are 2 distinct environments and as such Chapter 5 investigates club coaches understand of team building, the methods currently employed and their perspectives and practices on a range of associated aspects of team interpersonal development and maintenance. Ultimately, Chapter 6, in consideration of the emergent findings and reflections on the process; presents a range of implications for the various stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Exploring the Literature

2.1 Introduction

> "The crux of creating team unity comes from a sense of everyone giving absolutely everything they have for the cause. One player may only have limited ability but if he or she is putting everything they have into their role then the players with higher levels of ability will follow suit and so they make each other better.
>
> When there is trust and respect there, when every player is operating at their full potential and with a common purpose, you'll get a unit that will take a bit of beating.
>
> Team building is all about relationships. If you look at an average club, you'll have a squad of 25 players so you're talking about somewhere in the region of 700 separate relationships. For example: Player one gets on great with players two and 25 and he gets on fine with players five, six and seven and his cousins 11 and 14 and he'll pass the ball to them but he doesn't hit it off with 11, 12 or 19 and he has no time at all for seven, 17 and 20. Meanwhile, eight and 22 don't like him, etc, etc, etc. Cliques form if individuals never really get to know and trust each other and all those different dynamics are going on in every club team.
>
> So how does a team become united? How do you get them to pull together when the chips are down, when they're five points behind and staring defeat in the face like Inniskeen were last weekend?"
>
> -Watters (2022), The Irish News

While traditionally the majority of interest and examination has been directed towards individual sports pursuits and their exponents (Woodman & Hardy, 2001), the team sports unit provides an additional fascinating layer of complexity that has received much less attention (Bloom & Stevens, 2002). Here the individual is replaced by multiple players across a team panel, with varying personalities and aptitudes in addition to a host of skill level differentials and with the ultimate task being to coordinate them into an optimally functioning and consistently performing unit. Salas et al (1997) stated that a team

composed of expert individual athletes is not synonymous with being an expertly performing team, a fact that clarifies the need for teams to be 'built'.

A team is considered to be "a collection of two or more individuals who possess a common identity, have common goals and objectives, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and modes of communications, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally interdependent, reciprocate interpersonal attraction, and consider themselves to be a team" (Carron et al., 20015, p13). This multifaceted definition clearly identifies the scope of potential areas for development or 'team building' and as such provides the first level of indication to the sport psychologist in developing interventions. The pre-eminent definition of 'team building' is that of Brawley & Paskevich (1997, p.13), in which team building is proposed as "a method of helping the group to increase effectiveness, satisfy the needs of its members or improve work conditions". Beer (1980, p.140) presents one of the most enduring definitions and refers to it as "a process intervention designed to improve the functioning and performance of the team". The so-called "process" nature suggests that there are a number of stages involved, thus given the dynamic nature of sports teams and the changing demands of long sports seasons, it suggests that team building may encompass a longer term, development undertaking. Team building intervention formats appear as either chronic or acute. 'Chronic' interventions refer to those carried out over an extended period of time or on an ongoing basis. 'Acute' interventions are those isolated, one-off events. Team building interventions have also been divided into direct and indirect modalities. The direct mode involves the sport psychologist working directly with the team when implementing activities, while the indirect method involves the sport psychologist working with the coach or other members of the team who then carry out the intervention

Team building has been a feature of sport psychology research since the 1990s and has its roots in organisational psychology. Rovio et al (2010) listed four broad categories of intervention aim; namely goal setting, role clarification, development of interpersonal relations and problem solving. The overall aim of the interpersonal relations approach in this setting was based on influencing the team atmosphere and team functioning via effective communication, mutual support and emotional sharing under the assumption that this will facilitate a more effective team. Thus issues identified to be addressed in this environment included team norms, roles, communication processes, emotional relations, cooperation barriers, power and resistance (Salas et al., 1999; Tannenbaum et al., 1992). Given the apparent commonalities of relevance to the sports environment also, the appeal of team building that lead to the eventual crossover to sports is somewhat apparent.

Team building interventions, in their widest guise, have been credited with influencing a wide range of team attributes in sports to date including cohesion (Stevens & Bloom, 2003), athlete satisfaction (Carron & Spink, 1993), team communications (Newin et al, 2008), leadership (Smith & Smoll, 1997), reduced dropout and higher attendance (Spink & Carron, 1993) and performance (Burton, 1989). At the individual level team building has been shown to impact mental well-being (Martin & Davids, 1995), levels of competitive anxiety (Cogan & Petrie, 1995), better self-concept (Ebbeck & Gibbons, 1998) and heightened levels of confidence in team colleagues (Dunne & Holt, 2004). Bloom et al (2008) also highlighted a potential caveat with team building in that coaches often lack the knowledge or skills to implement it and may also be unaware of the potential for faulty implementation to lead to the development of team cliques. Overall, it has proven difficult to fully attest to the merits of team building owing to the range of difficulties with the literature, including the wide range of discrete methods employed, varied and often short intervention durations, extensive use of collegiate teams and a narrow focus on quantitative results and a heavy cohesion focus.

Yukelson (1997) refers to the overall aim of team building in terms of fostering optimal team functioning and further develops the rationale recognising that teams are highly dynamic in nature, comprised of a collection of interdependent individuals who must be coordinated and orchestrated into task efficient roles with the aim of achieving goas which have been deemed important by the team. It was further identified that over the course of a season goals and roles change as do people's perception of what is going on around them, teams develop and interpersonal concerns are said to fluctuate; all of which affect that overarching aim of optimal team functioning. Not alone does this underline the necessity of team building, but it also serves to highlight the fact that interpersonal relations are central to the process and outcome.

2.2 What Can Be Built?

Interventions under the umbrella of 'team building' have been extremely varied in sports. As stated, team building in sport psychology is a borrowed product initiated in the 1990s. It's relatively short place in the discipline has featured one dominant theme, that of cohesion. As will be demonstrated other aspects of the interpersonal relationships development of sports teams have emerged, however cohesion remains a consistent presence.

2.2.1 Cohesion

As stated cohesion has traditionally been the most researched variable in the study of sports team development interventions (Carron & Brawley, 2000). Bruner et al. (2013) also confirmed that cohesion was the "pre-dominant and largely singular emphasis of team building interventions" in their citation network and genealogical analysis. Irrespective of the fact that other aspects of team development have emerged, cohesion remains a frequent feature in contemporary literature.

The definition of 'cohesion' has been subject to few alterations over time. Festinger et al., (1950, p164) considered it as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group". Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer (1998, p.213) further defined cohesion as "a dynamic process reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs". This presents as the most common definition appearing in the literature and is credited with identifying multiple cohesion characteristics according to Carron & Eys (2012). Firstly its multidimensionality is acknowledged, in that members are said to both join and remain part of teams for a myriad of reasons. Secondly, it is said to recognise the dynamic nature of the forces leading people to group involvement. Thirdly, the definition is said to show the instrumental nature of groups as they have a purpose both for their formation and all subsequent actions. Lastly the characteristic of being affective, in that groups present a context for social relationship development be it positive or negative. Notably, as a consequence of some discussion regarding the status of cohesion as a group process versus an emergent state (Salas, Grossman, et al., 2015; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014) a minor adaptation to the original definition has been proposed to render cohesion as "a dynamic emergent state that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs".

Two types of cohesion have been identified and accepted in sports teams. Carron et al (1985). Task cohesion is said to constitute a sense of unity toward achieving the group's performance goals. Social cohesion then refers to both the quality of the social interactions, the tendency for members to spend time with one another and like each other. Carron et al (1985) further proposed four sub-dimensions to cohesion. Firstly, 'Group Integration-Task' is explained as the extent to which a group is united toward achieving its instrumental objectives, 'Group Integration-Social' constitutes the extent to which a

group is united in developing the social relations in the group. 'Attraction to Group-Task' is explained as how the individual is motivated towards the groups instrumental objectives. Lastly, 'Attraction to Group-Social' relates to how the individual is motivated towards social relations in the group. The Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron et al., 1985), the dominant measurement instrument employed in cohesion related sports research is based on this elaborated categorisation.

Both the meta-analyses of Carron et al., (2002) and Filho et al., (2014) attest to a link between players perceptions of team cohesion and performance of the team. It is accepted at this point that a circular relationship exists between cohesion and performance in that cohesion leads to higher performance levels and higher performance leads to further increases in cohesion (Filho et al., 2014; Carron et al., 2002). In addition a range of other associations between cohesion, performance and psychological variables have been found including increased levels of collective efficacy (Kozub & McDonnell, 2000), lower competitive anxiety levels (Cogan & Petrie, 1995) and increased sense of belonging (Beaumeister & Leary, 1995). Burke et al., (2014) identified positive feelings, higher attendance and efforts levels as a result of group involvement featuring high cohesion, while Terry et al., (2000) reported lower levels of anger, tension and depression when cohesion was perceived to be higher in their team unit. Pescosolido & Saavedra (2012) further elaborate on the potential mechanism operating with the benefits of cohesion to the performance setting. They credit cohesion as being useful where a synchronised response is required in competition; whereby mutual understanding of team mates skill set, habits and preferences along with an understanding of psychological states like their mood is said to contribute to effective coordination and decision making.

However, support for the absolute value of cohesion is not universal. A number of researchers have cautioned that cohesion may be counterproductive in groups that don't

emphasize productivity as a result of the cohesion acting a controlling mechanism (Langfred, 1998, Hackman, 1992). Rovio et al., (2009) replicated the findings of previous studies which found maladaptive results of high cohesion and identified it as a contributor to groupthink, the polarisation of some team members and pressures to conform with a junior ice hockey team. While Hardy et al., (2005) identified that athletes reported experiencing increased pressure from high task cohesion and difficulty committing to task related goals in the presence of high social cohesion.

Irrespective of the identification of some risk factors, the bulk of evidence suggests an array of beneficial effects of healthy levels of cohesion. According to Beauchamp et al., (2017) interventions to build cohesion are based on the premise that getting team members to develop unity and togetherness will have knock on effects such as bolstering motivation levels in individual players to increase their efforts towards collective goals and therefore combine to lead to better team outcomes.

Cohesion has experienced a change in status from being an assumed intervention outcome to being considered both outcome and antecedent. This raises a host of questions about the research findings to date, in particular the use of pre-test post-test methods, interventions over short time durations, failure to identify co-existing group change mechanisms in studies and the nature of the relationship between cohesion and other team and performance variables, the latter which is featuring in contemporary research. The use of alternative methods to the Group Environment Questionnaire is also an interesting development, as observational and socio-metric methods are explored (Sabin & Marcel, 2014). In light of the afore mentioned array of factors it is necessary to give due consideration to the value in a range of other areas allied to the development of interpersonal team relationships.

2.2.2 Adventure Activities

Adventure activities typically involve the use of outdoor pursuits type activities or artificially created environments such as obstacle or high ropes courses. Participants engage in individual or group based challenges requiring them to problem solve, strategise and interact in order to overcome physical, mental or social challenges (Priest, 1999), learn about their ability to surmount self-imposed limitations and how they can interrelate (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Priest, 1999) and draw on and further hone skills such as communications, compromise and cooperation (Hunt, 2007; Martin et al., 2017). Subsequently group discussions and debriefs take place in a structured format to facilitate participants in acquiring meaning and learning from their experience individually or collectively.

As a team building mechanism the adventure sector has demonstrated efficaciousness in the development of both cohesion (Glass & Benshoff, 2002) and group development (Hatch & McCarthy, 2005). The capacity of adventure based activity programs for team building purposes on the whole has been recognised by several researchers for its ability to stimulate change (Attarian, 2001; Gillis & Speelman, 2008; Priest, 1999). There has been significant interest in unravelling and understanding the mechanisms which give rise to such change. At the core of such investigations lies Panicucci's (2007) Stretch Zone Experiences concept. In brief, it is suggested that three primary states exist for humans; namely the comfort zone, stretch zone and panic zones. In the context of adventure based activities stretch zone experiences are idealised for the learning opportunity they afford as a result of the state of disequilibrium triggered. It is further suggested that the change process experienced may be affected via a combination of a challenge factor, opportunity for growth experiences and a sense of high adventure (Priest, 1999, p111). Bailey (1999) and Raiola & O'Keefe (1999) identify that adventure based activities present core elements of uncertainty, physical effort, combined with either a perception of risk or

actual risk along with a dual strand interaction with both the natural environment and crucially with the other participants; the latter which would evidently be of particular interest to the team sports coach. McKenzie (2000) similarly sought to unravel the processes involved in producing beneficial outcomes from the adventure sector. Several features emerged akin to those found elsewhere; specifically the unfamiliar physical environment and the small group aspect. Interestingly McKenzie (2000) elaborated on the 'challenge' element that has been presented elsewhere to define the need for activities to be sequential, holistic and crucially that they also match the needs of the participant cohort. Particular attention was also geared towards the instruction of activities. It was recognised that instructors who were both effective and interactive with the participants are key, also highlighted was the need to facilitate processing of the experience. Ewert and Sibthorp (2014) delineated comparable characteristics capable of facilitating positive programme outcomes. Several areas of overlap are evident with previous studies, specifically the challenge factor, the element of risk and small group task work. Also identified as impactful were the outdoor environment and the remote locations often used. Outcomes of these adventure programmes were classified into both interpersonal and intrapersonal categories. The former included such elements as group cohesion, collective efficacy, social competency, leadership skills and an overall sense of community; while the latter featured personal values, self-constructs, mental states along with both cognitive and physical skills development.

Priest (1996, p23) provides a useful source of guidance in determining activity type as a function of the needs analysis. Activities are said to fall into four categories, specifically recreational, educational, developmental and therapeutic activities. The aim of recreational activities is stated as changing feelings, a feat that is achieved by focusing on activities which feature energy, enjoyment and new skill development. Educational activities seek to change participants' thinking by developing new knowledge, attitudes

and levels of awareness. Developmental activities are said to lead to a change in behaviour, achieved by teaching new ways to act and increasing functioning. Lastly therapeutic activities are tasked with changing misbehaviour by teaching new coping responses and decreasing dysfunction. Therefore, the importance of designing a programme based on an accurate needs analysis is key, also illuminated is the need to avoid so-called 'cookie cutter' programmes, whereby insufficient attention is paid to particular groups' needs or circumstances, which potentially renders any benefits as haphazard.

Interestingly, the actualised extent of the transfer of learning from the adventure environment to the sports arena is one that has been under-investigated considering the range of stated benefits and appeal of this team building genre. Packer (2001, p. 493) suggests that the issue of transfer in learning is "hard to define, difficult to investigate and perplexingly controversial". Marchand & Banks (2015) identify two categories of transfer. Specific transfer exists where a skill that is learned during a program is used thereafter in similar settings, conversely in nonspecific transfer skills learned are applied in a different situation, such as the sports environment. On the whole further research is required to ascertain the specific nature of how such skills are transferred, the sport specific situations in which they are efficacious and whether or not they have longevity?

Boyle (2002) makes reference to a range of elite sports teams who have engaged in adventure based activity as part of team preparations. One such example quoted is that of the New Zealand rugby team who undertook a six day outward bound excursion with developmental aims such as personal development and intrapersonal development. Notably also the issue of transfer to the pitch was cited as a priority. Benefits identified included the ability to handle situations that seemed "scary" or "daunting", time to reflect on goals and relationships along with providing an opportunity to get to know teammates

outside of the pitch environment. Interestingly for a team outing, a portion of the course was completed solo. No longitudinal data is given for the subsequent transfer of learnings to the pitch however. Similarly, the 1984 USA Olympic Volleyball teams' outward bound experience is referenced and again declared a success on the basis of "melding a group of individuals with varied and often conflicting goals into a cohesive and focused unit". Hastie (1989) similarly took his Queensland volleyball team on a three-day mountain climbing experience with the aim of investigating cohesion and team dynamics under stressful situations. Again, the outing was declared a success with the physical and psychological demands credited as being the catalyst. Meyer and Wenger's (1998) study of the effect of a ropes course on a high school girls' tennis team. Results indicated positively for social cohesion, communications and goal setting with no task cohesion advancements demonstrated. While by nature the interaction with such a co-acting team would present different features to that of an interacting team it was noteworthy that the issues of transfer and longevity were pursued in this study. Team members reported fewer occasions of learning applications at three months post-intervention and yet fewer still at nine months. It must be considered that this study was carried out with a youth team, therefore limitations may exist when extrapolating results to adult teams who perhaps may possess a greater capacity to process activity outcomes and take initiative subsequently. Recommendations included using post-intervention activities and discussions in a top-up fashion nevertheless do appear prudent irrespective of the age profile of the team.

On the whole, the intuitive appeal of adventure based activities as a team interpersonal development tool is evident. It is the logistical process underpinning it that appears to determine the efficacy odds of the undertaking; specifically, that an effective needs analysis takes place, outcome objectives are clear and thereafter a suitable activity programme design or selection takes place. This process would necessitate a solid team

understanding by the coach, a clear vision of team potential and a willingness to fully engage in the process as opposed to enacting the role of observer throughout such that transfer can be assessed, optimised and topped up on return to the team's normal environment.

2.2.3 Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing

Crace and Hardy (1997) suggested that to perform effectively players not only required self-awareness but also an understanding of and ability to deal with other team members and their roles, needs, views and motivations. Therefore, developing mutual understanding was pivotal to developing a 'healthy' team. Orlick (1990) also attributed interpersonal problems in teams to a lack of mutual understanding and a subsequent inability to be responsive. Consequently, the potential value in improving mutual understanding between team members is evident.

Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing (PDMS) has its roots in the parent discipline of psychology and specifically group psychotherapy and counselling. PDMS is a team building approach that asks team members to publicly disclose previously unknown personal stories and information to members of their team unit (Hardy & Crace, 1997; Holt & Dunn, 2006). It can also involve the sport psychologist reciprocating with their own personal account. In group settings, collaborative personal-disclosure with a mutual-sharing component has been shown to nurture empathy as a consequence of group members gaining a greater understanding of each other's personal experiences (Dryden, 2006). Coincidingly, Farber (2006) referred to both Carl Rogers' and Albert Ellis' previous employment of self-disclosure as a means of developing trust, rapport and a sense of shared humanness with clients. The exercise, with potential accompanying fear factor and vulnerability is said to facilitate greater communication of values, beliefs, attitudes, and personal motives all of which can create a set of shared perceptions,

meanings and understandings among team members according to Ostroff et al, 2003 and Windsor et al, 2011.

To date only a paucity of work has applied PDMS as an intervention instrument in sport psychology. Yet, there would appear to be clear potential even taking just Crace and Hardy (1997) and Orlick's (1990) views mentioned above, as a snapshot of identified team needs. As a relatively new team building tool in sport settings, there is a rather limited body of work that is divided between testing the efficacy of the technique and providing practice guidelines for implementation. Studies that have tested its efficacy in the sports team environment have shown promising if not unequivocal support.

Through a season-long team intervention, Pain and Harwood (2009) demonstrated the efficacy of mutual sharing and open discussion on team functioning by showing improvements in cohesion, trust, confidence and communication, all of which were evident after the initial session and maintained thereafter. This has particular resonance given the extended duration of team contact and also given that a direct services approach was adopted which meant that procedural and quality control could be optimised. Results, in this case, support Yukelson's (1997) assertions regarding team building in that open, honest group discussions are pivotal to the process. Dunn and Holt's (2004) study also attested to the efficacy of PDMS. Like Pain and Harwood (2009) a university sports team was studied, also the sport psychologist had long-term involvement with the team and as such adopted a direct services approach. It was concluded that participants claimed improvements in cohesion, communications, understanding and confidence. The study however failed to make any reference to performance effects subsequently and it was identified that there was no identifiable transfer to task cohesion. PDMS has also been shown to be an effective means of developing social identity in sports teams (Barker et

al., 2014; Evans et al., 2013) owing to its ability to maintain or even increase players' feelings of belongingness and emotional significance towards their team.

Windsor et al.,'s (2011) study set in professional soccer is of particular value in that it tested the technique in the professional sports environment as opposed to the frequently used collegiate sports sector. Contrary to the findings of Pain and Harwood (2009) however they demonstrated no significant change in cohesion or communication from pre-test to post-test although an improvement in performance in the short term above expectations was claimed. The authors also presented social validation data which espoused the value of the intervention beyond performance outcomes and in terms of enhancing team closeness, understanding and communications. In an addendum, the authors note that the team achieved competitive success in the following season with a high proportion of the players who had engaged in the PDMS intervention. This begs the question as to whether there is a longer-term embedding process at work. It is also postulated that the intervention may have contributed to the high level of intactness of the team for the following season which facilitated a smooth progression in the development of that unit. Although not specified, it is worth considering whether perhaps it resulted in augmented social identity in the team which subsequently resulted in less player turnover. Other studies have emerged focused on professional practice recommendations. PDMS does come with some caveats for the sport psychologist employing the technique. Holt and Dunn (2006) claim that it is most effective with adult teams who operate in a high-performance environment. Given the level of introspection required to compose the requisite response to the nature of the typical questions employed in this intervention along with the maturity required both in delivering it and observing someone else in the process, it is evident that such an approach could be challenging in a youth sport setting. Two studies addressed Holt and Dunn's claim by employing PDMS in youth sport settings, specifically in elite youth cricket (Barker, et al., 2014) and the academy soccer

setting (Evans, et al., 2013). The results of both studies show outcome improvements in common aspects, namely confidence, trust, understanding, awareness, motivation and collective efficacy. Barker et al., (2014) identify several consultancy issues and recommendations, some of which coincide with those mentioned earlier. It is claimed that staff support for the intervention was high and as such lead to a high buy-in from the player contingent. Again, the issue of the sport psychologist's familiarity with the team emerged with a pre-consultation phase being recommended where the practitioner isn't a regular team feature. The issue of athlete apprehension and risk is tackled here also and it is identified that there is a heightened risk to the athlete presenting with low self-esteem in terms of public speaking and anxiety. Also, the need to be cognisant of a potential referral need in the event that disclosures identified clinical or legal issues is identified. Lastly, both Barker et al., (2014) and Evans et al., (2013) refer to the problem of correlating the intervention with subsequent performance outcomes and neither study resolves the problem. At this juncture, it is worth noting overall that studies in team building modalities, as a whole, when related to performance outcomes are difficult to directly correlate cause and effect.

At this point, it is worth noting that Brawley & Paskevich (1997) highlight a seldom considered aspect of team building effectiveness that has the potential to significantly affect the PDMS type intervention. They state that the effectiveness of a team building intervention is influenced largely by the effectiveness of the facilitator. In the clinical and psychotherapy setting this has long since been acknowledged. Truax & Carkhuff (2007) who examined therapist qualities that lead to poor or favourable therapeutic outcomes concluded that authenticity and genuineness were the most important ingredient in effective client practitioner relationships. While not every study stated that the sport psychologist disclosed as per the player body, Windsor, et al., (2011) referred to the fact that the sport psychologist in their study was asked to tell their story by the players and

acquiesced accordingly. It would appear that a willingness to disclose in kind by the sport psychologist, perhaps even as the opening contributor would be desirable at least and potentially serve the practitioner well in terms of enhancing their relationship with the player body. Irrespective of the part played by the sport psychologist or alternative facilitator, the potential for the informed use of PDMS interventions to positively affect the interpersonal relationships in a sports team has been established.

2.2.4 Socialisation

According to Bugental & Goodnow (1998) "socialisation is a collective process within a social practice which is defined as the process of how the individual human being will come to think and act in certain ways in relation to what others in the group are doing, allowing or encouraging, and how this thinking and action are activated in a social context through routines, expectations and interactions" (p. 427). Similarly, Coakley (2001, p. 82) defined it as "an active process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live". It is readily apparent that some key strands feature in both definitions, specifically the 'process' orientation and the requirement for interaction.

Organisational literature provides the majority of coverage of the topic of socialisation. Benefits accruing from formalised organisational socialisation processes are recognised as having a positive effect on intentions to remain with an organisation, the creation of strong bonds with colleagues and a personalised sense of being embedded in the organisation (Allen & Shanock, 2013). While it seems likely that many of the benefits would be shared across organisations and sports teams, Benson et al., (2016) identified that some variations exist between both group types owing to differences in the structural and contextual properties of sports teams. It was highlighted that subsequent to the sports season it is likely that many players decrease the time spent training together and perhaps

even interacting. It was also stated that this is the time period during which team rosters change as players depart for various reasons including transfer, graduation or retirement; and new recruits arrive. Therefore a time sensitive necessity to adjust and attend to the integration of newcomers both on and off pitch, is a feature of sports teams that perhaps isn't so acute in organisational environments. Consensus exists on the importance of optimising this time frame for the management of sports team dynamics (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Fang et al., 2011; Hackman, 2012). Several explanations are offered; firstly according to Van Maanen & Shein (1977) groups will have the highest level of influence over new recruits during the transition phase when they are most impressionable. Secondly, it is proposed that interpersonal conflict is more likely to be avoided if new recruits are familiarised with the socially constructed boundaries that frame interpersonal interactions in teams and team roles (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). According to Benson et al (2016) this can also help prevent communications issues. An additional benefit was identified by Price & Van Vugt (2014) who saw the potential to prevent the occurrence of social exclusion. Furthermore, Hackman (2012) in specifying the features of sports teams which necessitate players cooperating to achieve team goals; advocated for rapid and effective socialisation such that role perceptions, team cohesion and optimum commitment would be optimised. In advance of any discussion on the specific socialisation tactics employed in the sport specific literature, it should be highlighted that some risks have also been identified. Most notably, Benson et al., (2016) found that coaches were cognisant of the risk of veteran team members possessing negative attitudes and behaviours and thus having an obstructive effect on incoming players.

Socialisation factors surrounding youth sports has encompassed the majority of the focus to date. However, some relatively contemporary work has addressed the need to understand more about the methods used to integrate newcomers to adult sports groups.

'Socialisation tactics' therefore appears to be an emerging area of interest in sports, with scope remaining to broaden the breadth of team populations and levels studied. Benson et al., (2016) qualitatively investigated the socialisation tactics and decision making process undertaken by Canadian university level sports team coaches and athletes. Results of a series of semi-structured interviews indicated that a range of formal and informal initiatives were undertaken. Training camps were identified by athletes as useful in propelling their integration forward as it afforded the opportunity for consistent group-oriented activities, interactions with team mates, camaraderie developed through the demanding nature of camp training, daily coach orchestrated social activities and social outings such as attending games and meals, arranged by players outside of the training camp schedule. Coaches also identified the need to formally establish team policies, rules and expectations as a formative priority. Interestingly many coaches in the study also recognised the need to facilitate athlete input to some team principles, as a means of fostering accountability. Alongside the formal learning sessions provided, from an athlete point of view informal learning opportunities also proved vital for bolstering their continued understanding of team roles and expectations. One significant contributor to this was the role of veteran players, who were recognised as having particular influence in filling knowledge gaps for newcomers. Additionally the provision of social support by such players was considered key to ameliorating various difficulties experienced by novice team members. From the coaches perspective a keen awareness was evident of the importance of having veterans in leadership and mentoring roles who exemplify the desired characteristics and behaviours, in recognition of the fact that veteran status isn't a universal guarantee of a providing positive influence. While the study was carried out with a specific coach and athlete population in a particular context, it goes some way towards illuminating a range of methods transferable to coaches at various levels and different team environments.

As has been discussed, cohesion presents as the most researched team property with optimal cohesion yielding a range of benefits far beyond the few drawbacks. As such, developing and maintaining desired levels of cohesion presents as an ongoing task for coaches. Therefore, the arrival of new players presents a potential disruption to existing cohesion levels. Such has been recognised with the emergence of contemporary literature addressing the role of socialisation in team cohesion. Leo et al., (2020) explored that relationship in national soccer teams from three countries, across age ranges from 14 to 38. While measures were only taken at a single time point using the Sports Team Socialisation Tactics Questionnaire (Benson & Eys, 2017), the GEQ (Carron et al., 1985) and the Role Ambiguity Scale (Beauchamp et al., 2002), results showed a direct relationship between socialisation tactics and three dimensions of cohesion specifically Group Integration-Task, Attraction to Group-Task and Attraction to Group-Social. Therefore it was considered that players perceive higher levels of attraction to task based elements and integration into teams when coaches employ socialisation tactics. A relevant second strand to the study carried out with amateur and semi-professional club soccer players investigating the relationship between socialisation tactics, cohesion and players intention to return to the team next season showed a positive correlation between the Attraction to Group-Task aspect of cohesion and the likelihood of continued engagement in the team. Interestingly none of the other three elements of cohesion were shown to impact. Ensuing recommendations included engaging in socialisation tactics carried out by coaches, players leaders and other team members; such as providing information about team organisation, role clarification, establishing a range of interaction opportunities amongst players and cooperative objectives, the use of formal mentors and designing a team environment which facilitated informal mentoring.

Interest in furthering the knowledge base on socialisation processes was again evident as Chamberlain et al., (2021) explored the relationship with both cohesion and social identity

strength in youth ice hockey players. Previous findings from organisational research supported the effectiveness of socialisation tactics in indirectly bolstering social identity strength, by promoting goal interdependence via the provision of social support and structure (Changhong et al., 2013). Therefore it was considered that a similar effect may be evident in sports groups and such had previously been hypothesised (Benson et al., 2016a). Players completed measures of cohesion, social identity strength and team socialisation tactics at two junctures. Results indicated that players perceptions of the socialisation processes employed were positively associated with both cohesion and social identity. Further efforts to illuminate the underlying mechanism and provide guidance for applied practice suggested that where individualised role communications were provided by coaches, information sharing between incoming and remaining players took place and social opportunities presented outside of formal team time; stronger levels of cohesion and social identity ensued. While the study featured only youth players in a single sport, no obvious reason presents as to why the findings wouldn't be relatable to adult teams and other sports.

Positive interpersonal relationships are not a guarantee in sporting units. On the whole the evidence presented finds strongly in support of the design and implementation of a multi-strand package of socialisation tactics owing to the range of benefits and perhaps the risks of failing to attend to the needs of newcomers in the team environment. Notable also from the range of studies examined was the fact that the implementation of socialisation tactics were overwhelmingly seen as a coach and team player function and not necessarily the job of a sport psychologist or team building consultant in any guise.

2.2.5 Emotional Intelligence & Empathy

Emotional intelligence is defined as "the ability to perceive, monitor, employ and manage emotions within oneself and in others" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189) and has been

described as a form of social intelligence. According to Ioannidou & Konstantikaki (2008) explain it as "a concept including perception, expression and control of emptions, self-control and empathy, communications, conflict resolution process, conscience and perhaps many more". According to Goleman (1998) it constitutes a trifecta of actions, specifically the ability to understand someone's feelings, to listen to them and feel them and to express their emotions in a productive way. It is also said to refer to individual responses to interpersonal and intrapersonal information of an emotional nature and include the identification, expression, understanding and regulation of one's own emotions or those of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). According to Goldenberg et al., (2016) 'intrapersonal intelligence' is aligned to one's ability to recognise, regulate and give expression to emotions, while 'interpersonal intelligence' enables the individual to recognise their own needs and desires as well as those of others, be compatible with others, experience empathy, problem solve and to disagree in an effective manner. Therefore those possessing strong intrapersonal intelligence are said to have superlative control over their feelings and moods and benefit socially from such (Edwita, 2014). Interpersonal intelligence facilitates initiation of communication with others, acting in a cooperative manner, being likeable and capable of teamwork owing to a combination of effective processing and communication skills. This combination is said to be particularly suited to leadership capacity, conflict resolution and relationship building.

As research on Emotional Intelligence has burgeoned particularly in organisational literature and to a lesser extent in sports, a number of models have emerged. On the whole progress is considered to have been hampered by the lack of consensus on approaches and issues with the development of reliable, valid measurement instruments. In brief, the 'Trait Approach' (Petrides et al., 2004) suggests that people report their own self-perceptions and dispositions, which would be held to be relatively stable. Meyer &

Fletcher's (2007) 'Ability Approach' requires individuals to have the capacity of encode the information required to direct cognitions and motivate behaviour. Mixed Models approaches such as those of Goleman (1998) and Bar-On (1997) take the view emotional intelligence be conjoined to mental and self-report personality characteristics, for example mood and empathy. Specifically, Goleman's (1998) model viewed emotional intelligence as an assimilation of self-awareness, empathy, confidence, optimism, impulse control, social awareness, self-management and ultimately relationship management. Bar-On (1997) conceptualised emotional intelligence as a collection of trait and state characteristics, specifically intrapersonal and interpersonal, stress tolerance, adaptability and problem solving capacity and an optimistic mood.

Irrespective of the limiting factors identified above, the functional appeal of the concept of emotional intelligence has been enduring as a range of benefits have been reported. In organisational environments emotional intelligence has been linked to the ability to deal with pressure, customers, buffer stress and ultimately increase performance (Jordan et al., 2002; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002; Salovey et al., 2002; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). It also is shown to contribute to positive working relationships via the management of emotions (Mikolajczak et al., 2012), enhanced job commitment (Gardner et al, 2011) and better group processes and leadership efficacy (Cote et al., 2010). Beyond organisational settings higher levels of happiness were demonstrated as a function of better skills for human interactions (Bai & Niazi, 2014)

As stated emotional intelligence has also garnered interest in the sports environment. It is widely accepted that emotions are central to performance aspects in sports (Martinent et al., 2012; Laborde & Raab, 2013; Hanin, 2007, Campo et al., 2012). Laborde et al., (2016) points out that athletes have a consistent range of stresses to cope with including demanding training and those of competition. Alongside these, athletes are said to have

to manage the emotions of both themselves and others in their social environment such as team colleagues, team personnel, the opposition, sports officials and spectators. Therefore emotional intelligence is said to govern behaviour in each of these interactions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). This is in line with the findings of Lesyk (1998) who stated that more successful athletes comprehend their part in a larger system alongside team mates, coaches and their social circle outside of their sports and as such they have developed a range of social skills to manage this. These include communicating their thoughts, feeling and needs to others, managing conflict and negative interactions.

A relatively recent meta-analysis (Laborde et al., 2016) examined findings in relation to emotional intelligence in sports up to 2015. It was concluded that on the whole higher levels lead to better performance. From the 36 studies examined the following themes were emergent; emotional intelligence psychological skills, emotional intelligence in coaching, emotional intelligence performance and emotional intelligence transcends sport. Specifically in relation to team sports it was stated that teams reporting higher levels of emotional intelligence showed superior emotional control in pressurised situations, better capacity for managing emotions associated with controversies occurring during competition and a better comprehension of the effect of negative emotions on performance (Crombie et al., 2009).

Given the range of benefits identified in both organisations and sports it is clear why interest emerged in the possibility of training emotional intelligence in group environments. Recent evidence (Campo et al., 2015) appears to have put paid to the questions regarding whether it could actually be enhanced? A range of interventions examined for this review demonstrated a wide array of intervention formats that had been reported in organisational settings specifically. It was apparent that training this capacity

is a time consuming endeavour. Interventions included sessions spanning 8 x 2hour blocks over 8 weeks (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2010), 1 day followed by a 14week project (Clarke, 2010), 10 x 3 hour sessions (Crombie et al., 2011), 12 x 45 minute sessions over 3 weeks (Jahangard et al., 2012) etc. In terms of training interventions in the sports team environment a small number of studies have been carried out.

Barlow & Banks (2014) investigated the effects of a short term trial of coaching using emotional intelligence on the anxiety levels, team identification and self-efficacy status of high performance netball players. 20 players were randomly assigned to either a control group or coaching group. All players completed measures of anxiety, team identification and self-efficacy at pre and post-test, whereas the coaching group also completed an emotional intelligence questionnaire with the aim of highlighting areas for coaching. Subsequently each of the latter received a 30 minute 1-to1 solution-focused coaching session based on the GROW Model (Whitmore, 2009). Sessions followed a structure which discussed the assessment with the player, what the scores mean and identifying priority area. Players were asked to think about their desired outcome, compare it to their current profile, assess change options and explore an action plan. They were encouraged to come up with solutions by drawing on existing strengths and progress achieved so far. Visualisation of the desired change was encouraged along with thinking about the actions of a role model they could aspire to who would present a higher score in those two target areas. The study found that the coaching group demonstrated greater increases in self-efficacy alongside decreases in anxiety, but no difference in team identification. In considering the implications of this study from the perspective of the applied practitioner or team coach, the potential to affect positive change in this area is encouraging. The intervention affords an opportunity for the practitioner or coach to engage in a positive and productive interpersonal exchange. Logistically the 1-to-1 nature of the sessions would prove time consuming and thus it is likely that optimum timing in an amateur team

with limited time together in-season, would be in the pre-season period where player meetings may already feature. The other primary consideration in terms of replicating this intervention would be the level of knowledge required to score the assessment. compile and interpret the profiles. The study also took place over a relatively short time period and as such no longitudinal data were provided regarding sustained levels of change or indeed transfers to performance outcomes.

One of the shortcomings of the previous study was identified as its short term nature. Campo et al., (2016) carried out a season long investigation of the effectiveness of an emotional intelligence training intervention at the trait level, with professional rugby union players who were identified as not previously motivated to improve this aspect. A time intensive intervention consisted of 4 individual sessions lasting from 45 to 90 minutes with one session held every 5 weeks. A key logistical aspect was identified in that the schedule of this unit facilitated the roll out of the intervention i.e. they were a professional team in-situ for blocks of time. A pre and post-test trait emotional intelligence questionnaire was issued comprised of 153 items. Each player subsequently engaged in a discussion regarding his own profile from the point of view of the 4 subscales, specifically wellbeing, self-control, sociability and emotionality, followed by a discussion about the potential performance implications of their profile results. The session concluded with a discussion on the importance of emotional intelligence for performance. The following session was framed around enhancing players knowledge of emotions, emotional states and their relationship to sport. A practical exercise followed whereby players aimed to identify emotions via facial recognition in video clips. Lastly players recalled the range of emotions they experienced in previous competitive situations. In the proceeding session further engagement took place regarding previous competitive experiences of an emotional nature, functional and dysfunctional and the use of regulation strategies. Players were also introduced to the potential for interpersonal

regular amongst team mates and emotion contagion. The last session focused on players pre-competitive routines in terms of emotional regulation and routines were checked for relevance to individual player's needs. Homework tasks were issued between sessions. Results of this comprehensive intervention process showed improvements in some subscales, namely social competence, emotion management and perception; but not emotional intelligence at the global level. It was shown that improvements occurred via the process even without the presence of pre-existing motivations.

From the point of view of applied practice this study provides a wealth of procedural detail. However from the perspective of the applied practitioner the sheer time requirements make the process prohibitive outside of the realm of professional sports. It would also have been interesting to provide further medium to long term follow up data from the players subsequent experience. Even though only a relative paucity of studies thus far have examined the process of training emotional intelligence, the difficulties of comparison as a function of the range of measurements employed, intervention formats and lengths are evident. The appeal of the likely benefits achieved appear to be offset by the logistical difficulties of the time requirements. Further studies are required to assess intervention protocol in a range of team settings beyond professional sports. Additionally it was noteworthy across studies that consideration was not given to the individual intellectual capacity amongst players to comprehend and engage with the material presented to them, a factor which may hinder optimising results.

Referring back to Ioannidou & Konstantikaki (2008), an element of their emotional intelligence definition that has received some specific attention in sport psychology literature is that of 'empathy'. According to Keen (2007) empathy "means to recognise others' feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it". Similarly empathy has been

described by Zinn (1999) as "the process of understanding a person's subjective experience by vicariously sharing that experience while maintaining an observant stance". Two strands of empathy have been identified. "Cognitive empathy" is explained as perspective taking ability which facilitates being able to pick up on peoples emotional state, while "affective empathy" refers to the feelings we experience as a response to others emotions (Healey & Grossman, 2018).

Consensus exists regarding the importance of empathetic skills in humans, in facilitating and maintaining relationships (Preston & de Waal, 2002; Decety & Jackson, 2004). Additionally according to Riess (2017), a pre-eminent feature of empathy is that it assists in connecting people, especially those within their own group, especially those who resemble them physically, in actions, possess a common goal and who have endured in a similar fashion. The relevance of empathy to sports team relations therefore is evident. Indeed Shima et al., (2021) demonstrated that team sport and individual sport athletes possess higher cognitive empathy when compared to the non-athletic population, irrespective of the sport, their experience level or success achieved. It is said that perception-performance relationships involved in sports and physical activities such as learning and coordinating various movement patterns and interacting with other individuals for goal oriented purposes; are underpinned by empathetic processes involved in understanding others states (Sevdalis & Raab, 2013); which may explain the differences between athletic and non-athletic populations. It is also proposed that an 'anticipated guilt' mechanism operates and thereby promotes more pro-social actions and positive collegial interactions (Kavussanu & Stanger, 2017). Perhaps most significantly for the team sports environment, it has been shown that the degree of familiarity between the empathiser and the other party dictates the degree of empathy felt (Singer and Lamm, 2009; Bucchioni et al., 2015; Hao et al., 2019). It is considered that a player of higher empathetic capacity may contribute to higher team cohesion, which may be a

discriminating factor for coaches when making recruitment decisions (Behm & Carter, 2021). While other benefits of empathetic players include the ability to predict team mates reactions, comprehend the emotions of opposition players and correct decision making according to Budnik-Przybylska et al., (2021). With several pieces of contemporary research conducted, it has been recognised that a host of angles remain to be investigated if a fuller understanding of empathy and in particular empathy as it relates to team dynamics and performance, is to be achieved. Some interesting permutations are suggested by Behm & Carter (2021) in their review, which give rise to some questions which would have potential consequences in the Gaelic Games environment. Owing to quoted research showing considerable in-group bias in empathy responses (Hao et al., 2019) and empathy levels towards loved ones versus disliked individuals (Bucchioni et al., 2015), it begs the question as to the effect on empathy, interpersonal dynamics and performance whereby intercounty team mates are club rivals and compete in a potentially aggressive competitive environment?

2.2.6 Psychometrics

Allied to the subject of emotional intelligence and empathy is the practice of psychometrics. Psychometrics refers to a range of scientifically validated and standardised measures of an individual's mental capacities and behavioural tendencies typically identified as 'personality'. These assessments are typically administered by a (sport) psychologist with specific training in psychometric evaluation or a specialist allied to specific psychometric evaluation tools as specified below. The use of psychometrics in sports team building presents a relatively brief avenue of exploration especially compared to other branches of the parent discipline most notably organisational psychology. Traditionally psychometrics aimed to delineate a set of personality traits that would be predictive of successful athletic performance; a line of inquiry that overall proved equivocal (Van Den Auweele et al., 2001). The resurgence of psychometrics in the

sporting domain has led to a change in direction in terms of usage. Contemporary tools have focused on developing awareness and understanding in athletes of their own and teammate's characteristics, tendencies and preferences in interpersonal functioning aspects such as empathy provision or leadership emergence and effectiveness, which it is thought will enhance intra-team operations and dynamics (Beauchamp et al., 2008).

This has been achieved recently via the introduction of a range of psychometric evaluation tools designed with the aim of being user friendly in terms of presenting results and interpreting their implications. The likes of the Insights Discovery Evaluator, DISC Profiles and Mindflick Spotlight Approach for example, promote the development of self-awareness regarding communications, behaviours and preferences. Typically, the administration of a psychometric evaluation is a single time event with a group. The value therefore lies in the debriefing of results and follow-up intervention actions. Such tools have been adopted by a range of sporting organisations with the aim of enhancing self-awareness, accelerating relationship development, developing a growth mindset and an appreciation of team work. Insights, the company responsible for the Insights Discovery Evaluator lists both the Danish F.A. and the V9 Academy amongst its client case studies. According to Cruickshank & Collins (2017), Insights Discovery has also been adopted by sports organisations throughout the UK. Other similar tools such as the DISC profiles are similarly presented. In the team environment then the information can be used to aid mutual understanding amongst team members and how behaviours and communications can be modified for more effective interpersonal outcomes. Cotterill (2017) describes the use of the MBTi in cricket as an established component of the development process of the NGB, whereby information on the process is a component of coach education and players are subject to profiling at club level. Similar to the contemporary uses outlined above it is said that the MBTi here is used as a framework to comprehend individual differences, to examine how individuals may respond in the same situations and also how

the captain can cope with this and use it to adapt their approach. On the whole, it is clear that the shift in the focus on personality in team dynamics has served to re-invigorate interest and provide a new impetus for research. Such instruments however are not without their criticisms. According to Cruickshank & Collins (2017) they run the risk of people being 'put into boxes', self-handicapping and social loafing.

One research study of note investigated the use of the Insights Discovery tool with an elite co-acting sports team (Beauchamp et al., 2008). In brief, with the aim of enhancing the quality of interpersonal communication, reducing conflict, increasing both task and social cohesion and developing skills at giving and receiving feedback a longitudinal intervention process was enacted which started with the issuing of the Insights Discovery Evaluator, followed by a series of online workshops. Subsequently, all team members were issued with a report detailing their strengths and weaknesses, value to the team, communications patterns, potential blind spots and also information on working with psychological opposites and personal development goals. In the next phase, their results were discussed and role-plays were enacted to demonstrate blind spots. Further workshops were subsequently employed at future competitions to consolidate and facilitate a greater appreciation of preferences, all of which were accompanied by relevant debriefs. At a subsequent competition, another workshop was held with the aim of planning coping strategies for the upcoming season where the competitive environment meant that players would be in close proximity frequently. Peer mentoring was also put in place for the purposes of task-specific feedback and social support. A fourth workshop took place pre-season which served to simulate actual performance demands and facilitate players in using their strategies, communication skills and peer mentoring. When reviewed athletes attested to the greater understanding gained and its effect on improving interactions, increasing trust, cohesion and crucially performance.

In considering the applied practicalities of employing such tools the primary consideration for team coaches, athletic organisations and in particular amateur teams is likely to be the cost associated. Similarly, from the point of view of the Sport Psychologist working in the team environment, training to administer these instruments is costly and potentially prohibitive from a cost-benefit analysis point of view for someone working outside of a large organisation. From a team building perspective a coach in possession of personality data on their players faces two likely options, firstly dropping players who present a personality profile that fails to fit the team vision or providing training to the unit to accommodate the range of personality features, in line with the contemporary tools discussed. The latter however is time consuming, something that is a scarce commodity in the typical amateur elite or competitive recreational environments. It is also the case that the provision of such training, follow up and reinforcement would require the consistent presence of a sport psychologist and a capable, cognisant coach.

2.2.7 Communications & Conflict Management

There is widespread and longstanding consensus regarding the vital nature of communication in team sports. Effective communication, according to Sullivan (1993) is evident whereby team members are involved in an exchange in which listening to each other is followed by an attempt to build upon each other's contributions. In addition to verbal, non-verbal communications have been identified as a feature of team sport for the purposes of both communication and coordination; including eye contact, facial expressions, silence, physical contact, postures, body language, gestures and proximity (Renz & Greg, 2000).

Effective communication has consistently been recognised as potentially the most important facet of team operations (Yukelson, 1993; Carron & Hausenblaus, 1998; Dale & Wrisberg, 1996; Sullivan & Feltz, 2003). Ishak (2017) refers to the fact that a range of

tasks in the management of sports teams depend on verbal messaging for their delivery, including goal setting, motivational efforts, the provision of social support, knowledge sharing, role definition, and decision making. Indeed the essence of the coaching role has been identified as communication based; communicating with parents, players, imparting technical and tactical skills, interpersonal rapport building, mental preparation, providing feedback and building cohesion. The latter which is said to be essentially a communicative construct (Ishak, 2017) has a longstanding history of interest, as has been shown previously.

Ishak (2017) also importantly identified that interpersonal communications has a two way relationship with sports in that it is a vital component of sport but sport also presents an environment whereby communication effectiveness can be improved. Thus, given the pervasive and pivotal role communication plays in sports teams there remains relatively few studies investigating this team capacity and in particular a deficit of attention given to developing this cornerstone of team operations.

Sullivan's (1993) training intervention remains the main reference point in the literature. The overwhelming strength of this article presents as the level of detail given, which serves as a very do-able exercise for coaches or sports psychologists and without the need for multiple units of time investment. While no quantitative measures were taken to assess programme efficacy, some qualitative follow-up was compiled. Procedurally, the exercise involved presenting 7 intercollegiate coaches with a series of exercises to complete with their teams at least once during the season. The stated aim was raise athletes awareness of the own particular communication skills and to provide a developmental opportunity. In brief, exercise 1 aimed to establish a foundation for future team discussions and activities, including introducing the principles of effective listening and conducting listening based exercises culminating in devising a set of team discussion guidelines and

a self-assessment of each players listening deficits which would be shared with team members. Exercise 2 afforded players an opportunity to undertake a self-assessment of self-perceptions via an Introspection Worksheet. All profiles were anonymously redistributed to team mates to consider the profile in light of their team knowledge and feedback on it. Ultimately a team profile was compiled. The aim of exercise 3 was threefold, firstly to set the agenda for subsequent team building, generate commitment to processes and further develop listening skills. This was enacted using a paired interviewing exercise, devoid of note taking for the purposes of enhancing listening skills, followed by group feedback and culminating in a ranked priority list. Exercise 4 involved a team building activity requiring self-disclosure, feedback and interpersonal commitment; whereby players shared personal goals with team mates, feedback is offered to the player and opportunities for team colleagues to provide support are identified. Exercise 5 further progressed speaking opportunities for players as they were invited to discuss their hope and fears for the forthcoming season. The session was concluded with a discussion on the nature of risk taking. The penultimate exercise sought to further develop the team culture of open interaction. Players were invited to share stories of previous mistakes made to their small groups. All subsequently reflected on the self-disclosure experience in addition to the lessons learned from mistakes. The last session aimed to assess group functioning, participation of team members and the development of norms using a questionnaire to identify behaviours and plan alternatives. As part of the programme efficacy review if was considered that interpersonal communications skills training should be examined from 4 perspectives, specifically looking for the value of the exercise, describing reactions to the particular activity, increasing awareness of improvement areas and having an overall perception of the progress. As expected it was also highlighted that programme success would need to be assessed beyond the realm of a team's win: loss record.

A contemporary communication training program was carried out with Korean college level ice hockey players (Kwon et al., 2016). The study is written in the native language and therefore difficult to decipher by translation tool limitations. In summary both players and coaches were involved in the qualitative and quantitative study. A program targeting 8 communication factors was developed; specifically sympathy, trust, two-way verbal communications, respect, developing rapport, cohesion, firm expressions of opinions and training program communication. A total of 12x 90-100 minute training sessions were carried out with the overall aims of establishing interpersonal knowledge at a "Beginning of Communications" stage, followed by stage 2 entitled "Efficient Communications" and stage 3 entitled "Communicating To Become One Mind". Results of the programme showed improvements in satisfaction with communications, interactions between coaches and players, group cohesion and exercise effectiveness. Additionally increases in sympathy and both facets of cohesion were enhanced.

The key take-aways for the applied practitioner or coach from both intervention studies; firstly, is the fact that communications, beyond doubt, are shown to be integral to almost every aspect of the fabric of team sports environments and operations; secondly, such capacities appear, even in the reality paucity of studies published to date in sport to be immensely trainable. One such strand of team environments that relies heavily on the efficacy of communications skills is that of conflict management.

Conflict is defined "the process emerging from perceived incompatibilities or differences among group members (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). According to LaVoi (2007) "conflict is an inevitable, part of life and relationships" (p. 34). Feltz (1993) identifies that team success is often hinged on the ability to resolve inevitable conflicts effectively, while Ishak (2017) concurs on the inevitability aspect and suggests that the manner in which a team handles conflict may actually be more important than its ability to avoid it. There

are ample avenues for conflict in sports teams between various sections of personnel; internally within management, amongst backroom personnel, organisations behind teams, between management and players and often between player cohorts. Cranmer (2017) specified 4 trigger areas for team sports conflict potential, specifically performance issues, power and influence, logistics and lastly the communicative climate and culture. Two forms of conflict have been specified in the literature, both of which are known to affect performance negatively (Dreu & Weingart, 2003). 'Task conflict' refers to disagreements about the execution of the actual job of work, while 'relational conflict' refers to issues of an interpersonal and/or emotional nature (LaVoi, 2007). It is the latter which is considered to be particularly problematic (Schulz-Hardt et al., 2002). Antagonism and tension generated is said to distract players from performance, while emotional resources are devoted to reducing interpersonal issues as oppose to problem solving (Teakleab et al., 2009). A myriad of consequences of relational conflict are identified; undermining team cohesion and performance (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998), alienation, negative affect and potential dropout (Paradis et al., 2012).

Given the range of interpersonal problems caused alongside the inevitability of the existence of team conflict, conflict resolution competencies are deemed to be crucial for teams (Gilley et al., 2010). As such it has been identified as a regular feature of the remit of the sport psychologist (Holt et al., 2012). It has been suggested that sport psychologists should work to resolve conflict immediately where it occurs in their team environment (Weinberg and Gould, 2011, p.199). By way of intervening it has been highlighted that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach (Holt & Knight, 2012). However, some useful studies have been carried out which offer a sense of the potential pathways involved in conflict management interventions in sports teams along with some insights and recommendations for sport psychologists.

Holt & Knight (2012) investigated team conflict features and strategies in experienced and successful intervarsity ice hockey, field hockey, volleyball and basketball via a qualitative study. Many of the findings replicated those produced elsewhere. Again it was found that conflict occurred regularly on all teams. Task (performance) conflicts were a common feature, based in issues surrounding training, competition and playing time and most notably, they were often viewed as useful. Relational conflict was also found to feature. It was sometimes attributed to conflicting personalities and again found to be more dysfunctional than its task related component.

A wide range of approaches to conflict management was identified. Players expressed a preference for engaging senior players and captains as an early approach in terms of mediating relational conflict, as oppose to getting coaches involved. They were however prepared to engage coaches in issues around task conflict. Early season team building was suggested as a means of developing trust and communications in the team such that in the event of conflict resolution may be expedited. Structured team meetings were also identified as facilitative in that the whole team would be involved. Specifically as regards the role of the Sport Psychologist, players expressed a preference for engaging the Sport Psychologist in mediation if they were already working with the team. Also they identified the potential for the Sport Psychologist to structure the team meeting as oppose to the coaches. Study recommendations also suggested that the Sport Psychologist might train players in conflict resolution so that they may take a proactive role. It was also suggested that the Sport Psychologist might themself undertake specialised training in conflict resolution. Perhaps the most significant take-away from this study is the recognition by players of the value in pre-emptive team building programmes; which is valuable information in particular for the coach in terms of schedule planning, setting priorities and budgeting.

Vealey (2017) detailed experience of providing a long-term conflict resolution programme for a deeply conflicted intercollegiate basketball team which featured both interpersonal conflict and dysfunction of the team culture. Initial individual meetings with coaches and players revealed problems with task and social cohesion, cliques and player issues with coaching styles. Vealey recounts issues with gaining entry, resistance and scepticism from player cohorts. In response to an environment with a range of issues, a multimodal intervention programme was enacted with the aim of 'conflict management' as oppose to 'resolution', owing to the extent of the dysfunction. The intervention plan initially included the development of a team culture covenant and reframing task conflict as a positive. Following those, players were introduced to a practice of "inclusive behaviours" as a counterbalance for the clique culture. This permitted friendships and socialising between anyone in the team who desired, but outside of this all players must support all other team members. A "Smart System" team culture was then introduced which aimed to steer a growth, learning and improvement mindset so that irrespective of the challenges encountered, solution focused thinking and language would prevail. Personal-Disclosure Mutual Sharing was carried out as an exercise which aimed to develop communication, build trust and cohesion ultimately. The idea of 'failing forward' was introduced to progress through the various challenges and crisis experienced throughout the season. In assessing the programme efficacy, feedback from both players and coaches indicated that the intervention was helpful to the team culture, players provided a range of intervention feedback points and coaches considered the season successful irrespective of the challenges.

In considering the study and intervention from the perspective of the applied practitioner, the longitudinal nature of it and the degree of detail given makes it particularly insightful. It also highlights the breadth of the response needed to move a team unit from deep dysfunction to function, albeit not 'cured' and accepting from the start that this wouldn't

be a realistic outcome. It is most likely only in the intervarsity or some professional team environments that could facilitate such extensive consulting time over a season, which begs the question as to what a similarly afflicted amateur part-time team would do in response? Team interpersonal relationship initiation, development and health have been shown to be absolutely dependent upon the skills of effective communication and conflict management. It gives rise to the idea that communications and conflict management training may be essential modules included in initial coach education or at least continued professional development opportunities.

2.2.8 Leadership

The issue of and influence of leadership in sports teams is an immense and multifaceted one. Indeed the extent of its various factors is far beyond the remit of this research. Leadership is defined by Barrow (1977, p.232) as "the behavioural process of influencing individuals and groups toward set goals". It is within the fibres of this "behavioural process" that leadership has the capacity to effect team interpersonal dynamics. Leadership provision from the coach is one potential angle of influence while athlete leaders provide another; for example it has been identified that coaches decisions such as dressing room seating plans and mentoring arrangements have a direct impact on interactions amongst players (e.g., Carron et al., 1997; Chelladurai, 2007). A scoping review of coaches leadership and influence on sports team dynamics (Hague et al., 2021) revealed that interest in investigating coaches influence on cohesion has consistently burgeoned. For instance, Westre & Weiss (1991) showed that coaches whom athletes perceived as engaging in leadership via higher levels of social support, instruction, positive feedback along with an overall democratic leadership style were associated with higher levels of team cohesion. Such was also found by Gardner et al., (1996). Similarly Murray (2006) found that high school baseball and soccer coaches who rated strongly on

training instruction and positive feedback also achieved high levels of both task and social cohesion in their teams.

Athlete leadership within sports teams has been defined as "an athlete, occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal" (Loughead et al., 2006, p.144). Athlete leaders have been traditionally categorised as either of the 'instrumental' or 'expressive' function, with the former being task oriented and the latter assuming responsibility for interpersonal relationships (Bales & Slater, 1955), while subsequent thought accepts the integration of both functions of likely and doable (Rees & Segal, 1984). More recently, Fransen et al., (2014) distinguished four categories of athlete leader, including one purposed for social leadership. It was recommended that for the optimisation of both social and task cohesion, that several leaders be designated for specific roles.

When leadership traits and behaviours are taken into consideration, a number of findings suggest that coaches would do well to broaden their understanding of player preferences and factor this into decision making on designating leaders and including players on team panels. Numerous researchers, have identified leader selection decisions based on skill levels, experience and the likelihood of a player being selected to start games (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Loughead et al., 2006; Moran & Weiss, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2011; Yukelson et al., 1983) however Moran & Weiss (2006) identified friendship as a valued factor and Fransen et al., (2015a) found that team members perception of their closeness to the player leader was the most valued factor. Numerous other so-called 'soft-skill' attributes have been identified as key to the leadership profile, including good interpersonal skills, being trustworthy, demonstrating care for team mates and facilitating relationships and communications across the team (Price & Weiss, 2011; Dupuis et al., 2006; Holmes et al., 2010;). The question then arises as to whether coaches or sport psychologists can

intervene to train leadership skills in players. According to Cotterill (2016) athlete leadership development research is an underdeveloped area. Given that existing research identified the value of interpersonal and social aspects of leadership, this should form a central feature of future leadership development programmes. Cotterill (2015) developed such a programme for implementation in elite cricket. The aim of the programme was to develop future captains, provide leadership skill development and also personal growth and leadership development; the latter which was said to encompass effective communication skills, positivity, emotional control and respect. The programme, which was deemed successful, was underpinned by the National Governing Bodies' core values, several of which feature interpersonal aspects, specifically teamwork, honesty including open and reflective communications and respect. Additionally, the MBTI psychometric instrument formed part of the process and was identified by players as useful for identifying individual differences which would facilitate modifications to their leadership approach with team mates.

Social Identity Leadership has been a contemporary theme in the sports literature. The social identity approach comprising Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Turner et al.,'s (1987) Self-Categorisation Theory posits that a person's sense of who they are is based on their group memberships. Tajfel (1979) proposed that the groups to which people belong such as social class, family and sports teams were an important source of both pride and self-esteem. Groups are said to give us a sense of belonging to the social world. According to Turner (1991) when athletes define themselves in relation to a particular social identity this then proceeds to influence their values, norms, goals and behaviours towards group ends. Haslam (2004) describes the effects at a group level, including generating a sense of togetherness, commonality of purpose, coordinated actions and crucially mutual support across team personnel. This approach has a relatively short history in sport however it has gained significant traction. The burgeoning volume

of literature on social identity in the sports context shows it to be influential in increasing self-worth (Martin et al., 2018), greater collective efficacy (Fransen et al., 2014), better cohesion levels (Fransen et al., 2016) and overall better performance (Slater et al., 2018); therefore rendering it important to group development.

2.2.9 Teamwork & Team Effectiveness

Contemporary research on teams has re-orientated somewhat towards team effectiveness, teamwork and taskwork training. Like other areas of team development borrowed by sport, organisational psychology provides the origins of these practices also and efficacy in the domains of the military, academic, aviation and business has been shown (Beauchamp, 2017). It is clarified as a priority in this literature that teamwork involves more than cohesion development, with cohesion being considered an emergent state from interventions aimed at developing teamwork. It is said to involve a "dynamic process involving a collaborative effort by team members to effectively carry out the independent and interdependent behaviours that are required to maximise a team's likelihood of achieving its purpose" (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014, p.233). Subsequent to their theoretical and integrative review of teamwork in sport McEwan and Beauchamp developed the Integrative Conceptual Model of Teamwork Behaviours, that are shown to support individual and team performance outcomes. Teamwork according to the model, consists of two components, specifically 'management of team maintenance' and 'regulation of team performance'. Managing team maintenance is said to involve the behaviours which keep the team together, while the regulation of the team's performance involves the set of behaviours required to achieve the team goals. Interestingly, in terms of this body of work, team maintenance management behaviours are orientated towards the teams interpersonal dynamics and specify psychological support provision and conflict management strategies as key behaviours. The four stage process involved in performance regulation also features interpersonal behaviours. As the team progresses

through planning, execution, evaluation and adjustment stages a number of additional interpersonal behaviours feature, specifically coordination, cooperation, communication, reflection, problem-solving, backing-up colleagues and intra-team coaching.

While a detailed examination of the body of literature on teamwork and team effectiveness is beyond the scope of this chapter, the extensive range of interpersonal behaviours that underpin the process of teamworking give credence to the value in deliberately intervening to develop such competencies in support of group task work.

2.3 Coach Perceptions of Team Building

Newin et al., (2008) investigated the perceptions held by coaches of a youth ice hockey team building intervention, under the assumption that coaches opinions held value due to the fact that they are the ones frequently carrying out the intervention. Eight certified coaches were involved in the study. A range of team building activities were carried out either before or after practices of games guided by Carron & Spink's (1993) four stage framework. A pre-season introductory workshop was carried out with the coaches to inform them about the rationale of the study, the benefits of team building and also to introduce them to a resource website they would have access to throughout. Additionally they were introduced to the framework of choice and its relevance to the process. Lastly, the range of team building activities designed were introduced to the coaches. Activities prioritised fun and were designed around several teamwork, organisational, communication and cooperation tasks. The intervention required coaches to carry out five activities across the season, debrief with the players and also complete a pre and post intervention form. The form facilitated coaches in reflecting on the research process by completing questions on the teams record and environment, player interrelationships and also coach player relationships. They also reflected on the players response to the intervention. An additional strand to the study involved coaches being observed

delivering the activities by trained research assistants who would gather contextual and behavioural data. All coaches completed a post-intervention semi-structured interview to debrief the process. Results showed a high level of support for the team building intervention from coaches, including improvements in their own communication skills. Coaches also highlighted the sense of personal preparation they experienced and some felt that the programme should become a mandatory aspect of all teams activities, irrespective of mixed views on the transfer to the playing environment. Additionally from a team and player level increases in enjoyment, perseverance, problem solving, focus, team bonding and team working were reported. While this study provides evidence of the value placed in team building by coaches and an awareness within this of the value to interpersonal relationships, the fact that it was carried out in a youth sports environment raises questions as to the applicability to the adult sports team environment.

Bloom et al., (2003) investigated expert coaches perceptions of team building across a wide range of sports in the Canadian university sports system. Coaches from 29 different sports attended end of season focus group interviews. When asked as to their definition of 'team building' the following responses were recorded; cohesion, team dynamics, trust, camaraderie, team chemistry, synergy where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, pursuit of a common goal. Further analysis revealed a range of higher order themes, specifically fundamental elements of team building, the team environment, the coaches role and characteristics, team building activities, lessons learned, and the relationship between team building, cohesion and performance. In terms of the team environment, coaches referenced the perceived importance of a team environment which presents consistency, stability and positivity; something which was said to firstly be dependent on the coaches planning and organisational skills across the season. Player recruitment was considered as a priority in the process in terms of the likelihood of a potential incoming player buying into the coaches vision. Coaches also demonstrated their willingness and

the belief that it was a necessity to remove dissident players from their teams. Mixed feelings were expressed about the role of assistant coaches in team building processes, as some felt they were positively influential, whereas others feared the potential for mixed messaging. The theme of the "coaches role and characteristics" was stated as one of the dominant topics discussed. Coaches en masse agreed that team functioning and direction was their responsibility and as such they were aware that a strategic leadership style was pivotal to this, although not at the expense of being perceived as a dictator figure. The dynamic nature of their role across the season was also identified with the early season being an opportunity to set the tone and thereafter allow other leaders to emerge. Getting individuals to buy into the team concept was also noted as a key function of the coach which was enacted by engaging captains and veteran players of influence to transfer ownership, responsibility, communications and accountability duties to players to maintain effectiveness. Beyond athletic development, coaches also recognised their role in developing players as individuals.

The other dominant theme to emerge in the focus groups was that of 'team building activities'. Activities discussed were of a social, physical and psychological nature with many being undertaken for the purpose of improving cohesion. A wide range of activities included initiations, barbecues, potluck dinners, training camps; the latter which was highly rated by coaches for team building purposes in addition to its primary aims. Social activities were often targeted for early in the season. Institution specific activities such as a pride night, team jackets, lectures on the history of the team were also employed. Interestingly, one activity identified was having a sport psychologist talk to the team, which appeared to be designated as a once-off event, as opposed to them having a planning and longer term or embedded role in the team building process. Other activities identified as team building facilitative were allied to the physical and technical preparation of the team such as drills, tactical exercise and sport specific games.

Irrespective of the wide array of organised efforts listed by coaches, they also identified their feeling that cohesiveness wasn't something that could be forced and required more than one activity to bond a team. Logistically, team building was identified as particularly necessary at several time periods throughout the season. In addition to early season and training camps, prior to important competitions, subsequent to vacation periods and poor performances were all recognised as particularly high requirement. Succinctly, coaches identified that activities at these junctures would further bond the team and elevate emotions for the next phase. No single source of team building idea resources was identified. Coaches accessed the internet, books, articles, seminars, conferences, other coaches, players and trial-and-error.

In reflecting on the team building 'lessons learned', coaches orientated towards discussing positive experiences. Interestingly, a perspective which hasn't been frequent in the literature was that of exploring unsuccessful experiences with team building activities; was probed in this study. Happenings such as athletes getting lost on team runs, player initiations going wrong and bad weather hampering activities all featured. It was recognised that team building is not a one-size-fits-all exercise in that an exercise that worked well with one team didn't always transfer well to another. It was also identified that unforeseen events such as tragedy or injury sometimes bonded groups also. The relationship between talent, cohesion and performance also emerged as a theme but debate between the relative weighting of cohesion versus talent proved inconclusive.

In considering the findings of both of the studies presented above, it is apparent that coaches on the whole, across the sports investigated, recognise and appreciate the value of team building activities. The gap between both the youth sports coach and their expert counterpart appears with regard to the level of competence and confidence to plan and undertake team building activities. Also, interesting was the fact that specific diagnostics

to formally identify team deficiencies, particularly within the adult team environment were not a discussed consideration. Coaches appeared to rely on intuition and thereafter their research in order to decide what to address.

2.4 What Next For Interpersonal Relationships in Sports Teams?

As can be seen from the literature reviewed in this chapter, a range of factors are shown to impact on the initiation, development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships in team sports environments. Indication of the direction of progress in the area is given by a recent publication (Bedir et al., 2023) which examines the interplay of a range of factors, thus moving away from the investigation of stand-alone factors. The study explored the relationship between empathy, communication, cohesion and performance in competition in the team sport of curling. All of these variables have previously been shown to exert an effect on other variables or directly on performance. In this study it was hypothesised that communication would play a mediating role. The research involved 241 male and female athletes from 69 teams in the Turkish league. Data were collected using a range of instruments; the Empathetic Tendency Scale (Dokmen, 1988), the Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron et al., 1985), the Scale For Effective Communication in Team Sport (Sullivan & Feltz, 2003) along with a Personal Information Form prepared by the researchers. A statistically significant relationship was found between all variables. Results again confirmed that performance is positively impacted by empathy. Furthermore, further analysis showed that communication enhances the effect of empathy on performance and is therefore a mediator, as predicted. Cohesion, as has been the case in many previous studies, was shown in this study to positively predict curling performance. Consequently it was concluded that high levels of team harmony, empathy, cohesion and communications skills were imperative for optimum team performance. The study however did focus on the measurement and effect of the specified factors without

reference to the development of communication, empathy or cohesion in these teams, which may prove to be a useful progression for the research base.

Another interesting contemporary development which appears likely to influence applied practice subsequent to further research is the development of the Team Environment Assessment Inventory (Bruner et al., 2020). This instrument aims to provide a diagnostics tool in advance of intervention planning so highlight areas of deficiency for attention priority. From the point of view of amateur teams with limited time and financial resources to invest in this aspect of their development, when many competing necessities present; it has the potential to provide useful guidance. From the point of view of team interpersonal relations development specifically, the instrument has a number of elements which may provide useful feedback including role clarity and acceptance, leadership, team norms, togetherness, cooperation, interaction and communication.

Several studies presented in this chapter provide insight into the complexity of team sports environments and as a consequence operating in these units, be it in the coaching or sport psychologist role presents a host of challenges. What is apparent from the literature as a whole is that the vast majority of research remains focused on intercollegiate populations and thereafter the professional sector. Little is known about the requirements and processes involved in amateur competitive sports teams, which form the majority of playing opportunities for the masses. As such Chapter 3 will employ an action research methodology longitudinally to explore the interpersonal development of an amateur elite competitive team, replete with the challenges of limited time and resources. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 will seek to further illuminate existing practices of coaches in amateur team sports environments, at both elite and recreational levels in Gaelic Games; sports which provide the competitive infrastructure to examine both divisions.

Chapter 3: The Context Of My Study

3.1 The Context Of My Study

The origins of this study are founded in experience. Personally, from my experience of working in GAA team environments for in excess of 20 years in various roles with a range of club, collegiate and intercounty teams, it seemed apparent that interpersonal relationships constituted the foundations on which the capacity to build all else resided. In my early team experiences in a previous role, I witnessed absolute dysfunction of interpersonal relationships on a regular basis. I observed players being held against the dressing wall by their throat by coaches. In my Sports Therapist role, I prepared bloody leg wounds for transport to the Accident & Emergency Department when hurleys were thrown in anger across dressing rooms ending club careers i.e. ending hobbies on the basis of interpersonal failures. I've arrived home early after training sessions abandoned subsequent to physical altercations and friendships erased in the act. I've tended to a player who had his ear helix bitten off by an intercounty colleague while competing in their respective club roles and thus heading for hospital and court subsequently. I've also seen the other side, environments where players rally to support grieving team mates, players abandoning their honeymoon plans for the team when championship fixtures change; farming players getting help to finish the silage at 2a.m. so that they can sleep before tomorrow's first round of the West championship. Various roles for me came with varying levels of responsibility and influence to affect change; not least of which was realising that 'team building' was more than a half day or one day undertaking and as such broadened my perspective to consider the maintenance aspect and the day to day presenting opportunities. I think the challenge of that opportunity and responsibility has kept me addicted to team sports jobs for so long and spurred the genesis of this thesis. Beyond the realm of applied experience, the literature both captivated and frustrated me

in that I wanted to and needed to know what was happening in other environments, however I could often find 'real world' problems or limitations with the material I read when it came to application.

Several pieces of literature informed this study. Chapter 2 demonstrated the breadth of elements that potentially constitute an interpersonally functioning sports team unit. However, it appears that a chasm may exist between much of the literature on a range of interventions and key features of team environments, as specified by Yukelson (1997) in that teams have been identified as highly dynamic in nature, subject to fluctuations of goals, roles, interpersonal concerns and individual perceptions, throughout the course of a season. However, much of the literature to date on interventions under the umbrella of team building has presented a range of limitations in terms of catering for such team dynamics; limitations that most often haven't been addressed in terms of real world team environments. Examples of such limitations include focusing on pre and post quantitative measurements of an isolated target area, failing to include consideration of any other environmental influencing factor outside of often a short term intervention. A wide range of stand-alone methods have been investigated for much of the history of team building in sport.. Interventions have had widely varying time spans and a heavy focus on collegiate teams. The cohesion obsession has been identified as a dominant theme previously.

As a consequence, it renders accessing relatable literature and evidence based findings difficult for coaches and sport psychologists. Indeed much of the aforementioned quantitative literature would be beyond the statistical literacy levels of coaches seeking guidance resources. Chapter 2 also demonstrated that the literature appears to be responding to the range of extant shortcomings, as contemporary literature moves towards consideration of the interplay of a range of factors (Bedir et al., 2023). In line with this,

Chapter 3 aims to contribute to this progression by exploring the practical implementation of team building, over the course of a full season, with the following aim and objectives;

3.2   Study Aim:

This action research programme aims to improve the interpersonal functioning of an elite adult level competitive GAA team over the course of a season.

Objectives:

a. Apply & monitor acute interventions in support of the interpersonal functioning of the team across 3 research cycles

b. Apply & monitor chronic interventions in support of the interpersonal functioning of the team across 3 research cycles

3.3   Methodology - Action Research

The study will adopt an action research methodology with the aim of bypassing many of the limitations specified above.

Action research, the product of Kurt Lewin's (1946) work in group dynamics, emerged from recognition that research for the sake of producing books was insufficient. Stringer (2007, p.1) defines action research is "a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives". While Bradbury (2015, p.1) describes it as a "democratic and participative orientation to knowledge creation that brings together action and reflection, theory and practice in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern". According to Clements & Morgan (2015, p.143), this facilitates "prolonged engagement with the research question". It is said to focus on specific situations and finding localised solutions to local problems, as opposed to generalisable explanations. It is recognised for its capacity to

improve the quality, meaningfulness and fulfilment of work carried out by those who engage in the process. Problems which benefit from an action research approach, according to Stringer (2007), are often those based in the intricate interaction between people and the situations and events of the social aspect of their lives. It is therefore said to be a "participatory process" (p.6) which should include all those affected by the issue. Schmuck (1997) contrasts action research with traditional research methods. It is said to examine one's personal actions, as opposed to examining what others are doing, seeks continuous change instead of explanation of truth. It is considered reflective as opposed to objective and focused on planned change instead of the quest for knowledge. One is personally involved in the process in this case whereby previously they would have been removed from the research site and ultimately is reveals relationships and pattens instead of cause and effect relationships.

Action research has been affirmed as in line with the pragmatic paradigm. Hammond (2013) states that pragmatism offers a view of knowledge which is generated in a process of action and reflection on action when focusing on a problem. Firstly, it is said that pragmatism, as it considers knowledge to be both consequential and fallible, is central to the core motivation for action research. Secondly, it is said that we learn about our world via our actions and interaction with it, however as new knowledge is created our reality is then modified, which creates new information needs and problems; akin to the cyclic process that is action research. Thus as a quest for knowledge about how to improve a situation and not a search for an absolute truth action research and pragmatism find compatibility.

Procedurally several action research models have been produced; generally with a common pattern. Susman (1983) designed a 5 phase model featuring a process of "diagnosing, action planning, taking action, evaluating and specifying learning". Kemmis

& McTaggart (1988) produced a similar 4 step model featuring "plan, act, observe, reflect" stages and similarly Whitehead & McNiff (2006, p.8) designed the "action-reflection" model consisting of 5 stages involving observation, reflection, action, evaluation and modification. Stringers (1996) model consists of a 3 stage format which forms the 'look, think, act' procedure. It is the latter which will operate as the model of choice for this study.

Action research fundamentally alters the position of the researcher from that of 'expert' status to a facilitator or consultant whose role it is to act as a resource and catalyst for stakeholders and their aim. According to Stringer (2007) also key aims of action research are the development and maintenance of social and personal interactions that are life enhancing for all involved and conducive to community formation. In the context of the study in hand then there is an apt degree of fit between the consultancy position and team building aim of the stakeholders involved.

Action research has been employed in a range of organisation types and industries to date including education (Leitch & Day, 2000) and medical settings (Hart & Bond, 1996). Despite its potential in sports environments, given their social structures, to date there has been surprisingly fewer studies employing the methodology than expected (Clements & Morgan, 2015). Specifically within the field of sport psychology action research has been used to explore youth perceptions of the psychosocial sports climate (Gould et al., 2012), coach athlete interactions in competition (d'Arripe-Longueville et al., 2001) and coach learning (Clements & Morgan, 2015). Beer suggested that action research was particularly suited to team building owing to the longitudinal process involved in the activity. Geertz (1973) highlighted the benefits of action research to team building in facilitating obtaining both rich data and thick depths of description across the extended time frame. As detailed in Chapter 2, Rovio et al., (2012) employed the method with an

ice hockey team for team building purposes over the course of an entire season. Thus an action research design was selected for this study, suiting the pragmatic paradigm, the longitudinal time frame and the social environment involved.

3.4 Target Group

The team are a male Under 20 intercounty GAA team comprised of a fluctuating 31-36 players throughout the season. Three players were based with the Senior Intercounty team and therefore infrequently present. The age range within the team was 18-20. A high degree of homogeneity existed amongst playing personnel. A pre-existing degree of familiarity existed amongst some players as a result of playing together at Under21, minor level, underage development squads, club team mates or club rivalries.

Management- The management team consisted of a team of 4 men aged between 40-60 years, 1 manager, 1 coach and 2 additional selectors. The manager and coach had 5 years of intercounty management and coaching experience respectively. Both are also former intercounty players. Neither had undertaken any GAA coach education qualifications. The coach has a BSc. in Strength & Conditioning.

Backroom Personnel- a small cohort of backroom personnel worked with the team throughout the year, specifically a strength & conditioning coach, kitman, physiotherapist and a goalkeeping coach. A nutritionist, doctor and performance analyst attended on an ad-hoc basis.

Role of the Researcher- As team sports psychologist I assumed a practitioner- researcher role throughout the year. This was enacted in an immersion approach, whereby I was present on an ongoing basis (81 from 84 total sessions). On occasions where simultaneous team events were scheduled for different cohorts of the team i.e. a challenge match and

gym session, I was typically present at the match at the request of management with the exception of one session that was gym mandated.

A purposive sample of 8 from the player, management and backroom cohorts participated in the semi-structured interviews. This was comprised of 4 players split between younger and older players and a range of experience at this level. The other factoring influencing player inclusions was that of the likelihood of the player remaining on the panel throughout the year. The remaining sample was made up of the manager, coach, strength & conditioning coach and kitman. The manager and coach were selected for their central position and decision making authority. The strength & conditioning coach and kitman were selected on account of their ongoing proximity to the player group, with the latter having access to the dressing room at all times. The following identifiers were applied to the sample for anonymisation and are used hereafter for the sample, as per Table 3.1

Table 3.1. *Identifiers for Qualitative Data Sample*

Players	P1	P2	P3	P4
Management/Backroom	MBK1	MBK2	MBK3	MBK4

3.5 Ethics Approval & Informed Consent

Ethics approval for the study was sought and approved by the University of Central Lancashire. Informed Consent (Appendix A) was sought from all participants and an Information Sheet was issued to all (Appendix B). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to participants along with the right of withdrawal. There were no withdrawals. Players who were dropped from the squad were naturally withdrawn going forward, however their existing quantitative data were retained with permission.

3.6 Action Research Plan - Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected over 3 research cycles throughout the course of the season from January to August, as outlined in Table 3.2 using 'mixed methods' approaches. Employing Stringer's (1996) 'Look, Think, Act' protocol (Figure 3.1), the following action research study took place throughout the season. Throughout the 3 research cycles, "look" will be described as the 'observations', "think" will be described through the 'rationale', 'literature' considered and 'reflections' and "act" will be based in the detailed intervention descriptions.
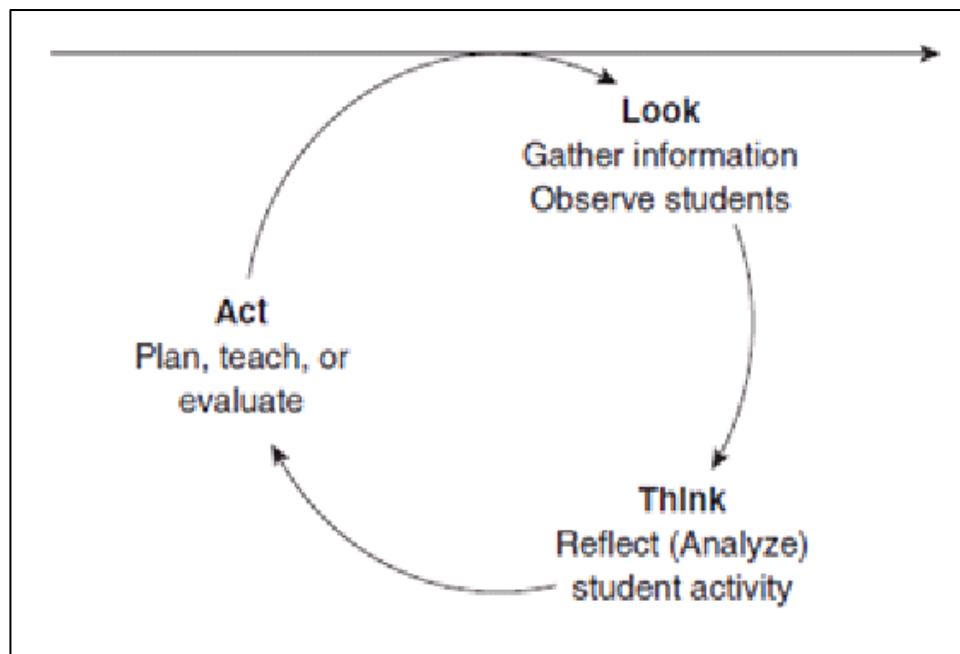
Figure 3.1. *Stringer's Actions Research Model*

3.6.1 Mixed Methods

Mixed methods research involves the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a research study (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017). It facilitates a more thorough assessment of a situation. In the context of this study it is considered that the use of a single method, particularly the use of quantitative methods alone, would severely lack the kind of insight from the range of stakeholders involved, while the use of

qualitative methods only would make any comparison with existing literature more difficult. A convergent parallel design was adopted whereby both data sets would be considered simultaneously for areas of congruence or divergence. Additionally being pragmatic about my position as an applied practitioner in a competitive environment, a primary objective of my time with the team was to gain sufficient insight, to both feedback to management and inform intervention decisions, such that competitive needs were optimised; as such the mixed method approach was facilitative in giving regular detailed insights. This is in line with the argument of Thrower et al., (2019) who espoused the pragmatic value of mixed methods for insight and practitioner utility. Mixed methods research is increasingly being used in sport psychology (Ryba et al., 2020).

3.6.2 Qualitative Research

While much debate has taken place about the definition of qualitative research, its lay man understanding essentially boils down to data which does not reside in numbers and statistics. Instead it aims to understand the likes of experiences, ideas and opinions in a detailed and insightful way and often includes interviews, focus groups, observations and surveys. In line with the stated aim, a qualitative research methodology will be adopted. Smith & Smoll (2016a) designate qualitative research methods as consisting of "a set of diverse options for researchers, enabling them to understand issues in an enriched manner", with the options said to be spread across the interpretation, the nature of the data collection and ultimately the analysis method (Smith & Sparkes, 2016A). The volume of qualitative research being published in sport psychology has notably increased as data analysis methods become more formalised and thus more accepted and also as the range of benefits become further apparent. Qualitative studies are compatible with the pragmatic paradigm, which according to Patton (2005, p.153) focuses on the practical understanding of concrete, real world issues of human significance. Furthermore, Giacobbi et al., (2005) refer to generating knowledge that is of a practical use. The three

principles of pragmatic enquiry quoted by Kelly & Cordeiro (2020) have clear applicability to the objectives of this qualitative investigation, namely the emphasis on generating useful, actionable knowledge which solves problems, the process of inquiry of an experiential process and vitally a recognition of an interconnection between experience, knowing and acting. Given the explorative process of this study, it renders the chosen qualitative method apt for the chosen paradigm. Semi-structured interviews were employed to investigate the perceptions and experiences of the manager, coach, 4 players and 2 backroom team members in this study. Semi-structured interviews according to Sparkes & Smith (2014) utilise a pre-planned interview guide, comprised of mostly open questions in order to give direction to the conversation. It facilitates a degree of flexibility while maintaining a relatively tight structure that insures that the key information is provided. It also allows sufficient flexibility that respondents can elaborate with further thoughts and feelings. A number of strengths and weaknesses of this method are presented. It is said to give greater control to the respondent than the fully structured format, allowing greater detail and description along with the opportunity for deeper revelation of the meanings attached to experiences. As regards negatives, the most frequently identified one pertains to the relative difficulty of analysis. Also the presence of barriers between the interviewer and respondent may prevent some experiences from being shared (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). I decided on this method due to its flexibility and my anticipation that information provided by coaches likely be particularly interesting and relevant and therefore require further probing capacity.

Observations were employed to record the behaviours of the team members, their actions and interactions, in the context of the team environment. Observation according to McKechnie (2008, p. 573) "is one of the oldest and most fundamental research methods approaches. This approach involves collecting data using one's senses, especially looking and listening in a systematic and meaningful way". Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that they

require prolonged engagement in the field with persistent observations. My position as sport psychologist, immersed in the team, aptly facilitated this.

3.6.3 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research involves a process of gathering numerical data. It's aims include producing statistics, proving correlations, measuring and making predictions amongst others and is enacted by carrying out the likes of experiments, surveys, systematic observations or examining secondary research. While it facilitates the processing of large amounts of data, hypothesis testing and comparing results, it is often critiqued for its lack of insight and context. Quantitative instruments used in this study were the Group Environment Questionnaire (Widmeyer et al., 1985) and the Social Identify Questionnaire for Sport (Bruner & Benson, 2018).

3.7 Instruments

3.7.1 Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ)

The GEQ is the most extensively used measure of cohesion in sport and exercise psychology research (Eys et al., 2007). Based on the Conceptual Model of Cohesion (Carron et al., 1985), the key features of this instrument is its multidimensional representation of cohesion. Four dimensions are presented specifically Attraction to Group-Social (ATG-S), Attraction to Group-Task (ATG-T), Group Integration-Social (GIS) and Group Integration-Task (GIT). Carron et al., (1985) showed the instrument to be reliable, content valid and internally consistent. Structurally the GEQ presents 18 items to score on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. Of the 18 statements, 12 are reverse scored. The first 9 items assess the team members feelings about their personal involvement with the team and features statements such as "I do not enjoy being part of the social activities of this team" and "I am not going to miss members of this team when the season ends". The second 9 statements relate to their

perceptions of the team as a whole and offers team members a range of statements such as "our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance" and "out team would like to spend time together in the off-season". The scoring range on the 4 dimensions is as follows;

- ATG-T = 4- 36
- ATG-S = 5- 45
- GIS = 4- 36
- GIT = 5- 45

The frequency and range of studies to date that have employed the GEQ, were in no small part an influencing factor for its adoption for this study, such that comparisons could be made. Additionally I had previously used this questionnaire with minor teams, which some players would have been part of, thus there would have been an element of familiarity with it and given the success achieved with the regimen previously I felt that engagement would be optimum. A copy of the GEQ is available in Appendix C.

3.7.2 Social Identity For Sport Questionnaire (SIQS)

Social identity has traditionally been recognised as one global construct (Terry et al., 1999). A second approach to conceptualising as a multidimensional is presented, whereby it has been reframed with three dimensions (Bruner at al., 2014). Firstly, "ingroup ties" refers to perceptions of similarity, bonding and belongingness with fellow team members. Secondly, "cognitive centrality" addresses the importance of being a member of the group and thirdly, "ingroup affect" considers the individuals positive feelings about their membership of the team (Cameron, 2004). "Ingroup ties" and "cognitive centrality" are said to be cognitive in nature while "ingroup affect" works at the affective level (Bruner & Benson, 2018). Furthermore according to Bruner et al., (2017) personal skills, social skills and initiative have been positively predicted by 'ingroup ties'. "Cognitive

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centrality" has been shown to moderate the relationship between personal behaviour and group norms (Benson et al., 2017) and 'ingroup affect" has demonstrated that prosocial team mate behaviours are linked to cohesion factors (Bruner et al., 2014). Structurally the questionnaire consists of 9 statements, 3 to assess each of the dimensions. Respondents are required to rate on a Likert scale from 1-7 ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Statements include "I feel strong ties to other members of this team", "overall, being a member of this team has a lot to with how I feel about myself" and "generally I feel good when I about myself as a member of this team". Regarding scoring the instrument, 2 options are identified. It can be scored either as a global construct from the total score or it can be scored based on all 3 dimensions depending on the degree of insight required. For the purposes of this study all 3 scores will be presented based on the latter rationale. The scoring range for each dimension is as follows;

- Ingroup Ties = 3 - 21

- Cognitive Centrality = 3 - 21

- Ingroup Affect = 3 - 21

- Social Identity Global Construct = 9 – 63

The SIQS is a relatively new instrument and as such hasn't presented very often in the literature. My rationale for selecting it is based on the degree of insight provided by each of the dimensions into players' inclinations towards the team unit and their own position in that. According to (Bruner et al., 2014; Rees et al., 2015) the strength with which individual players identify with their team has a range of implications such as a positively association with team performance (Murrell & Gaertner, 1992) and a range of positive individual outcomes which includes their self-worth, commitment levels, perceived effort and personal and social skills (Bruner et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2017). A copy of the SIQS is provided in Appendix D.

3.8 Cycles

Three research cycles were enacted based on 3 natural time periods during the season, as specified in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. *Season Schedule & Research Cycles*

Stage of Season	Time Frame	Duration
Early Year	Cycle 1	January - Early April
Pre-Championship	Cycle 2	Mid April - Mid June
Intra-Championship	Cycle 3	Mid June- Late August

3.8.1 Cycle 1

Overview

This phase started on the first week of January and continued until the second week of April when intercounty activity paused for a round of club championships to take place. The team assembled on average 3 times per week for approximately 75-90 minutes of training time. This phase was predominantly gym based, with a series of home and away challenge matches also. The developmental aims for the cycle at the outset were based predominantly on discussions with management and then findings from the literature. Establishing solid team foundations, operating methods and goal setting were initial priorities. Data collection in Cycle 1 were quantitative, observational and qualitative based on discussions with management. An emergent area to address was identified as player interactions.

In terms of management's workshop content, to the best of my knowledge they did not access sport psychology or coaching literature in support of their content. However, research does support their areas of inclusion and this was evident to me during the

discussion stages when they're plan was revealed. Support is found in the literature for the use of goal setting as a team building modality. Carron & Hausenblas (1998) demonstrated that goal setting a multifunctional in this regard in that it improves role clarity, role acceptance, maintains focus on required behaviours, motivation, interest and effort levels. Senecal et al., (2008) found perceptions of cohesion to be higher in a team cohort who had employed goal setting versus a control. They inherently understand the value of specifying a team vision and this is supported by the literature (Desjardins, 1996; Fisher & Thomas, 1996). Stevens (2002) confirmed the functions of a clear team vision in terms of uniting the team and bolstering emotional commitment. Norms or 'expectations' as they were labelled by management, have been shown to be effective in clarifying expectations for players. Team mental models, according to Cannon-Bowers & Salas (2001, p.228) are "knowledge structures held by members of a team that enable them to form accurate explanations and expectations for the task and in turn to coordinate their actions and adapt their behaviour to the demands of the task and other team members". Crust & Lawrence (2006) found a positive relationship between team processes, performance and the existence of team mental models. Exploring and specifying the task and team interaction mental models at this juncture would be efficient and provide a useful collective starting point.

Procedure

Subsequent to engagements with management a 'Team Formation Workshop' was planned for the first collective occasion. The workshop was held at the Strength & Conditioning coaches gym and lasted just over 2hours. There were 31 players in attendance (none of the senior cohort), management and a number of backroom team members (physiotherapist, strength & conditioning coach, statistics). Prior to arrival of players the Management & Backroom cohort were issued with an Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Informed Consent form (Appendix A). On arrival players were issued

with an Information Sheet (Appendix B) and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A), all of which were duly completed. The workshop consisted of 2 sections. Management's section took 30 minutes and was delivered by the manager and coach. No input from players was invited or offered. It covered the following;

a.   their team vision & playing style

b.   expectations of players and team norms

c.   a provisional schedule

d.   goal setting (predominantly outcome goals)

e.   panel selection policies

My workshop took approximately 80 minutes. An introduction was given which explained the purpose of the workshop in terms of team development, the input required from players and an overview of the research process that would be intertwined throughout the year. Questions were invited either publicly or privately, but none were forthcoming. Players were subsequently divided into pre-designated small groups of 5-6 players. Each group was issued with flipchart sheets and markers. The sheets already had headings in place to denote discussion topics. Approximately 20-25 minutes were given per topic, both to generate content within the respective groups and thereafter for each group to present their material. The same 2 presenters operated for each of the discussion tasks in each group, typically 2 experienced players assumed the roles. The rationale for the particular discussion topics was based on developing a team mental model of the training and championship requirements, in recognition of the spread of relevant experience amongst the full cohort. As such three team mental model development areas were specified (Figure 3.2)
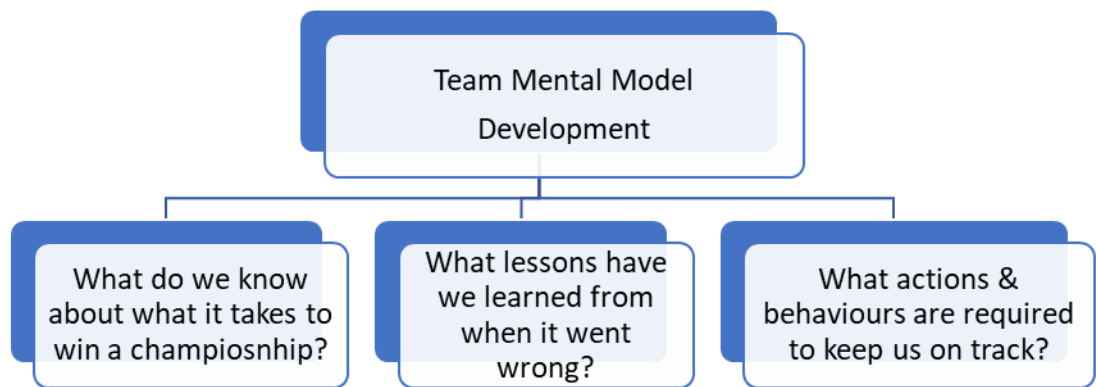
Figure 3.2. *Team Task Mental Model Development Structure*

In relation to the first discussion area, 5 groups worked on this, while the group that had been on a previous intercounty panel addressed the second topic based on their experience of an unsuccessful campaign. All groups then proceeded to develop the contents of what became the 'No Dickheads On Our Team' Player Charter. Subsequent to the player group presentations, I concluded the workshop by summarising the key points generated and further explaining the breadth of my availability and offering to them. The manager then concluded the workshop by reiterating the potential of the team and the achievement possibilities.

Reflection on action

Within the 24 hours after the workshop, I engaged in a written reflective exercise. Key points recorded included observations of initial clustering amongst players on arrival, keen and quiet body language during managements workshop content and an initial intuition that there was a little gap between those who had won the previous All-Irelands at Under21 and minor grades and those who had failed. Group work appeared efficient and charge was taken by a couple of players in each group, maybe giving an early indication of leadership potential and willingness. Further observations were deemed necessary to assess progress on the spread of interactions, clustering amongst club mates, potential leaders. Figure 3.3 presents the timely full content of the written reflection.
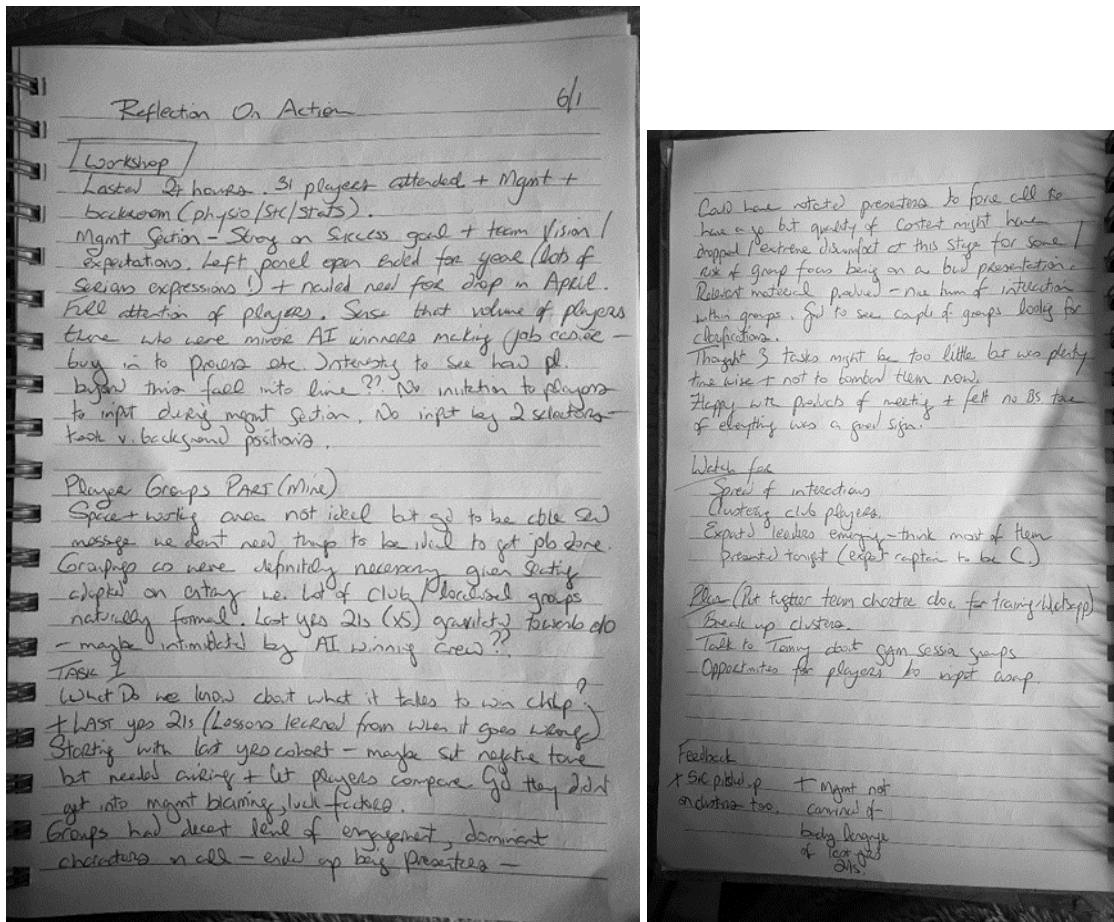
Figure 3.3. *Team Foundation Workshop- Reflection*

Reflection For Action

It was unclear as to whether another collective block of time would emerge, let alone be necessitated, between early January and the club championship break in April to facilitate an acute event to address the interaction, communications areas identified above. I was also mindful that not too much could be inferred regarding a deficit either, beyond initial, natural tentativeness that would go with the new environment until further observations could be made. Deliberately structuring the training environment to facilitate increased interactions and promote communications and leadership opportunities were deemed as the next logical step. I felt that this needed to be enacted immediately while players were learning the norms of the team environment. As such as some chronic interventions were initiated;

As this training period constituted a high volume of strength & conditioning sessions in the gym environment, this presented a potential opportunity to maximise interpersonal interaction. Spatially the gym is a tight environment requiring players to be in physical close proximity to each other as they work in pairs and small groups on equipment set-up, spotting lifts and conditioning exercises would all potentially provide interaction opportunities. Smith & Moore (2019) have since published an article suggesting a range of ways that the strength & conditioning facility can be structured to forge team relationships including effort encouragement, technique feedback, role modelling and inspirational motivation.

Observation

The first week of gym sessions were observed to assess the actual degree of clustering and communication levels. The clustering partnerships matched those observed at the Team Formation Workshop i.e. based on pre-existing relationships. Similar observations were remarked upon by the strength & conditioning coach.

Consequently, a conversation took place regarding structuring those sessions to interrupt the status quo within the constraints (i.e. some pairings were necessary based on height, strength matching needs for exercise purposes). Across the following sessions, myself and the Strength & Conditioning coach alternated between the following 'interruption methods'; no club mates, pick the matching number, pick the matching colour, pre-selected partner list posted, partnering experienced & novice players.

Observation

It was anticipated that this would lead to a dampening of the gym noise level initially, however it didn't really beyond the first 10 minutes where they audibly focused on discussing task work elements. The first observable significant increase in informal interactions was evident at the end of week 3 subsequent to a small group, competitive, anaerobic conditioning workout to finish the session. Spent players, at the upper limits of their endurance, freely engaged, slapping backs, helping each other up from the floor, passing around water bottles and cursing in mutual agreement.

b. Performance Profiling

Butler & Hardy's (1992) Performance Profiling is a tool that allows performers to identify, rate and monitor a set of skills required for performance efficacy. A range of benefits of Performance Profiling have been identified, including increasing performer self-awareness (Weston et al., 2005), heightening motivation (Jones, 1993), developing confidence (Butler et al., 1993) and performance monitoring (Butler & Hardy, 1992; Weston, 1995). Dale & Wrisberg (1996) examined the effect of performance profiling on team communications in a volleyball team with diagnosed deficiencies in the area and found that the exercise increased communications particularly with coaches. While a task focus was the central aim of the communications, the importance of a willingness and capacity to actively engage in team discussions, be comfortable with speaking up, articulating their viewpoint and thus supporting coaching and performance development aspects.

Performance Profiling was introduced in mid-February, once challenge matches were scheduled. Formalising team discussions and feedback was deemed to be warranted from both a coaching and communications development angle, specifically process goal setting, team focus, planning training and encouraging awareness and ownership of performance monitoring by players. From a communications development perspective,

performance profiling offered the opportunity to address all. I ran the exercise personally on the first undertaking with players and management present. In terms of initiating one primary aim I added 'communications' to the profile as the first area to be rated and formally targeted. Players, subsequent to minor discussion amongst a few settled on a rating of 4 on a 1-10 scale. As it was deemed to be a component fully under our control a target of 9 was set for the following 2 week period and opportunities to increase verbal communications in the team on-site environment were identified by players. Management also added some desirable development areas during training drills. Management and players proceeded to add other technical and fitness based goals to the profile for that time period. To conclude 2 players were selected by me, who I was confident would be comfortable and capable, to carry out the subsequent profiling exercise and players were informed that this task would rotate throughout the year.

Reflection On Action

Amongst the key points observed from the performance profiling exercise (Figure 3.4) were the fact that it wasn't anticipated that there would be widespread input to the first exercise. There turned out to a slightly wider array of inputs than predicted, including from 1 new young player and 1 established player who would have been considered extremely introvert at minor level; which was encouraging. A follow up boosting action was considered at the next pitch based opportunity which was a challenge match on the following Sunday morning whereby players would be asked on the spot to rate communication levels during the warm-up, half-time, post-match and spot room for improvement.
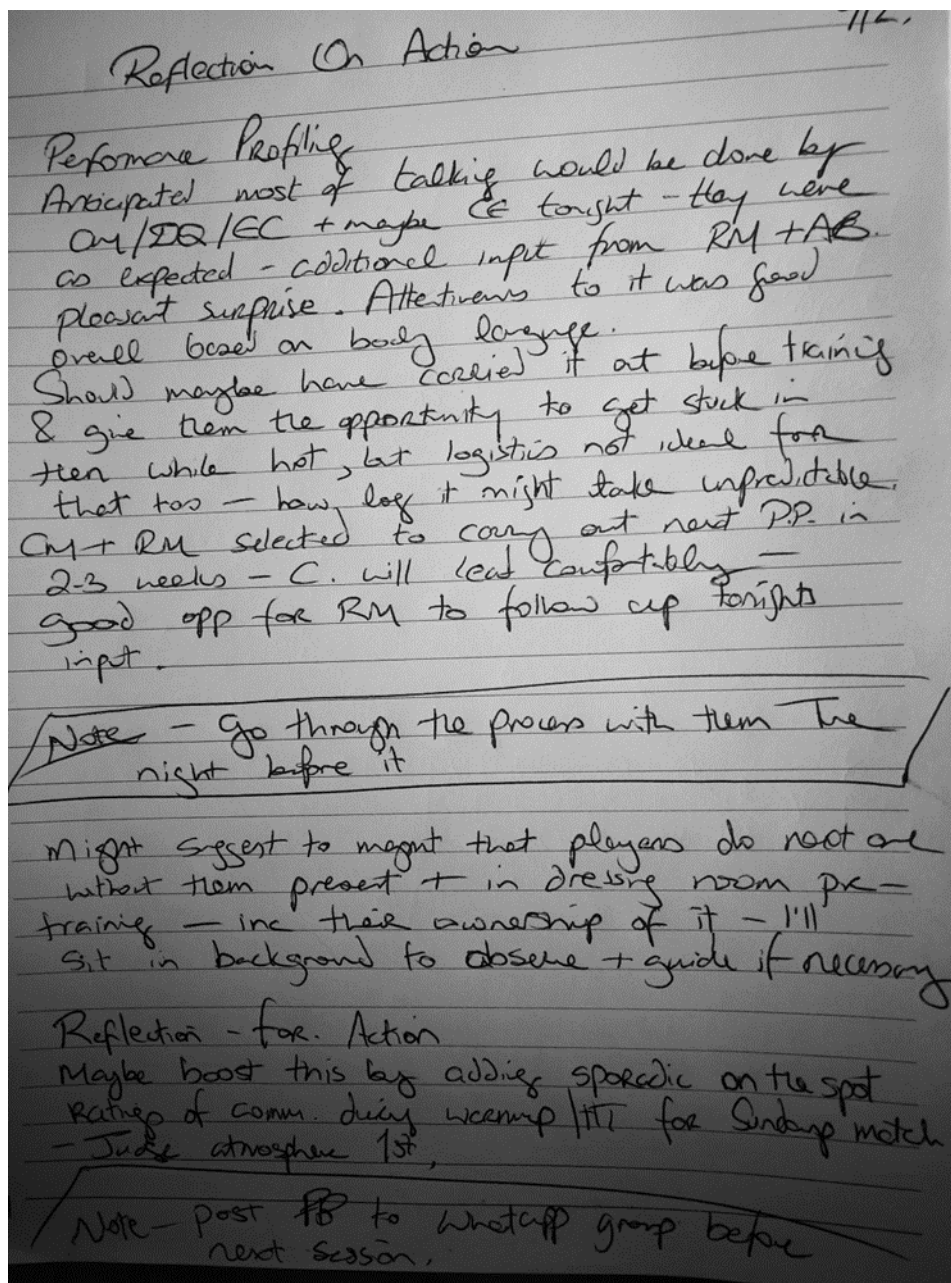
Figure 3.4. *Reflection On Action Performance Profiling*

Observations

I asked players twice on Sunday to rate their communications levels on a scale of 1-10,

firstly after the warm-up, where it was given a tentative 6 and again after the match. The

on-pitch communication in the first half was given a 5 and in the second half (subsequent

to a strongly worded half-time performance review overall) it was rated at an 8 (but

downgraded to a 7 by the coach). The spread of communications was limited to an average of 5-6 players, which wasn't unexpected.

The Performance Profiling exercise was carried out twice more before the end of the cycle. On the second occasion it was as planned carried out by players in the dressing room, post-match and without the presence of management. An increase in the spread of inputs, the freedom of debate and disagreement was readily evident (& informal banter) and put down to the absence of management. The lead player admirably kept it on track. Overall minor improvements were registered by players. Two further players were selected as instructed by the presenting duo this time to carry out the next exercise. On the final week of the cycle, at the penultimate training session, the exercise was repeated, in the presence of the coach, and again demonstrated minor improvements (+2 for communications) which he concurred with.

c. Organic Opportunity- Transport

In addition to the deliberate interventions planned during this cycle an organic opportunity for interactions arose once challenge matches started in that cohorts of players were carpooling from local areas and college cities together and occasionally via team bus. It was observable that players arriving to venues together like this were freely interacting on arrival informally.

Quantitative Data

A week before the end of the cycle i.e. early April, the GEQ and SIQS were issued to players in paper form to be completed at home and returned at the next session. All questionnaires were returned within the week. The following results were calculated for Cycle 1;

Group Environment Questionnaire

Table 3.3 presents the Cycle 1 results for the 4 GEQ subscales;

Table 3.3. *Cycle 1 GEQ Subscales Scores*

	Attraction to Group-Social	Attraction to Group-Task	Group Integration Social	Group Integration Task
Total Scores	1314	1123	906	1316
Mean	38.64	33	26.64	38.70
SD	4.95	2.61	1.08	4.33
Total Available	1530	1224	1224	1530

The data from the GEQ shows that a sound base exists across all subscales. The mean ATG-S and GI-T were closely matched, indicating that a collective task focus predominates, but which is closely followed by social attractiveness of the group. It is notable that the lowest mean, although still relatively strong for the formative state of the year, is that of "Group Integration Social". This would appear to be congruent with observations on the spread of interactions and communications thus far as a developing aspect.

Social Identity Questionnaire for Sport

Table 3.4 presents the Cycle 1 results for the 3 SIQS subscales;

Table 3.4. *Cycle 1 SIQS Subscales Scores*

	Total	Mean	SD	Total Available
In-Group Ties	586	18.9	2.77	714
Cognitive Centrality	538	17.35	2.95	714
Ingroup Affect	625	20.16	2.01	714

The data from the SIQS shows a sound base amongst all subscales. "Ingroup Affect" presents the lowest discrepancy, while "Cognitive Centrality" presents the highest. Ingroup affect has been linked with both cohesion and prosocial teammate behaviour (Bruner et al., 2014) and therefore appears to be in line with the strong cohesion scores displayed on the GEQ.

Summary & Reflection

Based on observations, ongoing reflections and quantitative measures, on the whole it can be said that this phase of team building was satisfactory in terms of its aims. I had a sense that previous All-Ireland successes with a cohort of the team was an influencing factor in that new players were exhibiting high levels of motivation and compliance, perhaps due to the perception that they were in an ambitious and tested regime. Coinciding with this too, returning players were observed to be modelling several required behaviours, having a strong sense of the nature of the task.

Two interrelated areas for attention were identified for attention; communications and tendencies towards familiarity clustering. Communication deficits manifested as limited group wide communications, small group communications based on pre-existing

relationships and on-field communications limited to a small cohort of players. During the early part of Cycle 1 progress may have been slightly hampered by a fluctuating number of players at midweek training due to college GAA competitions and the viability of travelling to away matches from college. This isn't considered to be significant however.

The Team Formation Workshop was the sole acute intervention during Cycle 1 and is considered to have been effective in its objectives. In hindsight, in light of the patterns observed since, it provided an accurate sense of group interactions status. Outputs such as the Team Charter and the Team Mental Model material generated suggested that the experience base in each group was influential. Behaviours since the workshop have, as far as can be assessed, been congruent with the charter.

Performance Profiling was initiated with a few objectives, both task, leadership and communications based. The trend in terms of communications was an increase in breadth and debate, some of which were tempered by the presence of management. The player duos taking charge of the exercise to data have been effective. I think the execution being role modelled by the first duo, and in particular the lead player set the scene going forward for this. The goal is to maintain this practice into Cycle 2.

Breaking the clustering habits was the other main objective of Cycle 1. I think it was necessary to force this initially as oppose to ask it from players and it was observed by myself and the S&C coach to immediately alter the range of interactions. The level of informal interactions increased consistently from this also.

Results from the quantitative assessments at the end of the cycle were surprising overall in that they were stronger than anticipated, although they weren't expected to be weak. It isn't considered that social desirability scoring practices were operating, as players

completed them away from the collective environment and it was confirmed for players that results were most useful and facilitative to us and the team goals (and therefore also more threatening to the opposition) if they were accurately filled in so that we could plan forwards. No significant area of deficit presented on either scale. Mindfulness was maintained of a forthcoming panel cut and the policy of having an open-ended panel on interpersonal dynamics going forward, thus the need to maintain momentum with developing the team was apparent, and the potential need to affect socialisation of newcomers was kept in mind. Additionally, it would be the case that 3 members of the Senior Intercounty Team would re-join the panel in Cycle 2 or 3 depending on the progress/ or lack of progress of the senior unit. This would potentially lead to de-stabilising relationships as club mates, friends would be cut from the panel and others cut from the match day squad to make room for seniors whom they had less familiarity with.

3.8.2 Cycle 2

Overview

The pre-championship phase commenced after the club championship break and consisted of field-based sessions and further challenge matches in the lead-in to championship. The team assembled on average 3 times per week for approximately 75-90minutes of active time. The developmental priorities for this phase, which emerged from Cycle 1 were the further development of the quantity, spread and quality of interpersonal interactions. This phase also featured a drop of players from the panel and the addition of 3 new players. Data collection during this cycle were both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative data were gathered via issuing the GEQ and SIQS to players. Qualitative data were amassed via a series of semi-structured interviews and ongoing observations. Results overall showed further progress in terms of interpersonal interactions and closeness.

Procedure

Both the acute and chronic modalities were employed during Cycle 2, which took place from late April after the club championship break until mid-June.

Acute

Away Day- A 'team building away day' was held prior to the start of the championship. A multi-activity schedule was planned. Specifically with the goal of further developing interpersonal relationships, several strands of activity were planned and are detailed below;

a.A pitch based training session

On route to the main venues this took place in the morning. This was a late addition to the schedule and one which I wasn't aware had been added until that morning. It was apparently motivated by the coach judging a need to work on some technical aspects. The change in schedule was frustrating in that it had the expected knock-on effect of causing time pressures on other activities. Additionally, from my perspective it potentially caused interference with a main aim of the day, which was to 'detox' from the rigours of the training environment.

b. Novelty Bus Activity

The 'Team Mate Most Likely To…" activity was carried out, firstly with the aim of demarcating the change in focus on the day from pitch based tasks work to a lighter, social agenda. Procedurally, a series of sheets of paper were circulated requiring players to indicate via a 'tick the box' the team mates they deemed most likely to best represent the particular statement on the heading of the sheet. A mix of sports traits (e.g. "player most likely to win an All Star Award in future", "player most likely to be the county senior

manager one day", "player most likely to step up to take a last minute do or die penalty"), identity (e.g. "volunteer to mentor a new player", "represent the team at a media event") and novelty (e.g. "be adopted by the coach", "seduce a nun", "infiltrate a Ladies Football dressing room", "model in London Fashion Week") based statements were used. A range of novelty prizes were presented by the manager to the winner of each category.

c. Indoor Multisport Centre

Players were strategically divided into groups of 5-6 for a circuit of competitive multi-sport challenges in a dedicated facility. Team design was based on separating club team mates and observations of interaction patterns during Cycle 1. Each group comprised a mix of players from competing club teams, young panel members, experienced panel members and more overtly extroverted players. Score cards were kept by each group throughout the rotation and I took a series of photographs throughout the day which could be used subsequently as a reminder of the team bond generated.

d. Small-Group Task Work

A multi-functional activity was designed for the afternoon session. The player groups from the morning activity were retained. I held an activity briefing with all players. The activity was designed to be time pressured, however owing to the additional morning pitch session this was made more acute. A selection of players had been asked to bring laptops on the day and groups were issued with basic supplies (tin foil, cardboard, tape, scissors). A dual strand task was designed which involved the physical creation of a full sized trophy from basic supplies (i.e. cardboard, tin foil, tape, scissors), secondly each group had to produce a newspaper match report suitable for the local newspaper the week after the first round of the championship along with a preview of the provincial final and staged photography, featuring their trophy, to suit the match account. Teams were

encouraged to start by holding a small-group meeting to decide on a strengths based division of labour. Their body of work was mounted on card to be assessed and scored by management to determine the winning team.

Figure 3.5. *Small Group Task Work*

The rationale for the contents of this activity was multifaceted. I sought to further expand and challenge the interactions amongst the groups, from the morning's novelty activity to more intensive and task based ones. It was envisaged that the need for group personnel to engage regarding the division of labour would help develop communication capacities which may be transferable to the likes of half-time in matches. It would also require a player or players to assume leadership roles in initiating discussions and structuring the

plan of action, while all players would need to indicate as to their perceived strengths. In writing the articles they would envisage the performance necessities in detail. Accounting for the additional time pressure, groups worked diligently on designated tasks. There was a keen sense of competition observable amongst groups throughout. At the conclusion of the task work, a debrief was held and centred on referencing the cooperation and communication experiences of groups.

e. Team Meal

The day concluded with a team meal. At this juncture no further sub-groupings or seating specifications were imposed. This was by design, to observe the degree of clustering amongst players. Tables were circular with 8 seats per table. Players, as the arrived in the dining room, tended to sit with those they arrived with or wherever vacant spaces presented. No patterns beyond this were evident. There was plentiful informal interaction visible at tables. The final debrief and prize giving ceremony was presented by the manager, the latter which had the desired humorous effect.

Reflection On Action

The key points from the post-activity reflection provided in Figure 3.6 in relation to the Away Day centred on the observations and effectiveness of the various strands. The change in the schedule, to include a pitch session was frustrating and created the expected time crush throughout the rest of the day, especially on the afternoon task work as that was the only block of time within our full control. The group separation for the multisport centre was effective and interactions within the group were free flowing throughout. The newspaper activity was challenging for the groups and resulted in some interesting observations regarding the division of labour mostly. Output from the activity were good overall and insightful as regards assessing the volume of championship coaching

messaging which had been absorbed in recent weeks. In observing the new players throughout the day, their assimilation appeared to be well progressed. The importance of maintaining momentum from the day was very apparent at the end of it.

Figure 3.6. *Reflection In Action Team Building Away Day*

The multisport centre wasn't the first choice of activity for the morning session. My personal preference would have been an Adventure Centre such as Kilalloe in the region. However, it was significantly more expensive and thus cost-prohibitive given the use of the hotel for the afternoon.

Chronic Interventions:

a.Performance Profiling

Performance Profiling was maintained from Cycle 1 and continued to take place on a 3-4 week basis (depending on match play) and was carried out in the dressing room by an alternating duo of players. The trend of decreasing input by myself and management was maintained in favour of player ownership of the process. An increasingly wider cohort of players were typically now engaging. The work of the captain to steer focus on interactions during the activity was observable. The last profiling exercise before championship incurred a change. In conjunction with the coach, it was agreed that he would select 2 players to complete it, whom he knew and players would expect to be championship starters. So the vice-captain and goalkeeper were selected.

b. 'Captain's Chat'

The 'Captain's Chat' was introduced as an additional regular training communications, motivational, leadership and goal setting activity. As a follow-up task to the Away Day, for the purposes of maintaining momentum on engagement amongst players, I spoke to the captain. He suggested a players meeting. This however was something I knew management wouldn't be keen on. For confirmation purposes I communicated the idea to management who confirmed their discomfort with the idea. With the same essential aim, but a less formal environment, I suggested that a pitch based huddle might suffice. It assumed the format of a brief pre-training period whereby players only would be present

in a huddle at the bottom corner of the pitch, out of earshot of management or backroom personnel, myself included. It would be called at the behest of the newly appointed captain for players to set their intentions for the session, remind the group of the current Performance Profile target areas, self-motivate and discuss any salient issues amongst the player body. In practice it took place every 3-4 sessions.

An increasing interest has emerged in the literature in athlete leadership in sports teams. Athlete leaders have a significant impact upon satisfaction, cohesion, and team dynamics (Cotterill & Fransen, 2016). Four leadership roles have been identified, specifically field task and motivational roles and off field social and external roles (Fransen et al., 2014). The captain in this instance was selected for a range of attributes, including the ability to lead at least 3 of the 4 aforementioned functions, with the exception maybe of off-field social. Therefore formalising an activity in which he could operate regularly, without the need for considerable blocks of time was important. This would also facilitate additional personnel contributing. There weren't a wide range of natural or willing leaders on the team which would justify or perhaps risk formally dividing functions.

c. Organic Opportunities

Further organic social interaction opportunities emerged in addition to collective travel arrangements. Pitch based training sessions commencing meant earlier arrival on-site at the training ground and thus more unstructured dressing room time together. In addition post-training sit-down team meals commenced. The canteen area consisting of long, rectangular tables the length of the room were facilitative of multiple players in a communicative radium of each other and players self-seating randomly as they emerged from the dressing room. Therefore players naturally tended to rotate who they were in proximity to.

Reflection On Action

The initiation of the 'Captain's Chat' activity was I think the best alternative to the captains desire to hold a player meeting. It needed to be something simple and not become a cumbersome distraction to organise at this point, with championship looming. I think giving them full control of it from that point and personally stepping back was important in terms of their championship self-management. Performance Profiling, needed the timely championship focus in too. While the rotation of players was going well, in hindsight, the change to the presenters was the right decision. There was more coach input to the exercise than anticipated.

Quantitative Measures

In the last week of Cycle 2 a repeat set of quantitative measures were obtained using the GEQ and SIQS. The results of the questionnaires are presented in Table 3.5 and Table 3.7. At this juncture the 3 senior intercounty players had returned to the Under 20 panel, however they were not issued with the questionnaires, having returned for the last 2 sessions only before the instruments were given out.

Table 3.5. *Cycle 2 GEQ Scores*

	Attraction to Group-Social	Attraction to Group-Task	Group Integration Social	Group Integration Task
Total Scores	1164	974	849	1181
Mean	38.8	32.46	28.3	39.36
SD	5.14	3.84	4.64	4.67
Total Available	1395	1116	1116	1395

Results from the GEQ for this cycle mirror the trends observed in Cycle 1. Again GI-T presents as the highest subscale, followed closely by ATG-S. GI-S is again the lowest subscale.

Table 3.6. Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 GEQ Mean Comparison

	Attraction to Group- Social	Attraction to Group- Task	Group Integration Social	Group Integration Task
Cycle 1 Mean	38.64	33	26.64	38.70
Cycle 2 Mean	38.8	32.46	28.3	39.36

When the means for the GEQ from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 are compared, upward trends in 3 of the 4 subscales are evident. GI-S demonstrated the largest increase, although still considered a moderate change to overall stable data. Only ATG-T showed a decrease at a minor level.

Table 3.7. *Cycle 2 SIQS Scores*

	Total	Mean	SD	Total Available
In-Group Ties	610	19.67	1.68	714
Cognitive Centrality	536	17.29	3.90	714
Ingroup Affect	632	20.38	1.25	714

Both 'ingroup' subscales again present as the highest scoring areas. The trends from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 are shown below.

Table 3.8. *Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 SIQS Mean Comparison*

	In-Group Ties	Cognitive Centrality	In-Group Affect
Cycle 1 Mean	18.9	17.35	20.16
Cycle 2 Mean	19.67	17.29	20.38

Table 3.8 shows a high degree of stability between Cycle 1 and 2, with only minor changes in trends. Minor increases are shown in both 'In-Group Ties' and 'In-Group Affect', while a small decrease is evident in 'Cognitive Centrality'.

Qualitative Assessment

During the final 10 days of the cycle a series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with the manager, coach, kitman, strength & conditioning coach and 4 players. The interview schedule is provided in Appendix E. Interviews took approximately 15-25 minutes and were carried out at the training ground, club premises and a hotel lobby. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions took on average 3.5 to 5 hours. This lead to a high degree of familiarity with the data set early on. The data were analysed using Inductive Thematic Analysis, using Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6 Stage Process. Braun & Clarke (2006) refer to thematic analysis as a method that organises data in a minimal way and provides a rich description in the process of identifying, analysing, interpreting and reporting of themes. The inductive approach, according to Patton (1990), renders the themes as strongly linked to the data, as such it involves coding the data devoid of aiming to create a fit with a coding frame or indeed the researchers preconceptions. It has the capacity of highlight similarities and differences in the data and bring an outcome to a wide range of data. The capacity to engage in

interpreting the data is recognised as a key strength. A feature of thematic analysis which is considered to be particularly pertinent to this investigation and paradigm is the accessibility of the research results to the general public. Procedurally, Braun & Clarkes' (2006) 6 Stage Inductive Thematic Analysis process was enacted. Stage 1 is known as 'familiarisation'. This requires the researcher to become deeply familiar with the data set via repeated reading and scanning for patterns and meanings. The process of transcription involved in the post-interview phase is said to be an ideal means of achieving this aim (Reissman, 1993; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Stage 2 involves the 'generation of initial codes'. This involves commencing the process of organising the data into meaningful groupings by working through the data set, identifying segments of interest and patterns and highlighting them for further categorisation. Stage 3 progresses onto the 'search for themes' through a process of sorting identified codes into initial themes and considering the relationship between themes as well as the various levels of theme. In stage 4, 'reviewing themes', a refining process is undertaken; collating and separating themes whereby there should be a clear distinction between themes. This is achieved via two stage process, firstly all of the collated extracts for the themes are re-read in consideration of the presenting pattern. Secondly, the whole data set is examined to assess the validity and accuracy of themes and identify whether anything has been missed during the coding process. Stage 5 involves 'defining and naming themes', which in essence refers to identifying what each theme is about and the aspect of the data that it captures, what is interesting about it, how it fits into the broad area of research. It culminates in issuing a concise and accurate name to the theme. Ultimately stage 6 involves 'producing the report', which tells the story of the analysis by adding relevant data extracts to provide succinct insight. In an effort to maintain quality throughout the process Braun & Clarkes (2006) "15 Point Checklist For Good Thematic Analysis" (Braun et al., 2016) was

consistently referenced throughout. Appendix F provides a sample of the working stages of the thematic analysis process that was replicated throughout the thesis.

Kelly & Cordeiro (2020) refer to 3 principles of pragmatism in organisational research settings specifically the production of actionable knowledge, the acknowledgement of the link between experience, knowing and action and valuing inquiry as a experiential process. All 3 are inherent also to this project. Morgan (2014b) identifies that under pragmatism the emphasis lies in interrogating both the value and the meaning of data acquired in terms of its practical consequences. This necessitates flexibility of investigation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005) and analysis techniques. Inductive Thematic Analysis facilitates this pragmatic process in that it allows interrogation of the data, with a responsive, open mind to peoples experiences and needs in a social setting. Two objectives were salient in analysing the interview data, firstly establishing the current status of interpersonal relationships in the team and secondly establishing the influencing factors. The results are presented below;

Table 3.9. *Cycle 2 Interpersonal Relationships Status According To Players*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Interpersonal Relationships Developed -Interpersonal Relationships Advancing	Interpersonal Relationships Positive Status
-Some divide persists -Don't know new players	Interpersonal Relationships Sub-Optimal
-On-Field Communication Methods Now -Communication Active Off-Field -Lack of Conflict	Team Interactions Positive Status
-Communications Reticence -Limited Players Leading Communications	Team Interactions Sub-Optimal

Four Higher Order themes were emergent. Two themes were considerably stronger, specifically 'Interpersonal Relationships Positive Status' and 'Team Interactions Positive Status', deriving from 16 and 14 raw data units respectively. Therefore it can be stated that according to the player cohort the status of interpersonal relationships are considered to be predominantly positive. In terms of influencing factors the following were emergent according to the player cohort.

Table 3.10. *Interpersonal Relationship Influencing Factors According To Players*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Acute Interventions -Chronic Interventions	Interventions
-Player Initiated Activities -Informal Activities	Non-Intervention Activities
-Proximity Opportunities Externally -Time Together -Pre-Existing Relationships	Incidental Factors

Three higher order themes are presented. Players considered 'interventions', 'non-intervention activities' and 'incidental factors' to have influenced the status of interpersonal relationships at this juncture. The largest theme, narrowly, was 'non-intervention activities', which included lower order themes of activities initiated by players outside of the training environment and activities at training which fall beyond the remit of deliberate interventions.

Table 3.11 presents the Cycle 2 inductive thematic analysis results for the management & backroom personnel cohort regarding the status of team interpersonal relationships.

Table 3.11. *Cycle 2 Interpersonal Relationships Status According To Management &*
Backroom

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Tight Group -Interpersonal Knowledge Advanced	Interpersonal Relationships Positive Status
-Clustering Tendency -Incomplete Bonding	Interpersonal Relationships Sub-Optimal
-Increase in Informal Communications -Increase in Formal Communications -Leadership Emerging	Team Interactions Positive Status
-New & Younger Players Quiet -Communication to Management Poor -Slow to Develop On-Field Communications	Team Interactions Sub-Optimal

Four higher order themes were emergent, which show a level of disagreement amongst
the management and backroom cohort on the status of interpersonal relationships,
however considerably the strongest theme was 'interpersonal relationships positive
status', followed by 'team interactions positive status'.

Table 3.12. *Interpersonal Relationship Influencing Factors According To Management & Backroom*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Acute -Chronic	Interventions
-Dressing Room -Canteen	Informal Activities
-No Big Personalities -Leaders Emerging -Backroom Observations Info to Management -Panel Cut Positive	Personnel Factors
-Pre-Existing Relationships -Time Together	Incidental Factors

Four higher order themes were emergent, namely 'interventions', 'informal activities', 'personnel factors' and 'incidental factors'. Both 'interventions' and 'personnel factors' were the largest themes emerging from this cohort.

Reflection

Taking into account the quantitative data, observations and qualitative data at this juncture interpersonal relationships overall can be said to be said to be advancing and incomplete. The cycle commenced subsequent to a 2 week adjournment of intercounty activity. Throughout this fortnight club championships took precedence. This involved inter-club rivalries coming to the fore and intercounty team mates retreating to the position of opposition in many cases across the panel. Cycle 2 also featured a panel drop, resulting in 5 existing players leaving the team permanently. It did however feature 3 new incoming young players. It was considered that this trio of events could potentially destabilise or lead to a regression in interpersonal relationships.

Interventions in Cycle 2 were both acute and chronic in nature. Performance Profiling was maintained and observations indicated continued increase in interaction throughout the exercises. Insight into the utility Performance Profiling as a communication tool was described by a young player;

> We have leaders inside and we're able to stand up, try to bring the boys into it. Even when we were inside in the gym, you and <the manager> got the young lads to get up and talk, get them out of their comfort zone, see what they have to say, their ideas. (P4)

It is also possible that this perception was more localised to novice panel members than their experienced counterparts who perhaps were more used to leading group interactions and may have had more of a task focus during the exercise.

'Captain's Chats' were introduced to maintain momentum on player group task and motivational communications. This activity was enacted regularly, involving only players. Therefore a degree of curiosity existed amongst management and backroom personnel as to the specific content. The nature of the communications in these brief interactions was recounted by a starting team member. This interview excerpt also indicates progress towards the objective of developing player ownership of their championship process;

> As we get together before training, we need to hold back, say to each other we'll drive this on from the start. Don't give them a reason to be giving out about anything, just go straight for it, it's our journey, we'll be the ones talking, take the journey. (P3)

The selection of captain was a managerial decision based on knowledge of the player from the previous year and observations of his behaviours throughout Cycle 1 this year. Opinions were sought by management from a number of backroom personnel and there was early and full consensus on who should be selected. The designated player

demonstrated overt leadership behaviours and a willingness to consistently interact throughout. Such was confirmed by a central member of the backroom team; "I don't think the captain is afraid to attack in the group. That's known" (MBK4). From the practitioner point of view, on the whole and given the limitations on time, I felt that these intervention formats presented the most pragmatic means of structuring interpersonal interaction and leadership development opportunities, alongside a sense of devolved team ownership.

The acute intervention consisted of the 'Away Day'. The multi-part schedule was designed to achieve a range of aims from providing an antidote to the rigours of the training environment, socialising opportunities and further developing communications and leadership opportunities through task work. While the late addition of a pitch based training session was a personal source of annoyance and frustration, I decided not to raise the issue with management unless they broached the topic, give the impending championship pressures of a knock-out first round match. Three other members of the backroom also expressed the opinion subsequently that it was an unwarranted and tiring addition to the day.

In advance of championship both quantitative measures were issued again. The results overall demonstrated small increases on both with the exception of the GEQ subscale 'Attraction to Group-Task' and the SIQS subscale 'Cognitive Centrality'. Only minor decreases were observed in both. 'Cognitive Centrality' which refers to the importance of being a member of the team and 'Attraction to Group-Task', suggests that the necessity to intensely refocus on club priorities and reside in that familiar environment for a period of time, may have disrupted the intercounty identity development and goal focus temporarily. Perspective must also be maintained on the fact that it was a very slight regression and not absolutely unexpected owing to both that re-acclimatisation to the

intercounty set-up after the club championship break and maybe more so potentially to the change in personnel in the panel. In terms of the regression in 'Attraction to Group-Task' I also considered that there may be a period of familiarisation and settling into a new, attractive but highly task focused unit for new players, especially with the pressures of championship looming. 'Cognitive Centrality' is said to be moderated by the relationship between group norms and personal behaviour (Benson et al., 2017). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the process of a settling into a new established team unit, learning team norms and becoming attached to the status of group membership requires time. It was however deemed positive that only slight decrements were demonstrated. Additionally, as was confirmed by insights from the qualitative data, the incoming players were considered by both players and management-backroom to be a good fit, albeit quiet. It is also noteworthy that interview data from a member of management indicates that a slight regression in team dynamics was perceived subsequent to the club break before quantitative data confirmed such; "I've seen it dip a little since we came back, part of our plan is to revisit as we get closer to championship" (MBK1).

The sense of a positive interpersonal relationship trajectory was identified by several parties in the qualitative data, supporting the trends found in the qualitative data;

> It has got an awful lot better. Lads I wouldn't have known at the start of the year, I know now. You'd meet them at <senior intercounty> matches and you'd be chatting away compared to before Christmas, you'd have just said 'well' and walked on. You wouldn't have actually stayed and talked to them on a personal level. (P2)

In a similar vein, it was stated;

> You come into training, it's not as if you sit beside the one person. I can go into the dressing room now and know that it doesn't matter who I sit beside, I can talk

to that person. I wouldn't feel awkward. There's a strong bond there at the moment. (P4)

From the management-backroom perspective, a similar perception presented. It was felt that;

> They seem to be a tight bunch. Dressing room banter is spread evenly and everyone is involved. As with every dressing room we have a few lads more vocal than others, but no egos. There is always a laugh in the dressing room after training which is a good sign. (MBK4)

While the dominant themes demonstrated that it was felt that interpersonal relationships were positively developing, it wasn't universally held. A member of the management-backroom cohort felt that there was further work to do as regards a complete cohesion; "I think there's still a bit of a divide in the group, 4 or 5 groups, couples, people finding it hard to get to know other lads in the group? Age? Slow getting going" (MBK2).

In examining pitch specific aspects of interpersonal development a high degree of confidence existed amongst players in their knowledge and prediction abilities on each other. The typical sentiment is exemplified as follows;

> It's been coming on over the last while. When we first started everyone is not an individual but ya mightn't spray it to a lad 10yards away in case it breaks down and it'd look bad on you. Really clicked the last few weeks, we're more trusting of each other, all comes with time and training together. (P2)

Similar views are expressed from the management-backroom;

> On field habits, that's definitely grown over the last few weeks through us trying to point out a few things as well "this is a physical player, he should be getting a higher percentage of high balls in his corner'. That has improved, they are copping onto that a bit. Certain players require a different type of ball into them, can get

different match-ups right, I'd say they'd predict it fairly decently, 60-70%, more to come. (MBK1)

In terms of interpersonal interactions similarly the dominant feeling amongst both cohorts was that it was improving and with room for further improvement. When asked specifically about communications within the player group it was felt that "it is good, has improved an awful lot since the start of the year, it can get better. It's slowly but surely getting there. It's still positive". (P1).

Developments in informal interactions beyond training were also highlighted;

> Relationship wise we're brilliant, get on like a house on fire. We have a Snapchat, Whatsapp group. We keep up to date with each other, know what's happening with each other. We do meet up with each other the odd time. Boys going off playing golf together, its very good. (P3)

From the management-backroom perspective a similar observation of development was conveyed;

> They're communicating well. It would be a concern that it's the same 5-6 that's driving it. But I don't know it you'll ever get the whole lot contributing at the one time. I think there's a lot more contributing now that earlier in the year. (MBK2)

As regards informal interactions it was observed from a management-backroom viewpoint that;

> At the end of sessions you notice the camaraderie is starting to come. The seriousness is done during the session, laughing and messing as they walk back to the dressing room is more apparent. You can see the team building and bonding coming. Very obvious in the beginning the small groups sticking together in the gym. We were conscious of separating them, they are young and making that initial contact with someone was hard for them, now mixing more, pushing each other on, definitely an improvement there. (MBK3)

The scope for improvement in formal interaction was also recognised perhaps above and beyond that considered by the players;

> If players could speak up it could be better. It is good. More communication amongst themselves, it could be better. There still is people on the panel self-conscious of saying something wrong in the group. I think lads feel if I say this I could be wrong, but there are no wrong answers. It's hard to get that our of people, takes a while. People realise after a while. In training drills now you hear lads saying something that you wouldn't before. It's improving, getting better, just at a slow pace. (MBK2)

There theme of 'room for improvement' was further expressed in terms of interpersonal relationships by management-backroom, which appears to be at odds with the degree of development expressed by players;

> ….more comfortable, natural with each other. I don't think yet they're a massive, strong, brotherhood, 'I'd die for ya bond', they don't know the little personal details, the backgrounds, they're very unwilling to open up about that stuff I'd say, hopefully that'll come over the next few weeks. (MBK1)

As an extension of investigation into interpersonal relationships status, the existence of team problems and conflict was broached. No conflict, beyond pitch-based physical incidents (which would typically be viewed as positive occurrences signalling a state of readiness), had been observed or reported by any party thus far. Personnel factors were identified as the influencing factor in the lack of debilitating problems, specifically selecting players who were deemed to fit with the team identity, culture and playing style;

> You can't have too many problems and reach goals. We haven't had a major problem, always have little ones. It's going well at the moment. We had good ambitions and goals from the start and don't have dickheads in the team. I'd say among themselves they'd probably sort it out fairly quick. I think they're a nice, honest group and there's no big personality. Nobody who would want to cause a problem. If something did arise through circumstance they'd be reasonable and

honest lads to sort it out fairly quickly. They'd be good or not let a problem fester in the group. (MBK4)

When the range of influencing factors were investigated it was clear that much congruence existed between the perceptions of both parties with recognition of the role of interventions, informal activities and incidental factors. Some contrast however emerged. 'Informal Activities' were highly rated by players as influential, more so at this juncture than formal interventions; "you get to know lads on bus journeys to matches, meet them outside of training, talking about something else outside hurling, not always hurling talk, good to have a social side too" (P1).

In contrast the management-backroom cohort were less likely to recognise the full range of informal activities operating. Also a point of differentiation, they identified "Personnel Factors" including player selection policies and the observations and opinions of backroom personnel, as influential to their ways of operating. Furthermore it was noteworthy that both players and management-backroom cohorts perceived the panel cut as being a positive influence on the interpersonal development of the team; something which legitimately could have been expected to have the opposite effect. Both parties considered that the security afforded to the survivors of the cut would enhance their willingness to engage and interact above and beyond any sorrow experienced for the loss of departing team mates; "lads would be disappointed if a friend was dropped but that's the way it is, you have to get on, the best lads make the panel and that's the end of the story" (P2). An insight is given as follows into the mechanism operating for a player in this regard;

> Definitely, earlier on in the year people are more individual, looking after their own interest till they can relax a small bit. From the initial drop lads can have the comfort to talk to lads, talk to lads more, comes from playing matches too, being

in situations too where you're flat out running, talking afterwards about how fucked you are, get to know their personality and what they're like. (P1)

That security factor was also identified by management-backroom as a potential catalyst;

It has changed dramatically since Christmas. It's got tighter and smaller in numbers which gives guys a little bit of security to know they're in our plans. Fellas are inclined to enter into more dialogue with each other when they know they're there for the longer haul. (MBK2)

Reflection For Action

In terms of informing actions going forward into Cycle 3 a number of considerations are salient. Quantitative data shows a high degree of stability. This may suggest that a ceiling effect is operating which would indicate that a topping up approach may be the most appropriate when there is not a deficit position that required addressing. Operational mindfulness is also maintained of a few pragmatic adages, specifically "the further you go the more things stay the same" and "find what works and do more of it"; all of which have been touted to some of these players at previous grades. A further key consideration is the time availability once championship commences, particularly for the purposes of scheduling acute interventions. In terms of intervention planning, I have been considering some alternatives. Management have tended to remain 'hands-off' in terms of inputting ideas thus far beyond the 'away day' morning activities. My preference would be to further expand the leadership capacity of the team by designing a leadership training programme drawing on the studies referenced in Chapter 2 for content and structuring guidance. Additionally, being familiar with communications development exercises referenced previously, I considered these may be a useful addition to expedite developments in these key team areas. While management expressed support for them, gaps of time in which to pursue them during Cycle 2 didn't present, particularly with the club break featuring.

3.8.3 Cycle 3

Overview

Cycle 3 operated throughout the championship duration. The team lasted the full duration of the championship. This cycle consisted of predominantly pitch based training, a small number of challenge matches, 2 strategically placed 'top-up' gym sessions in advance of the provincial final and All-Ireland final and collective recovery sessions post-championship matches. Developmental aims were of a maintenance and topping up nature as no significant deficits presented and incoming players were identified as having fitted in well. Data collection were via qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data were gathered via the GEQ and SIQS. Qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews and observations. Data showed that in advance of the All-Ireland final interpersonal interactions were advanced and highly satisfactory and functional but not perfect.

Interventions:

<u>a.Acute</u>

A Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing intervention was planned for the weekend before the All-Ireland Final, as the single acute intervention in a cycle that was as time compressed as expected. PDMS, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, aims to bring the group closer by requiring players to self-disclose personal information to the team. It is an intervention that has demonstrated considerable efficacy in its short history of being applied in sports environments. The intervention however was withdrawn by myself prior to informing players about it during the week before it was scheduled to take place. In a short time period 4 panel members had experienced tragic events in their social circle, external to the intercounty team. Therefore I felt that a potentially emotive activity was

unsuitable in that timeframe in advance of a major fixture. Management, concurred with the decision.

As alternative exercise was discussed, which would fulfil the remaining objective of heightening the sense of togetherness of the team in advance of the final. 'Player Values Sheets' were selected in which each player was issued with an envelope of sheets, each of which had the opening statement, "I value <team mate name> as a team mate because....". Players would complete a full set about all of the panel members, talking about the strengths they accredit to him, friendship aspects, personality characteristics valued and then sign it. A time period of 5 days was given to complete the exercise. Each players full set of sheets was collated and presented to him at the last training session 2 days before the All-Ireland Final to take home and read.

b. Chronic Interventions

The status quo remained in terms of the existing chronic intervention formats throughout the championship period, namely 'Performance Profiling' and 'Captains Chats'. This was both a deliberate and logistical decision. The preparation phase for championship matches is intense and has a lot of 'boxes to be ticked' in a short training week. The post-match phase is initially focused on physical recovery and coaching debriefs, before a brief period or 'normal' training resumes in advance of the next preparation phase. Performance Profiles in this phase were carried out by starting duos and were championship performance focused. The necessity did emerge to ask for input from substitutes perspective, as opposed to the on-field experience, but reticence to contribute was evident.

As had emerged in the qualitative data of Cycle 2 a number of player lead activities were also operating externally to the intra-team activities. Specifically, lively social media communications were described and cohorts were meeting outside of training for social

recreational activities such as golf and recovery sessions at the local river dam. It was also identified that players felt more likely to engage in conversation when they met team mates outside of training in random circumstances such as spectating at club or intercounty matches.

Reflection On Action

The key points from the reflection on action (Figure 3.7) include the decision process to withdraw the PDMS exercise and replacement with the 'Values Sheets'. The sheets worked well, a very good job was done by the players on the whole. It was also identified that many of the sheets contained commonly used adjectives about players, perhaps indicative of the level of interpersonal knowledge that has developed.
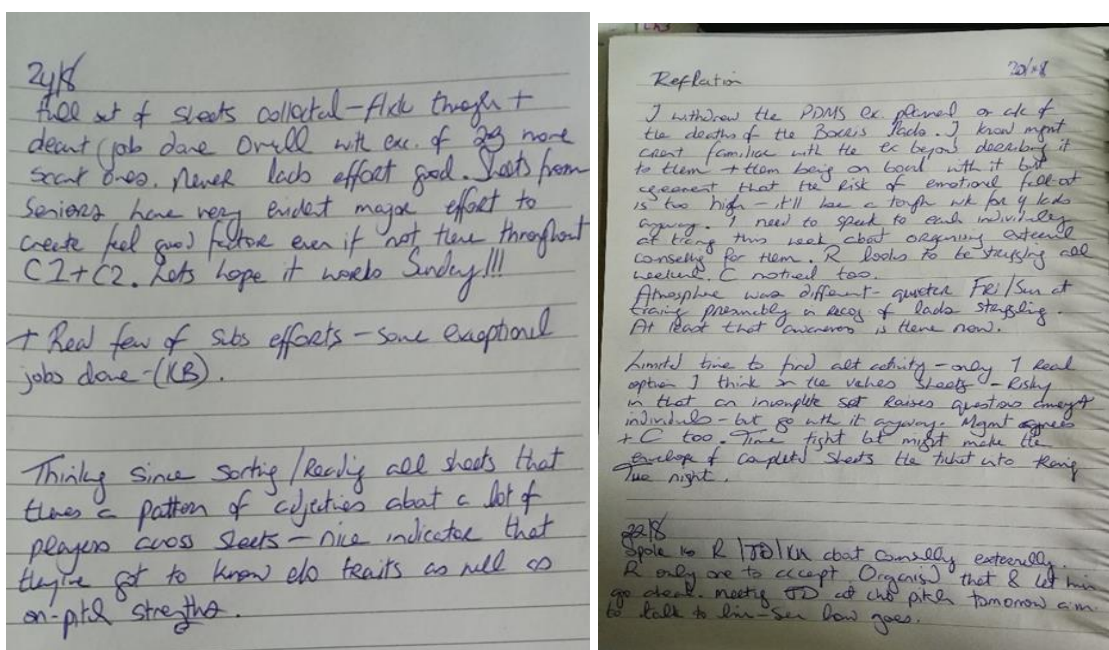
Figure 3.7. *Reflection On Action :Acute Interventions*

The last set of quantitative measures were gathered at the start of the All-Ireland series, therefore more than half-way through the championship. It would have been desirable to execute the exercise 7-10 days later but not pragmatic to issue such paperwork to players who were expected to be fully focused on the championship semi-final. The results from Cycle 3 thus far are presented in Table 3.13 and 3.14 and the trends for all 3 cycles are presented thereafter.

Table 3.13. *Cycle 3 GEQ Scores*

	Attraction to Group-Social	Attraction to Group-Task	Group Integration Social	Group Integration Task
Total	1328	1056	959	1311
Mean	41.5	33	29.96	40.96
SD	3.75	3.24	4.04	4.28
Total Available	1440	1152	1152	1440

The mean for all GEQ subscales showed a minor increase from Cycle 2 to Cycle 3. The greatest increase was realised in ATG-S, while the smallest increase was found in ATG-T. Interestingly an almost identical increase was found in both Group Integration subscales.

Table 3.14. *Cycle 3 SIQS Scores*

	Total	Mean	SD	Total Available
In-Group Ties	578	18.06	1.53	672
Cognitive Centrality	544	17	2.53	672
Ingroup Affect	602	18.81	0.7	672

The mean for all 3 subscales showed minor decreases from Cycle 2 to Cycle 3, with the largest decrease presenting in In-Group Ties. Both In-Group subscales presented very similar decreases at 1.61 and 1.57.

Table 3.15. *GEQ Trends for Cycle 1,2,3*

	Attraction to Group-Social	Attraction to Group-Task	Group Integration Social	Group Integration Task
Cycle 1 Mean	38.64	33	26.64	38.70
Cycle 2 Mean	38.8	32.46	28.3	39.36
Cycle 3 Mean	41.5	33	29.96	40.96
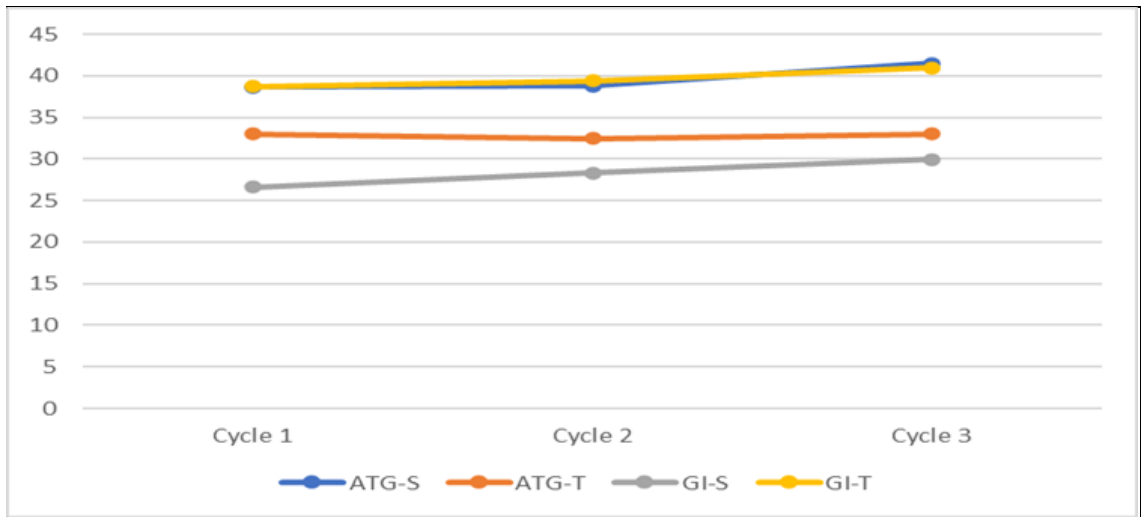
Figure 3.8. *Graph of GEQ Subscale Trends for Cycle 1, 2, 3*

The trends across all 3 cycles are shown in Table 3.15 and Figure 3.8. ATG-T was the sole subscale presenting a decrease throughout the season, albeit a minor one. The almost parallel trajectory of ATG-S and GI-T is readily apparent in the Figure 3.8. Also notable is the upwards trend in GI-S across the cycles and the relative stability of all 4 subscales on the whole, particularly the other 3.

The trends for the SIQS are presented below in Table 3.16 and Figure 3.9.

Table 3.16. *SIQS Trends for Cycle 1,2,3*

	Ingroup Ties	Cognitive Centrality	Ingroup Affect
Cycle 1	18.9	17.35	20.16
Cycle 2	19.67	17.29	20.38
Cycle 3	18.06	17	18.81
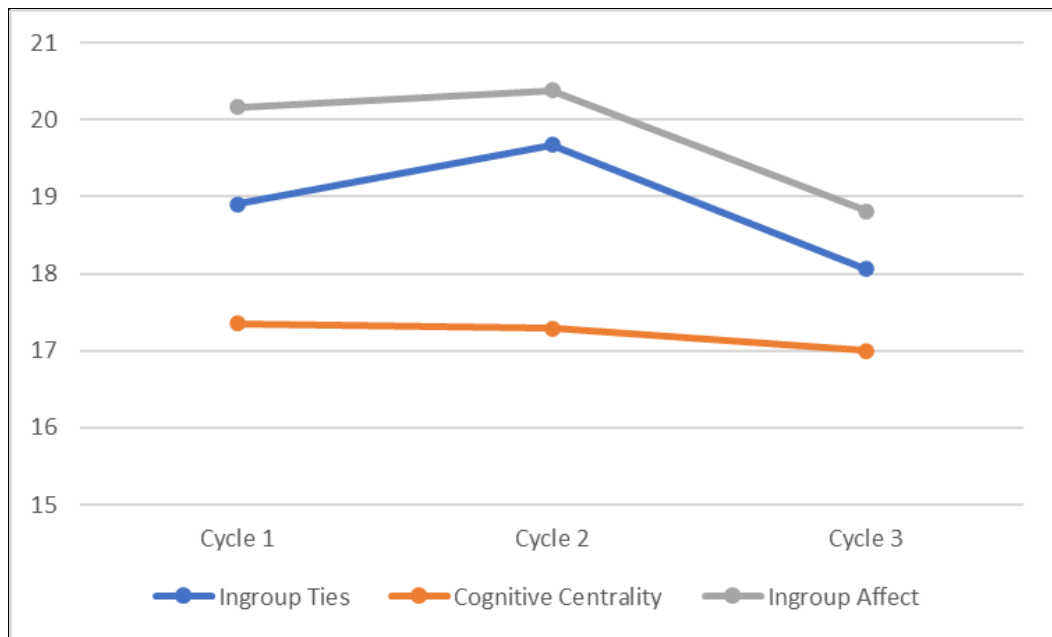
Figure 3.9. *Graph of SIQS Subscale Trends for Cycle 1, 2, 3*

It is notable that Cognitive Centrality showed a minor decrease across all 3 cycles, while both 'ingroup' subscales trended upwards from Cycle 1 to 2 and thereafter decreases were evident.

Qualitative Data

A repeat set of semi-structured interviews took place in the latter stages of Cycle 3 to assess the state of and influencing factors on interpersonal relationships at that juncture. The interview schedule is provided in Appendix 7. Interviews took approximately 15-20 minutes and were carried out at the training ground and club premises. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions took on average 3.5 to 4.5 hours. This lead to a high degree of familiarity with the data set early on. The data were analysed using Inductive Thematic Analysis, using Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6 Stage Process. A sample of the 6 stage process employed is available in Appendix F. Two objectives were salient in analysing the interview data, firstly

establishing the current status of interpersonal relationships in the team and secondly establishing the influencing factors at that juncture. The results are presented below;

Table 3.17. *Interpersonal Relationship Status According to Players*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Closeness Increasing -Improved Predictive Ability on Pitch -Decrease in Cliques -Team Important To All	Interpersonal Relationship Positive Status
-Concern About Extended Panel -Internal Competition	Interpersonal Relationship Sub-Optimal
-Increasing Task Communications -Increasing Informal Communications -Leadership Emerging -Absence of Negative Conflict -Fun Experienced	Team Interactions Positive Status
-Performance Discussions Not Optimal	Team Interactions Suboptimal

Four higher order themes were emergent. The 2 strongest were 'Interpersonal Relationship Positive Status' and 'Team Interactions Positive Status'. However some few alternative views considered the status of both areas to be sub-optimal. A number of influencing factors were identified by players and are shown in Table 3.18.

Table 3.18. *Interpersonal Relationship Influencing Factors According To Players*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Acute Interventions -Chronic Interventions	Interventions
-Socialising After Winning -Informal Training Activities -Social Media	Informal Activities
-Player Personality Traits -Universal High Standards	Personnel Based Factors
-Time Together -Pre-existing Relationship -Championship Performances	Incidental Factors

Four higher order themes were emergent, 'interventions', 'informal activities', 'personnel based factors' and 'incidental factors'. 'Interventions' presented as the strongest, followed by 'incidental factors'.

The status of Interpersonal Relationships was also assessed by the management-backroom cohort. Results are presented in Table 3.19.

Table 3.19. *Interpersonal Relationships Status According To Management-Backroom*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Increasing Cohesion -Value in Membership -Increased Interpersonal Knowledge	Interpersonal Relationships Positive Status
-Concern About Extended Panel -Varying Levels of Familiarity	Interpersonal Relationships Sub-optimal
-Increased Task Communications -Increased Informal Communications -Open Leadership Communications	Team Interactions Positive Status
-Same Players Communicating -Communication Reticent With Management -Performance Discussions Sub-optimal	Team Interactions Sub-optimal

Four higher order themes were emergent from the management-backroom cohort, 'interpersonal relationships positive status', 'interpersonal relationships sub-optimal',

'team interactions positive status' and 'team interactions sub-optimal'. 'Interpersonal relationships positive status' and 'team interactions positive status' were considerably stronger themes. 'Team interactions sub-optimal' was stronger amongst the management-backroom cohort than that of the players. A range of influencing factors were identified (Table 3.20)

Table 3.20. *Interpersonal Relationship Influencing Factors According to Management-Backroom*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
-Acute Intervention (Away Day) -Chronic Interventions	Interventions
-Socialising -Social Media	Informal Activities
-Player Character -Cohesion With Management	Personnel Based Factors
-Winning -Pre-Existing Knowledge -Time Together	Incidental Factors

Four higher order themes were emergent, 'interventions', 'informal activities', 'personnel based factors', 'incidental factors'. 'Interventions' presented as the strongest theme, while 'informal activities' was the weakest. The latter is considered to be most likely attributable to management-backroom not being fully aware of the breadth of what was occurring informally amongst players. Otherwise there is a high degree of balance amongst the other themes.

On the whole at this advanced point in the championship season team interpersonal relationships can be said to be further developed, if short of an elusive state of completion. As per my reflective journal, in reality only 1 individual considered the achievement of perfection to be a realistic aim. Cycle 3 coincided with the commencement of the provincial championship. There was an undercurrent of anxiety about the first round given its 'knockout' potential. However, success at this stage meant progression to the provincial final, which also guaranteed progress to the All-Ireland series. The other significant feature of this stage was the return of the players involved in the intercounty senior team (Figure 3.10). Barring injury it was expected and accepted that these players would return and almost definitely enter the starting team for championship fixtures.
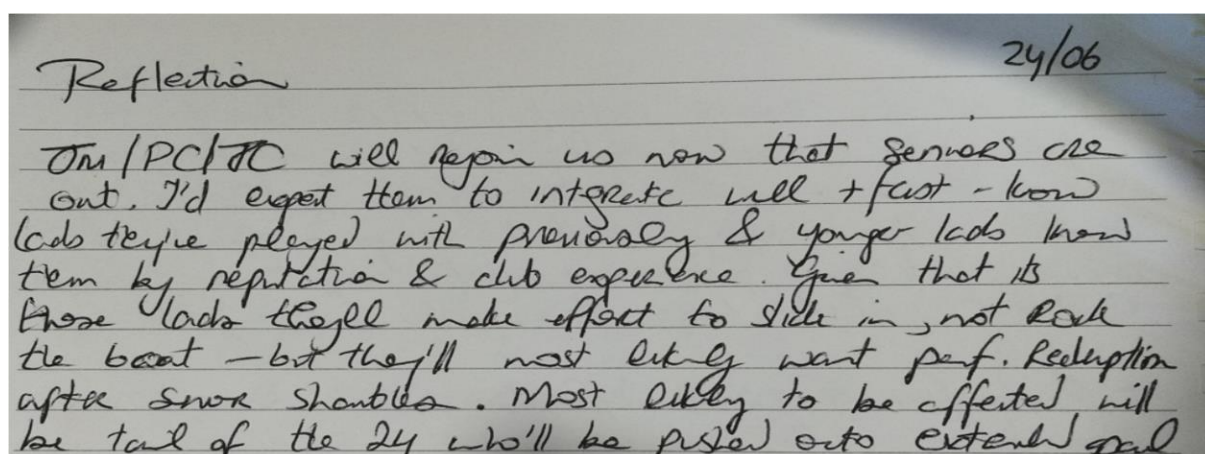
Figure 3.10. *Reflection*

Interventions during Cycle 3 were both chronic and acute in nature. Performance Profiling was maintained, however it happened less frequently and coincided with championship fixtures. Observations showed a slight increase in interactions generated during the exercise, in terms of a wider array of players inputting. However there was little voluntary input from panel members who didn't have playing time during matches. I felt that this was owing to them perhaps not feeling like they were in a position to critique

performances. 'Captain's Chats' were also retained and held at the discretion of the captain. While the exercise was independent of interference or input from outside of the players group, some insight emerged from the qualitative data that suggests that task based communications dominated; "captain pulled us to the corner to discuss it ourselves <performance in the first round of the championship>. It was the elephant in the room that there were huge improvements to be made" (P4). The frank nature of communications in these interactions was also captured by another player;

> Captain would pull us in before or in our group chat. We'll meet up before training in our own group chat and again before the ball is thrown in. It all flowed naturally towards the end, instead of bullshit talk everyone was speaking truth, it came from the heart. (P3)

While the extent of the dispersion level of the communications isn't known, it was felt that the exercise contributed to enhancing devolved performance ownership.

Time limitations and macro level training needs dictated the scope for acute interventions in Cycle 3 also. The timing of the Cycle 2 'away day' was such that the carry over or embedding effect appeared to be manifesting during Cycle 3. It was identified by management-backroom that players appeared to "let down their guard, started mixing more" (MBK1). Similarly from the players point of view it was felt that the day "brought us all closer as a unit. People weren't afraid to speak, showed the leaders" (P3). In comparing responses to those elicited previously it would seem that this outing further developed or perhaps expedited interpersonal developments that were already on a positive trajectory. As previously identified the practice of deliberately structured groupings appears to have been central to optimising the spread of interactions;

> I think it definitely got people closer. Because the teams were picked before we went people couldn't get into their most comfortable group of 3-4 friends so people had to get to know and speak to other people which was good. I was in a

group with lads that I wouldn't talk to as much as other people on the panel. I thought it worked a good but like that, now I talk to those lads more now. When you walk into the dressing room there's different groups you'd notice, but not anymore when you walk in. Now it doesn't matter where you sit, you'd be comfortable. (P1)

Many similar opinions were echoed by management-backroom when considering the impact of the outing;

I think it had a very good effect. Players got the chance to see the personality of different players they wouldn't see in the normal environment of training or games. They got to see vulnerabilities, form different opinions from preformed ideas of what certain players were life, got to know players better, relax around them. It became a bit more comfortable as the day went on. I thought that developed further in the weeks after in training. Usually they're like clusters of sheep. They knew when the groups were aligned it was for specific reasons. They were probably surprised that 'he's not like that, his personality'. Good from that point of view. (MBK2)

As previously detailed the Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing intervention was replaced by the Values Sheets Exercise for the last acute intervention. The overall intention for impact with the ultimate intervention, irrespective of the format assumed, was to heighten the sense of togetherness amongst the panel. The practicalities of the timing of the remaining interviews meant that most were already complete in advance of this exercise. Insights provided considered that;

I got a good kick out of them. Every players thought they were important. It makes you feel good when you get them. As <a senior player> said 'everyone have a read of them in the morning and bring what you think you can bring and what other people think of you'. So I think they were great value. (P4)

Similarly, it was considered that;

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> When we did out player value sheets they were a huge help. You got to see what the boys thought of you and I know there's always going to be nice stuff on it but it's great to see what they thought of you, it's great for camaraderie. (P3)

After the All-Ireland semi-final the last set of quantitative data were collected. The GEQ showed small increases of all subscales. Conversely however the SIQS presented marginal decreases for all subscales, to the lowest point recorded throughout the year. It is likely that this result is owing to the increasing stability of the match day panel with only minor changes to personnel breaking into the substitutions list from the extended panel. On a match by match basis decreasing opportunities for championship playing time would naturally be observed by players at the tail end of the panel. Coinciding with championship progress and the process of preparing for the next match the training focus also shifted to increased attention on playing players via competitive priming, match reviews, video analysis and one-to-one feedback. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that an increasing level of disconnect and perhaps identifying less with the success being achieved, may have been setting in amongst the extended panel. Qualitative data at this juncture also made reference to the extended panel as a source of concern but also as a natural feature of competitive team sport;

> Suppose lads that haven't got game time yet, as disappointing as it is, I've been in that position and it's not an easy place to be. Lads might feel 'what am I doing here?'. It's obviously for the rest of the team you have to drive it on, you're part of a team with your friends. Every year wont be your year but you have to drive it on. Some lads might be down if they're not getting the game time they need. That comes with it. (P1)

A coinciding sentiment was shared from the management-backroom perspective;

> The only concern Id have are some of the younger player or players who perceive they won't be part of a championship day squad are still a little on the outside. It's hard to put your finger on it. They're trying their best to integrate and be part of it

but you can see little signs, 'this doesn't concern me or he's not talking to me here'. That's an area I wish I was better at. It's hard to know how to make it better. They're a little group, that group changes all the time. They're maybe isolated a little bit. But maybe that's partly their own fault too. (MBK2)

Overall, the final assessment of the state of interpersonal relationships has been shown to be advanced and satisfactory to both stakeholders. Observations from the management-backroom stated confidence in this regard;

They know a lot about each other outside hurling. They know each other's traits, what they're like, hearing them in the dressing room slagging each other. Even if I'm talking to them and I bring up something, they can tell you anything about each other. They know everything about each other. (MBK3)

Congruence with this perception emerged elsewhere also;

They're getting a lot more natural with each other. In the past if 2 lads were sitting beside each other and didn't know each other the conversation wouldn't be great. But I see them now that they're natural with each other. Getting to know bits and pieces about each other. Knowing personalities outside of hurling that's all improving. (MBK3)

When on pitch knowledge was explored a high degree of confidence also existed in interpersonal knowledge and prediction ability; "I'd say we know everything now, even watching the forwards, all the forwards know what they're going to do, as backs we know what runs they'll make. We know each other inside out at this stage" (P3). That sense that knowledge and prediction ability was approaching optimal was also observed by management-backroom;

I think that's got a lot better lately, match by match it's improved. They're thinking where each lads is going to be or what he's going to do. They're reading each other a lot better now. Management has a lot to take credit for. They're drumming

it into them night in night out. Players are taking responsibility. Familiarity I suppose, at this stage if they're not getting to know each other. (MBK4)

Similarly development in the team interactions appears to be at an advanced stage, albeit with room for improvement. From a players point of view it was observed;

I suppose every game we got better as a unit. At the start we were very quiet. Stuff like the task <away day> helped us get to know each other a bit more. There were a lot of young lads on our team. It helped them gain confidence. By the end they wouldn't shut up. You're spending that much time, 2-3 nights a week with people, you're going to get to know them more. Some are your actual friends, by the end we're all friendly. (P4)

The developing status of communications was indicated again from the player orientation;

The last time I spoke to you I thought it could be a bit better but it's improved a good bit since then, think lads understand how important it is. We're in an All-Ireland now and it's all those small things that will help us to win. Lads understand that if I'm not so comfortable talking I have to do it now for the best of the team. (P2)

Again it was management's view that;

There are a core of guys that do all the talking, maybe the older guys. The lads off minor are quiet enough, <on pitch> probably the same. But they're not afraid to tell each other anything. Probably before at the start you could see that where some lad could have given a bollicking he didn't. Now they're more likely to geet onto each other and keep each other going. (MBK1)

With task based communications coming to the fore at this juncture it is reasonable to suggest that this may be indicative of the upward trend in the GEQ subscale of GI-T throughout the year. This begs the question as to whether the core value of monitoring and intervening to develop sound interpersonal relationships lies in its importance to the

subsequent development and functioning of task aspects? Understanding this relationship may serve to further motivate coaches to develop their capacities to enhance this aspect of team functioning as a foundation upon which to coach.

A wide range of interpersonal relationship influencing factors were identified. On this occasion a higher degree of congruence presented between those identified by players and the management-backroom cohort. The change in alignment appears ot be related to greater recognition by players of the effects of 'personnel factors' perhaps owing to additional development in interpersonal knowledge and the value placed on it.

The status quo in relation to team conflict and problems was maintained. Players were in universal agreement that negative conflict hadn't been a feature of the season to date, a situation attributed to a range of closely related factors; "there wasn't much, a few arguments in training, you need that (P2); "teambuilding, we're together a long time, we wouldn't want to have conflict with anyone on the team" (P3); "generally it would be a weak leadership where someone is afraid to say something to someone but I don't think it's that, think it's the buy in form everyone" (P1); "all the lads are comfortable at saying what problems we need to fix. It doesn't matter if it's me or anyone, we'll all take it on the chin for the team" (P4). The player character theme was also reflected; "you just couldn't work with a nicer bunch of boys. I wouldn't fall out with any of them, I'd have no reason to. They're all really genuine men, they're all there for same reason I am. They're all the same character that I am, we're all the same kinda character" (P3). The range of insights from management-backroom personnel were shown to echo many of those expressed by players;

> I thought there was always a maturity about the players, conflict thankfully there wasn't a whole lot. A couple of incidents in training that were aggressive if you

want to call it conflict. I thought players parked it quickly and shook hands and got on. The respect for each other had a big effect on that. (MBK1)

It was further observed that;

The absence of conflict is down to a young group with ego in check, unassuming honest young men, similar personality wise, nobody in the group that's an overpowering character. I think they're fairly even-headed, honest enough to get on with their work so that contributes to a good strong group. (MBK2)

The findings will be further developed and discussed in light of the relevant literature.

3.9 Discussion

As stated previously, part of the genesis of the design of this study was founded in recognition of the gaps identified in the literature base, particularly the short term nature of studies, single intervention formats and pre and post-test designs. In response, this action research format detailed a range of interventions across a full competitive season complete with both qualitative and quantitative ongoing monitoring. As a consequence directly comparable results in the literature are sparse. A number of discrete findings are however comparable. Social cohesion subscales were measured on 3 occasions throughout the season. Attraction to Group-Social demonstrated consistent increases across the cycles having started from a relatively high base in Cycle 1. Group Integration-Social also demonstrated increases across all cycles. The increasing closeness amongst players was also reinforced in the qualitative data, both from players perspective and observations of management and backroom personnel. The 'informal activities' theme supports Pescosolido and Saavedra's (2012) recommendation for team members to spend some of their spare time together, thus improving the effectiveness of their relationship and in turn their ability to work together effectively. Taken alongside the consistent performances and results observed, they are in line with Carron & Brawley (2008) who designate social cohesion as a central component in the development of shared

understanding amongst players. The alternative according is that players who do not get on are less likely to produce effective, cohesive performances.

Martin et al., (2009), concluded that team building interventions based on developing interpersonal relationships were the second most successful type. The meta-analysis also confirmed intervention length as key to efficacy, with brief interventions of less than 2 weeks shown to be non-significant. While a range of interventions, often including stand-alone designs and non-interpersonal relationship specific aims were included, findings of this chapter, concur with those of the meta-analysis in question which confirm team building interventions in excess of 20 weeks to be superior. Interventions on the whole according to this meta-analysis were shown to be more impactful in terms of social cohesion than task cohesion, similar to the findings of this chapter, which as stated showed upward trends in social subscales over the 3 cycles, but presented a decrease in a task based subscale between Cycle 1 and 2 in this study. It should however also be noted that the task based subscales in this study both started from a high base. As stated, it is accepted that a circular relationship exists between cohesion and performance in that cohesion leads to higher performance levels and higher performance leads to further increases in cohesion (Filho et al., 2014; Carron et al., 2002). As shown in the season wide GEQ trends table, this has also been replicated here Interdependent, cooperative, team sports require a higher level of cohesion (Cotterill, 2012; Murray, 2006), criteria met by Gaelic Games. Thus the merit in accounting for it on an ongoing basis is evident. Dobrijević at al., (2020), concurs with the high cohesion requirements of interactive team sports, but contrary to the findings of this study, task cohesion is found to be greater. Qualitative findings from this study showed consensus that team conflict was almost non-existent throughout the year. It is reasonable to suggest that solid cohesion levels were a factor in this as Terry et al., (2000) reported lower levels of anger, tension and depression

when cohesion perception was higher. Contrary to the findings of LaVoi (2007) and Ishak (2017) conflict was not shown to be inevitable in the present study.

Maladaptive effects of high cohesion were identified by several researchers previously (Langfred, 1998; Hackman, 1992; Rovio et al., 2009). Such wasn't found to be case in this study. It is reasonable to suggest that cohesion in this case had a positive impact via reinforcement of the team norms and expectations set at the Foundation Meeting. Groupthink is one of the main maladaptive outcomes identified by high cohesion (Rovio et al., 2009), while qualitative data consistently found this group to exhibit reticence in contributing to team discussions and performance analysis, there isn't any evidence that this was owing to anything other than communication confidence deficits.

New players joining the team during the latter stages of Cycle 2 was identified at the time as a potential significant de-stabiliser. As was proven both in the qualitative and quantitative data this turned out not to be the case. One of the limitations of this study was that it didn't afford an opportunity to include incoming players in the qualitative investigation to gain additional insight into their experience of joining the team and integrating. Leo et al., (2020) showed a direct relationship between socialisation tactics and 3 dimensions of cohesion specifically Group Integration-Task, Attraction to Group-Task and Attraction to Group-Social. Therefore it was considered that players perceive higher levels of attraction to task based elements and integration into teams when coaches employ socialisation tactics. The incoming trio in this case were briefed my management on their roles and expectations of them in advance of arriving into the team. Shortly after joining the team they attended the team 'Away Day' and were placed in sub-groups for activities with established players. Chamberlain et al., (2021) indicated that players perceptions of the socialisation processes employed were positively associated with both cohesion and social identity particularly when coaches and existing players interacted

with the regarding roles and team norms. While cohesion discussions dominate much of the history of team building literature and as a consequence provide much of the basis for comparison, cognisance must be maintained of the fact that cohesion measurement and development was not the sole objective of this study but a single indicator of the direction of progress on a broader scale.

Team interaction and communication featured as a consistent area of deficit and development across the season. In agreement with Ishak (2017) it appears that interpersonal communications does have a 2 way relationship with team sports, both a required component of it while also an opportunity to develop communication effectiveness.

In terms of leadership, the rationale behind the appointment of the captain was in line with practices detailed elsewhere. In this case also leader selection was a function of skill level, experience at the grade and the likelihood of him being a starter (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Loughead et al., 2006; Moran & Weiss, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2011; Yukelson et al., 1983). The range of soft skill attributes identified in the captain were also in line with several of those identified (Price & Weiss, 2011; Dupuis et al., 2006; Holmes et al., 2010) including superior interpersonal skills, trustworthiness and communications. In line with Bloom et al., (2003), player selection was identified as pivotal by coaches and in the end identified by players as a key factor in the efficacy of the unit.

3.10   Reflection on Action Research & Personal Reflection

There is widespread agreement in the literature base that reflection is a key component of action research (Costello et al., 2015). Anderson et al., (2004) similarly promote reflective practice as an increasingly important element of professional practice in applied sport psychology delivery. As a practitioner the process of shifting between reflection-in-action to reflection-on-action and ultimately to reflection-for action makes service delivery a

highly engaged, cerebral activity. As time has passed since the championship ended a range of reflections on the process, personal and professional practice have evolved. I was aware in entering this team that this kind of team environment is one which I am very comfortable, having operated in GAA team environments for a long time and with players in this age group and stage of development. Having experienced this championship structure with previous teams was also advantageous in that I had a concrete sense of the performance requirements. I did however have to work at actively keeping an open mind to the potential differences in team personnel. Additionally, I was aware of the fact that I think about team preparation in a very similar way to several of the management team, therefore practically I needed to ensure that I was recording my observations before discussing them with management, to avoid a sort of 'cross contamination' influence.

The intended outcome of the body of applied work detailed in this chapter was first and foremost to develop team interpersonal relationships to the degree required to support efforts to achieve the teams championship potential i.e. winning the All-Ireland was identified as a realistic aim. The intended objectives were to achieve this by applying a range of acute and chronic interventions across the natural phases of the year. The main unintended but valued objective I think that was achieved was in relation to my realisation of the value of the triangulation of inputs that was a feature of the range of interview data gathered. I think it served as the main means by which my status in the unit changed from 'consultant expert' status to 'facilitator collaborator', in that this time I was going beyond issuing questionnaires to players and calculating the scores in the background, to probing and inviting opinions and listening deeply. At this juncture I can't think of any unintended negative outcomes of this project. While not an unexpected, negative outcome, I think in hindsight I was disappointed with the level of stability of the team development trajectory throughout, not in the sense that it wasn't sufficient but that from a challenge perspective and the 'fixer' within, that there weren't 'meatier' problems or deficits to address. Overall,

I conclude that I did achieve the desired outcomes. I must then ask the follow-up questions, 'now are those outcomes useful?' and 'would I pursue different outcomes?'. In competitive GAA at this level there's a narrow range of outcomes, typically pre-determined by the counties expectation of success or lack thereof. What I'm certain about is that the development of interpersonal relationships is a fundamental necessity irrespective of the goal. And I'm certain that the more coaches understand about this necessity and the benefits, the more interested and invested they'll become in this facet of team development too.

I have also reflected upon the range of actions taken throughout this action research process. They were definitely not all my first preference options. But this project was initiated underpinned by pragmatism and being pragmatic was a consistent logistical necessity. Time limitations dictated some intervention choices and some intervention plan abandonment. Limited finances and emergent tragedies likewise. I think what was enacted were the best, doable alternatives, the best was made of them and the outcome was, as far as can be predicted, absolutely comparable.

As I dig through my learnings and factor in my team experiences since this project, there have been many. In terms of changes to my perceptions and knowledge regarding interpersonal relationship development in GAA teams, I think first and foremost my appreciation for the influence of informal opportunities for interaction has dramatically increased. I can't discount the presence of the 'control freak' in me, who seeks the intervention opportunities, for it taking this long and the learnings from this project to come to that realisation. However, I do feel that it's not something that can be left completely to the realm of informal opportunities, the risk of accidental exclusion is too great. Maybe the timing of when the reins of structure become more deliberately unstructured is the key?

Additionally in terms of reflection upon the action research process and with the added benefits of additional, recent practice experiences, I am certain that a factor I didn't much consider at this outset of this season affects the fundamental viability of operating in this way. Management style I think is possibly make or break for the action research modality at least in this operating environment. A level of trust, engagement, adaptability and personal efficacy appear to me to be pivotal, in contrast to a more control style leadership. From the perspective of my personal practice therefore, it has lead me to ask a different range of questions before considering consultancy roles these days.

3.11   Trustworthiness

In addition to personal reflexivity previously detailed, there were a number of additional considerations to ensure trustworthiness. Lincoln & Guba's (1985) criteria were also considered. In terms of credibility, member checking was enacted subsequent to interviews at 2 stages. Immediately after interview I reflected back to participants my understanding of the key tenets of their information to garner the accuracy of my understanding. Subsequent to transcription interview data were returned to participants who were invited to make any edits they felt necessary. No changes were made. Triangulation of views was achieved by interviewing a range of stakeholders and comparing accounts. While replicability and transferability aren't a feature of qualitative research, given the specific nature of the research context, it is acknowledged that many of the features of the team environment may be common or similar to other team environments and as such relevance may be extracted by some. Thick descriptions of the rationales and process were provided throughout, which facilitate such insight.

3.12   Limitations of Study

While the study addresses many of the limitations in the extant literature previously identified, it is not without its own limitations. As stated, none of the incoming players

were part of the qualitative data collection, therefore observational data and accounts from the perspective of the players interviewed can only be presented on their integration. The study also fails to capture natural inclination of several personnel in the management team towards Social Identity Leadership behaviours. In hindsight it would have been interesting to add the Identity Leadership Inventory (Steffens et al., 2014) to the quantitative data instruments. Evidence of many of the principles of social identity leadership are evident to the learned eye, such as the leaders as in-group prototypes, in-group champions, entrepreneurs and embedders of identity. While anecdotal, it is felt that this has contributed to the functioning of the team on a chronic basis. In hindsight also issuing the Collective Efficacy Questionnaire for Sports (Short et al., 2005) would have added valuable quantitative insight into this complementary aspect of team development as previous studies have considered collective efficacy as a mediator between interpersonal relationships and athlete satisfaction (Jowett et al., 2012).

3.13   Conclusion

This action research study has illuminated the process of interpersonal relationship development in an competitive amateur team sport environment. As stated previously, little is formally known of the process GAA coaches undertake to develop their teams interpersonally, as such Chapter 4 will investigate the status quo amongst intercounty coaches. Chapter 5 thereafter will explore likewise amongst club level coaches.

Chapter 4: Team Building

4.1 Introduction

As previously detailed in Chapter 2, the definition of 'team building' is a very broad one with interpersonal relationships pivotal to all team operations and dynamics. A wide range of intervention formats have featured under the umbrella of team building and even within sphere of interpersonal relationships development and maintenance. In reviewing the relevant literature it is apparent that there is a deficit of attention focused on amateur sports teams, in favour collegiate and professional outfits. No single study could be found addressing team building in the broadest sense in Gaelic Games, irrespective of the long history of the games and the increasing use of various strands of the sport sciences in the preparation of teams at all levels, but especially those at the elite intercounty level. Anecdotal accounts which give a sense of coaches awareness of the benefits of team building and some indication of the nature of activities undertaken however do present outside of the academic literature. The following media article excerpt, an interview with Bernard Brogan, a Dublin senior footballer and multiple All Ireland winner; gives an apt indication of the inclination towards the value of a team building activity employed by a successful elite GAA team;

> "The last piece of work we did with Dublin, Jim brought us to Lambay
>
> Island. We didn't kick a football. A fantastic place. All we did was
>
> three sessions around connection, getting to know each other better.
>
> Some old guys. Some new guys. People talking about challenges. They
>
> had lost relatives. People who didn't have parents, who struggled with
>
> different challenges, and all it was to do was just to create that bond.
>
> And why do you do that? You invest in culture. For us in sport it's

about the last five minutes that I will go through the wall for you. You

are after slipping. I am going to make up to your man. I am going to

get a block or I am going to get that ball to you- if you are a striker- to

take that shot for us to win."

-Harrington (2023), Balls.ie

Thus, we know that there is awareness, appetite and activity in GAA, that fit the 'team building' brief. The above quote also shows the keen appreciation of the interpersonal aspect and the central role played by the manager, Jim Gavin in that particular team activity.

The literature on team building on the whole does present some corresponding evidence of the coach perceptions of team building, albeit less coverage than might be expected. It would be expected that a number of the findings of Bloom et al (2003) would be replicated in the GAA team environment, where such data currently does not exist. To investigate such the following methodology was devised with the aim of illuminating team building practices and perspectives with a focus on the interpersonal relationship aspects, amongst elite Gaelic Games coaches; thereby beginning the process of bridging the current knowledge gap.

4.2   Methodology

4.2.1   Research Method & Paradigm

In line with the stated aim, a qualitative research methodology will be adopted. Shank (2002) explained qualitative research as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (p. 5), whereby "systematic" is said to mean planned, ordered and in line with standards accepted by fellow qualitative research practitioners. The "empirical" reference supports the grounding of this type of investigation in real world experiences and "inquiry into meaning" refers to researchers aiming to comprehend how people make sense of their

experiences. As previously stated, Smith & Smoll (2016a) define qualitative research methods as consisting of "a set of diverse options for researchers, enabling them to understand issues in an enriched manner", with those options said to be spread across the interpretation, the nature of the data collection and ultimately the analysis method (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). While Smith & Smoll's (2016a) definition of summarises the overarching benefit; namely the facilitation of an enriched understanding of the issue, it is necessary to further examine the offerings afforded by the method as it is adopted as the sole method of investigation for this study.

In its broadest scope, qualitative research is credited with its capacity to yield both insights into and detail on problems in 'real world' settings, as oppose to the laboratory environment. Consequently, fields such as education, social work and healthcare demonstrate a longer history of qualitative work than many other domains. A prominent feature of the qualitative method is also its degree of adaptability (Eklund et al, 2011), whereby emerging areas of particular interest can be further probed owing to the fact that the structure of the research tool, for example interviews, can be readily broadened to take advantage of information of particular interest. Other qualitative methods include participant observation, focus groups, media, visual methods and documentary sources. As specified in the definitions above, understanding human experiences and environments is a core benefit of qualitative methods and while these typically don't lend themselves to a generalisable understanding, they do however facilitate more in depth insights within specific contexts. In designs and instances where it does accompany quantitative research as in mixed method approaches, it can provide valuable insight into the potential, underlying rationales for quantitative findings. In spite of the host of benefits, qualitative research has been critiqued for its reliance on the capacity of the

researcher to operate in a manner which is not influenced by personal bias or perspectives. Also levelled at the researcher is the responsibility to ethically and capably maintain confidentiality and anonymity of data which depending on the environment may be of a sensitive nature. The in-depth nature of the research which often necessitates an immersion approach will also evidently be readily time and resource consuming, as will the laborious nature of data analysis procedures. As it is most often context specific, both generalisation and replication limitations are the ensuing consequences.

The issue of the role of the researcher as alluded to above is a pertinent one. Researchers are central and actively involved across the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Specifically, they often occupy the role of observer, interviewer, data collector, storyteller or indeed the agent of change via their professional applied role and frequently many of these functions are performed simultaneously or interchangeably. Underpinning this, according to Willig (2004) is the necessity to generate accurate research questions, which are said to be process orientated, seeking to understand 'how' and 'why' events occur while at the same being absolutely amenable to change as a function of a dynamic research process. Interestingly, Charmaz (2004) further captures the challenge for the researcher in the qualitative domain whereby they are said to be required to fully embrace ambiguity and contradiction along with a state of bewilderment and accept them as evidence of their successful immersion in a complex process of gaining a deeper understanding.

The volume of qualitative research being published in sport psychology has notably increased as data analysis methods become more formalised and thus more accepted. This

has coincided with recognition of the range of benefits in terms of understanding such social environments, complex human interactions, experiences and perceptions; which couldn't be adequately captured by quantitative methods. In a recent review, Poucher et al (2020) noted a significant increase in qualitative studies published in sport psychology journals over a 30 year period. A wide range of sport psychology topics have undergone qualitative examination at this juncture. In relation to team sport this includes studies on socialisation tactics (Benson et al, 2016), cliques in sports teams (Martin et al, 2015), peer leadership (Tenenbaum et al, 2015), perceptions of team building (Newin, 2008) and team conflict (Paradis et al, 2014) amongst others.

Qualitative studies are compatible with the pragmatic paradigm, which according to Patton (2005, p.153) focuses on the practical understanding of concrete, real world issues of human significance. Furthermore, Giacobbi et al., (2005) refer to generating knowledge that is of a practical use. The three principles of pragmatic enquiry quoted by Kelly & Cordeiro (2020) have clear applicability to the objectives of this qualitative investigation, namely the emphasis on generating useful, actionable knowledge which solves problems, the process of inquiry of an experiential process and vitally a recognition of an interconnection between experience, knowing and acting. As the researcher is often positioned centrally in the qualitative research process, this immersion in the real world setting and its accompanying contextual understanding is congruent with pragmatism. Of course, advancing professional practice is a core aim of both this paradigm and the qualitative approach therefore given the explorative process of this study, it renders the qualitative method to be employed apt for the operating paradigm.

4.2.2 Objectives

In line with the stated aim, the following research objectives are presented for this chapter:

a. To explore the meaning of 'team building' to elite GAA coaches

b. To investigate the acute team building methods employed by intercounty GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

c. To investigate the chronic team building methods employed by intercounty GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

d. To further explore, via the discussion, emergent issues relating to the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships in intercounty GAA teams.

4.2.3 Designing The Study

A semi-structured interview was employed as the qualitative method to investigate the stated objectives. Semi-structured interviews according to Sparkes & Smith (2014) utilise a pre-planned interview guide, comprised of mostly open questions in order to give direction to the conversation. It facilitates a degree of flexibility while maintaining a relatively tight structure that insures that the key information is provided. It also allows sufficient flexibility that respondents can elaborate with further thoughts and feelings. A number of strengths and weaknesses of this method are presented. It is said to give greater control to the respondent than the fully structured format, allowing greater detail and description along with the opportunity for deeper revelation of the meanings attached to experiences. As regards negatives, the most frequently identified one pertains to the relative difficulty of analysis. Also the presence of barriers between the interviewer and respondent may prevent some experiences from being shared (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). I

decided on this method due to its flexibility and my anticipation that information provided by coaches likely be particularly interesting and relevant and therefore require further probing capacity.

4.2.4 Research Participants

For the purposes of the research going forward note that the term 'coach' will be used. It should be noted that in GAA the terms 'coach' and 'manager' are often used interchangeably. Both terms are frequently used to denote the position of primary responsibility for the team. In some instances teams have both a manager and coach, alternatively the one individual fulfils both roles or has a degree of overlap in their role specification. Five intercounty level coaches were recruited to undertake a semi-structured interview. Only coaches who had experience working at adult intercounty level and not underage intercounty, were interviewed. Recruitment took place via personal contacts, intermediaries and a social media request. All interviewees were male, which is representative of the overwhelming disproportion of male to female coaches in Gaelic Games. Coaches had an experience range of coaching all four team sports in the organisation. Only coaches with a minimum of two years' experience at intercounty level met the inclusion criteria. The rationale for such was based on ensuring that all coaches both had sufficient experience to contribute to the discourse. Nobody was eliminated on the grounds of not meeting this criteria. Timewise all coaches had extensive coaching experience ranging from <10years to >20 years. All coaches had completed GAA coaching courses as a minimum and two had Higher Education sports related qualifications. All coaches also continued to engage in non-formal learning from a variety of sources. Table 4.1 summarises the demographic information which was collected via the 'Coach Demographic Form" (Appendix H) in advance of the interviews. An identity code has been issued to each coach to main anonymity i.e. IC1, IC2, IC3 etc.

Table 4.1. *Demographic Information For Intercounty Coaches*

Coach Identity Code	Gaelic Sports Coached	Level(s) Coached	Coaching Experience	Formal Sports Related Education	Non Formal Sports Related Education
IC1	-Hurling -Gaelic Football -Camogie	-Club Underage -Club Minor -Club Adult -College -Intercounty Senior	-20 years>	-GAA Coaching Courses	-Books -Academic Journals -Print Media -Conferences -Seminars -Colleagues
IC2	-Hurling -Gaelic Football -Camogie -Ladies Gaelic Football	-Club Minor -Club Adult -College -Intercounty Underage -Intercounty Under 20/21 -Intercounty Senior	-20years>	-GAA Coaching Courses -Masters Degree	-Books - Academic Journals - Print Media - Conferences -Seminars -Colleagues -Consultants
IC3	-Gaelic Football	-Club Underage -Club Minor	-20years>	-GAA Coaching Courses -Undergraduate Education	-Books -Academic Journals

Coach Identity Code	Gaelic Sports Coached	Level(s) Coached	Coaching Experience	Formal Sports Related Education	Non Formal Sports Related Education
		-Club Adult -Intercounty Minor -Intercounty Senior -International Rules			-Print Media -Internet Research -Youtube -Conferences -Seminars -Colleagues
IC4	-Hurling -Gaelic Football -Camogie -Ladies Gaelic Football	-Club Underage -Club Minor -Club Adult -Intercounty Minor -Intercounty Under 20/21 -Intercounty Intermediate -Intercounty Senior	-20years>	-GAA Coaching Courses -Other NGB Coaching Course -Online courses	-Books -Academic Journals -Print Media -Internet Research -Youtube -Conferences -Seminars -Colleagues -Consultants
IC5	-Hurling	-Club Underage	-6-10years	-GAA Coaching Courses -Online Courses	-Books

Coach Identity Code	Gaelic Sports Coached	Level(s) Coached	Coaching Experience	Formal Sports Related Education	Non Formal Sports Related Education
		-Club Minor -Club Adult -Intercounty Senior			-Academic Journals -Print Media -Internet Research -Youtube -Conferences -Seminars -Colleagues

Coaches were interviewed across the range of GAA team sports, with the majority of coaches operating in several of the games codes. In terms of coaching experience, all coaches present far beyond the inclusion threshold of a minimum of 2years experience and 4 coaches present in excess of 20years experience. Coaches also all present formal sports related education, ranging from NGB coaching courses to Higher Education postgraduate level. Additionally all coaches indicated preferences for accessing numerous sources of coaching information.

4.2.5 Procedure

Subsequent to Ethics Approval being granted from the University of Central Lancashire, an interview schedule was prepared (Appendix I). "Team building" was initially maintained as the terminology as I felt that this would be meaningful to coaches. The interview commenced by seeking to establish the coaches personal definition of team building. Following this they were asked about their experience with team building interventions. Further elaboration on the specifics of interventions was probed. The interview then progressed to explore the creation of the team environment, interpersonal relationships and garner their opinions on the position of interpersonal relationships in GAA teams.

In advance of the first coach interview, a pilot interview took place with a friend who is an experienced club level coach to assess the general running order of the interview schedule, refine probe questions and gain an indication of the time required per interview. Some modifications in the form of additional probes took place subsequent to this.

All interviews were carried out in person, either in hotel lobbies or the participant's workplace. Initial rapport was established by engaging in conversation about contemporary GAA news stories, explaining my applied work history, simply explaining my research project and my interest in their input. Participants were issued with an

Information Sheet (Appendix J), an Informed Consent Form (Appendix K) and the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix H). Interviews, lasted from 35 to 45 minutes, were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Each interview ranged from 6 to 8 hours to transcribe, a process than afforded a high degree of familiarity with the data set.

4.2.6   Trustworthiness

The initial conversation described above with coaches aimed to provide a rapport building opportunity and as such bolster trust and full engagement in the interview. As a means of allaying any concerns coaches may have had regarding their participation, the use of their interview data and anonymity it was confirmed verbally to them that anonymisation would take place and their participation was confidential to all beyond myself and my research supervisors.

In terms of the interview design, care was taken to develop a series of open-ended questions typically initiated with an open, enquiring "tell me about your experience of…." or "tell me about how you…." style of question. The aim of this was to explicitly enquire about their idea and experiences and communicate the value in this, as oppose to a 'right or wrong' answer perception of the process. In line with this I was careful to demonstrate body language which portrayed the same sense of interest and engagement with their accounts. Intra-interview clarifications were sought in the event that any information being given was unclear to me. Subsequent to the body of the interview concluding and in line with the recommendations of Lincoln & Guba (1985) a member checking process took place whereby the key points of the interview were reflected back to the coach to comment on their accuracy and my understanding of them. Subsequently, following transcription, the interview transcript was returned to the coach via email to facilitate a review and edit by the coach if desired. No alterations were made by any participant. In

terms of replicability of the study the interview schedule is available as an Appendix (I). Therefore the study could be replicated with additional coaches or in alternative team sports.

4.3 Results

Interview transcripts were subjected to an Inductive Thematic Analysis process. The results from the series of semi-structured interviews with the intercounty coach cohort are presented and described below.

4.3.1 Data Analysis: Inductive Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) refer to thematic analysis as a method that organises data in a minimal way and provides a rich description in the process of identifying, analysing, interpreting and reporting of themes. The inductive approach, according to Patton (1990), renders the themes as strongly linked to the data, as such it involves coding the data devoid of aiming to create a fit with a coding frame or indeed the researchers preconceptions. It has the capacity of highlight similarities and differences in the data and bring an outcome to a wide range of data. The capacity to engage in interpreting the data is recognised as a key strength. A feature of thematic analysis which is considered to be particularly pertinent to this investigation and paradigm is the accessibility of the research results to the general public. As can be seen from the demographic data in Table 4.1 intercounty GAA coaches report interacting with a wide range of information resources, including academic journals, thus studies with such descriptive results may be of particular interest to coaches. Inductive thematic analysis is an apt fit with the pragmatic paradigm.

Procedurally, Braun & Clarkes' (2006) 6 Stage Inductive Thematic Analysis process was enacted. Stage 1 is known as 'familiarisation'. This requires the researcher to become deeply familiar with the data set via repeated reading and scanning for patterns and

meanings. The process of transcription involved in the post-interview phase is said to be an ideal means of achieving this aim (Reissman, 1993; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Stage 2 involves the 'generation of initial codes'. This involves commencing the process of organising the data into meaningful groupings by working through the data set, identifying segments of interest and patterns and highlighting them for further categorisation. Stage 3 progresses onto the 'search for themes' through a process of sorting identified codes into initial themes and considering the relationship between themes as well as the various levels of theme. In stage 4, 'reviewing themes', a refining process is undertaken; collating and separating themes whereby there should be a clear distinction between themes. This is achieved via two stage process, firstly all of the collated extracts for the themes are re-read in consideration of the presenting pattern. Secondly, the whole data set is examined to assess the validity and accuracy of themes and identify whether anything has been missed during the coding process. Stage 5 involves 'defining and naming themes', which in essence refers to identifying what each theme is about and the aspect of the data that it captures, what is interesting about it, how it fits into the broad area of research. It culminates in issuing a concise and accurate name to the theme. Ultimately stage 6 involves 'producing the report', which tells the story of the analysis by adding relevant data extracts to provide succinct insight. In an effort to maintain quality throughout the process Braun & Clarkes (2006) "15 Point Checklist For Good Thematic Analysis" (Braun et al., 2016) was consistently referenced throughout. Appendix F provides a sample of the working stages of the thematic analysis process that was replicated throughout the thesis.

4.3.2 Presentation of Results

The purpose of this study was to explore intercounty level GAA coaches' use of team building, particularly for the development of interpersonal relationships in their teams. Emergent themes for the relevant research objectives are presented below. It is also

acknowledged that the range and depth of insights gained from my immersion in and interrogation of the data set that is a feature of Inductive Thematic Analysis, would be limited by only relating the data to the specified objectives. As such further elaboration on aspects of team interpersonal relationships that extend the insights below or address adjunct areas are presented in the discussion.

In advance of presenting the findings, it should be noted that a range of supporting quotations from the coaches are presented, some of which are relatively lengthy. In those instances an informed decision was undertaken to include them based on the insight and/or level of description they provide to illuminate the relevant theme. Additionally, consideration was given to a reading audience that may not be familiar with the internal context of a cultural sport and as such some of the descriptions and elaborations provided by the coaches afford key insights.

a. Explore the meaning of 'team building' to intercounty GAA coaches .

The first objective was to explore the meaning of 'team building' to intercounty GAA coaches. This formed the opening section of the interviews. Two questions were devised to elicit information, firstly "tell me about what the term 'team building' means to you?" and to probe further coaches were asked about "the characteristics of 'built' teams?". Table 4.2 presents the results of the inductive thematic analysis process. From an initial 18 lower order themes 6 higher order themes are presented.

Table 4.2. *Intercounty GAA Coaches Definition of Team Building*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
Interpersonal Knowledge Team Knowledge Task Knowledge	Environment Knowledge
Task Cohesion Social Cohesion	Team Cohesion
Experienced Stable	Maturity
Interpersonal Communications Quality Communication Environment	Communications
Improving Play Players Driving The Standards Playing Work-rate & Persistence Emptying The Tank	Performance Efforts
Depends On Team Takes Time "Better People=Better Footballers" Do What You Can To Get The Best Out Of Team Use Whatever Mechanism You Can	Process Based Aspects

Intercounty GAA coaches understand team building as an assimilation of 6 themes, specifically 'environment knowledge', 'team cohesion', 'maturity', 'communication', 'performance efforts' and also the team building 'process based aspects'. Upon examination it can be seen that interpersonal relations quality and behaviours feature across several themes. Such is very evident in the view provided in this account;

> "Team building for me would be to build a collection of players in a cohesive manner,   that can work together, play together and that basically there's little strife in the group. Where you might have some personalities that there might be strife, it's about trying   to get them all to work together. Definitely in the dressing room for me there has to be   a good atmosphere where people are talking, especially around training that you can   see it within the team that they're willing to engage with each other". (IC4)

The breadth of team experience of the coaches is evident in the distinctions made between the nature of the task in different types of teams. Thus, the theme of 'environmental knowledge' from the coaches viewpoint is portrayed here;

> "I suppose it depends on the team you have and the knowledge of the team you have.   Some teams you come into that you won't know and they may not know each other as   well and then you have to think differently about team building from a team you know very well or they know each other well. If you take college level where you're trying to bring a lot of people from different backgrounds together and you only have a short period of time to get to grips with it quickly. I'd have worked with my own club team and I'd know most of them. It's a different type of team building and you have to go at it very differently. An intercounty team is very different because you usually have a lot of guys in a hurry, elite performers have only one goal, to get on the first 15 and they're in a hurry to get there. So it's very different in the team building, depends on the team and your position in the team and their knowledge of you". (IC1)

The following account also makes reference to different types of teams, however the coach doesn't make a distinction between the desired outcomes irrespective of whether it is applied to an intercounty team or club team. It highlights the multimodal outcome goals of the process as per the themes of 'cohesion', 'communication' and 'performance efforts' presented above;

> When we start out with a group of players at the start of the year at intercounty level they're coming from different parts of the county. At parish level they're coming in at different age groups. You're trying to bring them together to work for one cause, goal or mission and that's probably doing what you can do to get the best out of the team, work for one purpose, get the individuality out of it. Bringing that together takes time, especially a new team and sometimes you might not achieve it in the first few months or the first year. That we're all working together for the one cause, that the team is more important than individuals. If I was to go up on the bank and watch them playing and they weren't playing well hurling wise, it was a struggle, but they were still fighting tooth and nail, there was no give up, all encouraging each other, no giving out, all working together….then I'd say to myself we've built a team. (IC2)

Reflecting the thesis' central aim of exploring intercounty coaches perceptions of and experience of team interpersonal relationships, coaches viewpoints are thus further explored below. On the whole, given the range of interpersonal dynamics to be managed, it is clear why coaches demonstrated such engagement with the active process of seeking to understand and positively influence relationships via the range of acute and chronic interventions presented in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

The potential degree of immense managerial challenge of the competitive elite team sport environment is described in this extract;

> In a county the first thing that happens is that you are rivals, that has to be broken down. The second thing is that at intercounty level everybody is out for themselves. People will talk about team but ego is a huge part of intercounty sport.

There are millions of examples of players at the moment who don't make the 26 (match day panel number) who don't care a lot. There are instances of players who played on intercounty teams who did not make the 26 and who didn't go to the game….Intercounty a lot of the time, whether people like it for not, you're managing egos, trying to get the best out of people. Do people really have time to buy into the values that you're spreading and you're building? You're trying to get to the end where everybody understands….some players with a 30-35 man panel find it impossible to feel part of the group. (IC3)

Remedial interpersonal situations are also experienced as commonplace;

A lot of teams you go into, there's issues there from the start, personality clashes, jealousy of one person getting more of the attention than another, brothers passing the ball to each other….With the county one year some players wouldn't play if other players were there. There was conflict over management, so we had a lot of work around that.

As the antithesis and most likely an ideal field based outcome of optimising interpersonal relationships, the following was also explained;

This is where I mentioned earlier, when people know each other very well, their habits, what they might do. A former club & county players told me one time about a great team and decision making, 'I knew the players so well from always hurling with them that I'd go up the field and get the ball in the half back line, I'd throw it across to the far side of wing forward and run down the field because I always knew that players would throw the ball back here because they always done it, they knew each other so well', well there was the interpersonal relationship….it might seem small at the time but that's where that mountain or seaside day or rooming together or pucking around together…you're building that up". (IC2)

That then perhaps gives rise to the question of what degree or threshold of social relationship is considered a prerequisite to support optimal performance? A high degree of consensus was found on this question. It was considered that;

I don't think people have to love the guy they play with, really it's respect, normal human relationships. I don't think they have to be perfect or friendly. Sometimes when they're forced they're worse. But I would expect that there's a basic set of relationships that has to be undertaken no more so than in a workplace for us to function…..Once a threshold has been reached in terms of the relationship, that they communicate openly and honestly, they don't necessarily have to be best friends. (IC1)

A similar theme of a 'respect' threshold is presented here;

Definitely there has to be respect there. As a coach that's the one thing you have to preach in the dressing room; you mightn't get on, there might be personality clashes but without respect you're going nowhere. If there is a little divide or crack the team is going to suffer for it, I've seen it" (IC4)

There was further consensus with this general position;

They don't have to get on, look at the example of Roy Keane, Manchester United, he said himself he wasn't friends with a lot of them but on the field they played together. A lot of great teams, a lot of the players you'd be surprised, they don't get on socially, never meet but when they're together as a team. That's built up my the management, some do stick together, some don't. It's getting on on the field of play, in the training, you don't have to go drinking together. (IC2)

The localised and parochial context of the GAA was identified as a contributing factor in this regard;

In the context we're talking about they come from communities, areas where they know each other, they've grown up with each other in the age groups. If they don't know each other they know parents or people they know. So there's an awful lot of connections that are related in what we're doing. They would certainly be a huge help. In our context and more often than not they do get on socially. (IC3)

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Having established a range of the considerations of intercounty GAA coaches as regards team building, the following objectives will address the nature of team building interventions undertaken.

b. To investigate the acute team building methods employed by intercounty GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

The second objective was to specify the nature of acute interventions that intercounty GAA coaches employ. Coaches were initially asked whether they have carried out team building with their teams? All coaches reported having conducted team building with their teams. Coaches were subsequently asked about the nature of activities undertaken. Five higher order themes were emergent from 12 lower order themes, which are presented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3. *Acute Team Building Interventions of Intercounty GAA Coaches*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
Activity Centred Drinks Centred	In-House Social
In-House Organisational In-House Educational	Developmental Team Activities
Foreign Training Camp Multi-Day Camp In Country	Multi-Day Training Camps
Self-Directed Training Based Activity Provider Based Training Activity	Off-Site Training-Based Development
Tragedy Visit By Terminally Ill Supporter Volunteering Opportunity Social Engagement Project	Emergent Events

The five higher order themes are 'in-house social', 'team developmental activities', 'multi-day training camps', 'off-site training-based development' and 'emergent events'. The strongest preferences demonstrated were for 'Team Developmental Activities' which included the likes of an early year foundation meeting, workshops, personal disclosure mutual sharing, guest speakers and psychometrics, amongst others. The accounts presented below demonstrate the considerations coaches give to their choice of methods. Firstly, one coach described their observations of where team building and interpersonal relationships development have come from in Gaelic Games;

So historically in GAA, an amateur sport, there is a feeling that team building and getting on and social context has all revolved around alcohol and our relationship with alcohol. Team building, weekends away, a lot of those come back as 'we're going on a session'. 'we're going on the beer', you've got to be able to hold your drink, to hold your round, stay with the lads. There's 19 year olds drinking with 35 year olds. For sure there's an understanding that that does bring the group together. Ultimately an important part of the team building is to get them to understand that they do get on and they do work together". (IC3)

As an extension of the team building definition themes presented above the following viewpoint perhaps gives further indication of a lingering perception of 'team building' as an external 'go to' activity but also aptly frames an alternative viewpoint;

…I'd have done lots, to be quite frank I wouldn't have got huge value for them. Maybe it was because of how they were ran or my personality but sometimes I felt it was ad-hoc, box ticking….I think even sitting down as a group and deciding upon what's our goals, ethos, values is much more valuable in terms of a formal team building exercise than going off paintballing or whatever….going off to these activity centres or camping overnight, I've done all of them and I think they're gimmicks. (IC5)

The remainder of the cohort expressed varying levels of preferences and esteem for a range of acute interventions; "I think occasional different forays into <isolated event> team building is good. It allows you to reinforce good habits I think, reinforces good relationships, challenges people in a way" (IC1). Further description is offered here of the programme of acute events used throughout a season;

….using things like endurance courses, the bog. Another time we did a retreat, went away, had our workshops, training sessions. Being in that enclosed environment, it was lovely, we had a dinner….definitely it's one of the first things I put down when I'm organising the year, 'when will we get together as a group?'. (IC4)

A coach who expressed a strong preference for punctuating the season with acute interventions rationalises;

> Because the GAA year is so long, in a typical year it's very difficult to do 110 training sessions a year, go to one venue, hope everything will work. So for that reason I think it's important to do something different, go away, even just to the local cow field, local mountain, seaside, do something different. It helps build the group they're together in a different setting than the normal place. (IC2)

As a strong proponent of such methods he provides further rich insight into the nature of activities undertaken, observed problems and outcomes. Consideration of beneficial outcomes to interpersonal relationships is also evident;

> It could be the first day of the year you meet or a month or 6weeks in or at a time when things aren't too busy. You'd maybe do it prior to championship, normally one off events going somewhere, it could be local, you mightn't be going to far at all. You get he help of somebody to work alongside you, come up with ideas, you watch what other sports do and it might be the simplest thing. Get all working together, fun, get laughter into it. At the same time you'd have specific goals for the day, in groups working together, leaders emerge from groups, getting other people to get involved, maybe the quieter players….I've tried the weekend ones but no I wouldn't recommend them, mainly because you can only keep them engaged for so long….it probably works better at intercounty, you've more of a choice, you feel you have more control, people are more professional in their attitude. If it's the club junior team they're more inclined to go to the pub. (IC2)

Further logistical detail is provided in this account;

> "I would have used external providers. No needs analysis process to the extent that I would have wanted them to. They never got to the root of it. Sometimes my fault as well as theirs. We wouldn't have got to what we wanted to get from it. What was absent? Culturally relevant? I remember writing in the diary that I should have spent more time setting this up" (IC1).

With reference to the coaches use of alternative acute interventions such as Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing and psychometrics, neither can be said to be a frequently employed option. Psychometrics was only employed by one coach;

> The county team, I did personality traits, add the boxes, we then put them up on the screen. It all came out like, we learned a lot. Because you were able to put them into groups, players would have known what group they were falling into. You could talk in general terms about each one. So it was a good way to get information out to the group. (IC4)

Another coach referenced having access to information about how best to approach particular players based on their traits but not as a consequence of formal psychometric profiling. A contrasting approach to the example referenced above regarding psychometrics was offered as follows; "no I haven't. I would have felt that most of the answers were in the group. I didn't want to put players in with a third party where I felt they were going to give answers that weren't as truthful or as honest".

Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing type interventions were mentioned as a strategy to strengthen closeness and develop communications skills. Notably neither coach had employed it by following full intervention procedures, nor demonstrated an awareness of it being a formal intervention strategy. Instead their intervention appeared to have more instinctual origins;

> Before Friday evening training sessions 2 players had to talk for 3 minutes in front of the group. You learn so much about them, everybody else did. There was some really touching things, like a selector getting up and talking about her brothers suicide and the effect. Others in the group were shocked. The group became much more open. If you're trusting the group with your life story or the details of your life that matter to you you'll find they're more open with you too. Another guy who spilled everything to a group, they sae him as a weaker individual because of it. I think you have to strike the balance….The most emotional aspects of these

things tends to come about when you sit around with a facilitator like a Sport Psychologist. It seems to be a safer space when you have an outside facilitator.

Another coach also referenced a PDMS type of intervention along with an insightful reflection on such;

> We would have done a lot of American'ish activities like the guys speaking about themselves on strengths and weaknesses. That can be quite intimidating at times. It can put people in quite difficult places which I would have seen in the past, but that might have been just the age profile. I just think that the surroundings weren't comfortable enough for people to be able to feel that way. But maybe the concept was good but maybe that togetherness needed to be built up a little bit more for people to feel that comfortableness in the group. (IC3)

As shown, acute team building intervention formats are appealing to intercounty GAA coaches. Beyond the realm of the isolated intervention however, there is evidence of an awareness of the need to extend the effort to the 'everyday' encounters;

> Whatever you achieve on these days away, the feel good factor, you have to bring back to the training field on Tuesday night and maintain that, bring something to the training session that develops that, brings it a bit further. It's not just a once off thing. It's a bit like a fitness test, you do one at the beginning of the year and never do one again. It has to be followed up. It might be small things you might do at training, pocket fillers, giving leadership roles or getting other people to take on things. That to me is maintenance, maintaining it from the dressing room till you get out onto that pitch. (IC2)

Furthermore, time pressures were identified as a barrier to carrying out many of the acute interventions. It was observed that;

> Time is an issue. Going to team building, creating time with GAA panels is difficult. You have to squeeze in your training blocks, finding extra days to fit in the add-ons and meetings. These players are amateurs and sometimes you find they may not wholly buy into these exercises and come with a negative attitude

that 'I'm missing a day's work' or 'I'm away from my family' or 'I could be doing better things'….you don't want to piss players off, keep them there all night or bring them in on Saturday, you might have to once or twice a year but apart from that…they have to go get up for work in the morning.... (IC5)

Accounting for the likes of time as a barrier and the identified need to reinforce gains from acute interventions, the next section will investigate the use of chronic interventions.

c. To investigate the chronic team building methods employed by intercounty GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

The third objective was to specify the nature of the chronic interventions that intercounty GAA coaches employ. It was accepted that many of these may not 'in-name' be targeted by the coach under their perception of 'team building' but instead be considered to be part of the team management processes, but nonetheless developmental. Table 4.4 presents the emergent themes; 5 higher order themes were formed from 16 lower order themes.

Table 4.4. *Chronic Team Building Interventions of Intercounty GAA Coaches*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
Socialising Together Outside Training Encouraged Socialising Opportunities Within Training Facilitated	Socialising
Mentoring Programmes Senior Leadership Groups Strategic Use of Senior Players	Leadership
Proximity Opportunities Interaction Facilitation	Training Activities
Special Needs Backroom Team Member Sport Psychologist On Site Player Selection Decisions	Human Resourcing Considerations
Structured Team Meetings Small Group Discussions Social Media Visual Communications 1 to 1 Communications Facilitated Targeted Speakers	Communications

Higher order themes of 'socialising', 'leadership', 'training activities', 'human resourcing considerations and 'communications' are presented. 'Communications' development interventions, followed by 'leadership' development and deployment methods were the strongest themes. The need for there to be a chronic approach to team building was succinctly explained; "look for anybody involved in team sport it's the central part <team building>, you cannot thing you have 15 super individual players who will suddenly, mythically magically come together as a team" (IC3). While the importance of verbal communication was evidenced throughout, it was also recognised and appreciated that "it's natural that some players don't engage, it's not their way of expressing things" and that "too much talking" is also problematic if it leads to certain personalities "dictating or controlling the whole thing" (IC2). Deficits in communications however were noted by coaches as a fundamental problem;

> Communication is huge issue or lack of it, I see with county, club. Maybe it's the mobile phone generation. I find with younger players especially they're so quiet, trying to get them to speak up, communicate on the field or in a team meeting can be very challenging. What you find is you have the same 2 or 3 being the voices for the squad. So you to have to provide opportunities for players to develop confidence and be comfortable speaking in front of the group. Once you get that to a stage you're in a better place, the more voices you have. You can see people are understanding the game, asking questions, that helps to build your patterns of play or trust on field. (IC5)

Similarly, another coach considered communication levels to be not just an observed deficit within the team, but also considered that his team were recognised externally as weak in this area;

> Definitely communication is the biggest thing and in this region is the thing we're weakest at. I don't know if it's a historic thing, that we're more subdued or what. It's been noticed by teams in this region that when we're up against teams from the north or Dublin their communication is top notch. What makes them stand out

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and gives them an extra percentage over teams is their talking. It's something we worked really hard on, it's to sustain that. (IC4)

As all coaches indicated that deliberate efforts were being made to structure, develop and generate communications, even if not perceived by them as a formal intervention; a range of methods employed will be explored. It is worth noting, subsequent to examining the range of acute interventions above, that no coach referenced applying an acute intervention specifically for the sole purposes of developing communications. The PDMS type intervention discussed above was the closest. By way of a barrier, time was again quoted; "ideally you'd love to sit down or give someone that responsibility to go develop that for us. Going week to week in the National League or Championship you've so many balls in the air to juggle" (IC5). A range of approaches are discussed by coaches, including social media applications, the provision of opportunities to give opinions and feedback, targeting specific players to speak to the group with and without advance notice, pairing players for tasks, asking specific players for feedback at meetings and most popular amongst intercounty coaches was small group work. A desired outcome is explained as follows; "you might be putting those players together so they'll get to know each other, talk to each other, when they start to talk to each other they become their own managers on how the game will be played and taught rather than you telling them to move here or there" (IC2). The degree of consideration of the whole team environment and how it facilitates players communication was also recognised;

> For me it's very much built into the whole values. If that honesty and integrity is part of what we are then we are very much allowing opportunities for the guys to express themselves and communicate and open up. We give them opportunities all the time….if they don't they will be asked to speak, give their opinions, they will be given opportunities to talk things out. We put players in the position where they can express themselves and they can talk openly about stuff (IC3).

The rationale behind structured small group work, a popular method, is explained;

I think forming groups in a meeting or analysis situation is a good way to facilitate that. I think you don't ask 'have you any questions?' because again you'll have the same 2 or 3, so you form groups, different roles in it, 3,4,5 points to go through. So you're going back for feedback and someone different in the group feeds back on the different ones. Also players are more comfortable in a small group setting getting their points across. (IC5)

Leadership methods were also identified as a dominant theme. While there wasn't consensus across the entire cohort on the use of 'senior leadership groups', it emerged as popular with the majority of coaches. Interestingly, the issue of the captaincy as an influencing method was not mentioned. That may in some limited instances be as a result of a particular counties' method of selecting the captain. In some cases the selection of captain can be the remit of the club who won the county championship the previous year assuming they have a representative on the county team. On the whole, coaches displayed awareness of the breadth of the function of leadership provision; "I think leadership groups are very important, broad spectrum, representative leadership groups across the age spectrum, that you don't just pack it with older guys but also that you don't pack it with guys that are very vocal. Some guys can lead in different ways, but also provide opportunities for them to lead" (IC1). The function of the leadership group was also detailed;

They feel they have voice, can talk about things too away from the pitch and can bring it back to the attention of management. It worked reasonably well over the years, I think it's a vital part of working together. The last thing you want is going into a dressing room with 30 players and saying 'I hear there's an issue here' and everybody throwing in a thing. Here you can have a logical and calm discussion around a table with 8 players, a lot more gets done and it's brilliant in coordinating where you're going. (IC4)

Only one coach detailed a method of composing the senior leadership group beyond selecting a cross section of the team. The use of Social Network Analysis for this purpose

was described by one coach, albeit not in name. In a contrary perspective one coach expressed a negative orientation towards the use of the senior leadership group;

> The big thing with all my teams is that everybody is treated the same. Do I expect older players to lead? I do. But unless you have built up the mechanism of the team. In the intercounty scenario when I came in I had a number of very strong individuals, some of them would have left on my watch, I retired them. It was imperative for me that they could not be seen that cliquish….if there is total respect for everybody across the team concept then you can never have that <dominant players>. (IC3)

Additionally, the organic materialisation of leadership was acknowledged; "leaders will always emerge in every group and there's some people not maybe cut out for leadership roles. Somebody has to carry the shovel, we can't all be foremen. But you try to give responsibility to people as well. That's what team building is about, giving those that don't often come to the forefront a chance" (IC2).

An additional function that was tied to the leadership role was that of the socialisation of new players to the team. Mentoring was a frequently mentioned function of the senior leadership group and/or senior players;

> County teams may have a leadership group and it'd be important that they look out for new players. In ours we have 5 on it and they all have players assigned to them that they would check in on privately….sitting down with them after training, making them feel welcome and part of the group as soon as possible (IC4).

The mentoring function was similar across coaches whereby the duties were comprised of "making them feel welcome" (IC4), "explaining the ropes and the rules, when they have a poor day it's ok, it's not the end of the world" (IC1), checking-in "how's things going? How are you finding training?" and positive feedback on performance (IC4). One coach (IC4) also explained his process of bringing in players from the minor grade the

year before they would be ready to step up to the senior panel to take up positions on the extended training panel or giving them 'water carrier' roles, with the aim being to accelerate their eventual full integration.

The theme of 'socialising' presented a dual strand, specifically encouragement to socialise together outside of team contact time and then the provision of socialising opportunities within team time. Outside of scheduled team sessions it was felt that "poker games, FIFA games at each other's houses….go to matches together" (IC4) would be beneficial. Similarly another coach recounted instructing his players "if you're going out give one of the lads a buzz and see if they're interested. So you never see one of our fellas on his own, there's always a group, there's always togetherness, they'll always go out, socially they very much interact" (IC3). Coaches, en masse, supported the provision of socialising opportunities within the realm of the team schedule. This varied between organised social opportunities, of which there was some divergence of agreement and structuring the team environment and plans to facilitate informal interactions.

It was anticipated that coaches would express a negative orientation towards alcohol based team activities. However, this wasn't wholly the case; "it could be a case of, from an intercounty viewpoint you say 'after this match you can go for a few drinks, we're meeting wherever for an hour or two'….it helps to forge relationships, lads get to know each other" (IC5). The difficulties with management organised social events was also identified;

> I don't have to be organising their social lives, they're working everywhere, different living circumstances, they're going back to cities, you don't own them. You might organise on a day out, the social side of it, a meal, a drink, but then you go home. There's responsibility then too, you're organising social events for them, then Tuesday night you're on the pitch giving a different speech and you're a hypocrite" (IC2).

As stated, facilitation of opportunities for informal interactions in the team environment have been recognised as important also and also as a remedy for the identified time challenge. It was considered that;

> If you just call your training session 3 times a week, training at half seven in and out, I don't think that's automatically the best model for it <interpersonal relationships> to grow organically. I think you have to facilitate it in some form, certain conditions such as arriving early, if you're going away for a weekend for a match strategically picking who rooms together….in the dressing room, sitting down for food afterwards….allowing opportunities for them to socialise together. (IC5)

Given the objective of exploring interpersonal relationships, it would be remiss not to explore the breakdown of relations and coaches' experiences of intra-team conflict. Conflict was en masse acknowledged as a 'given' in a competitive environment featuring a range of personalities; "in any form of life, workplace or team environment, conflict is inevitable at times. I hear people say 'I've 30 best friends in here', I don't buy into that or think it's possible" (IC5). In a similar vein it was felt that; "you're going to get it in a competitive environment and physical game. It will cause friction" (IC1). Causes were said to include; "getting close to a big game….things in people's personal lives, things between players" (IC2). The majority were explicit in identifying the potential for conflict to be a positive sign; "I wouldn't discourage it if it's on the training field, if it's coming from the right place and not an ulterior motive but you care about the team. If two lads have a scrap in the corner it's great, you know they're in the right place" (IC5). In a matching perspective it was stated; "it is a good sign prior to big games that players can take each other on in a training session….a physical altercation happens a lot in a training session between 2 players, for me I'd want it to happen….this shows that we're in a really good place, that everybody wants another goal, what they're also doing is challenging each other to come up to this level of performance" (IC3). It was considered negative in

cases where it was left to fester (IC1), affect the team environment or the mental health of players (IC4). In terms of conflict management it was considered that; "dealing with it after is crucial because if you don't it becomes a problem and it will eat into your team" (IC3). Methods of dealing with it which were quoted included self-policing by other players (IC1), leaving players to sort it out themselves (IC5), removal from the team (IC5). Interestingly only one coach mentioned the use of a Sport Psychologist (IC3), wherein the coach felt it was beyond his personal capacity to remedy the situation.

Also under the theme of 'human resources' player selection decision making was referenced. It was acknowledged that the player panel is not always comprised of the most talented players in the county. Coaches demonstrated consideration of their panel with regard to the overall team environment; "if you select bad characters or too many of them, nobody is perfect, if you select bad people you're likely to get dressing rooms. You have to be careful and mindful of who you're selecting, it creates its own dynamic" (IC1). Similarly the relationship between the personality and team environment was addressed here;

> If you are dissenting from buying into the identity then you're dissenting to buying into what we're about. So you're in the wrong place at that stage. Again for some people some players equate being removed from a panel as practically driven, 'I wasn't good enough, the manager didn't like me'. Maybe the problem was you don't understand what our identity or value system is or you don't buy in. There's loads of examples of unbelievably talented players who people will have said 'how have they not made that team? That's beyond me', and then you see some of the personality traits that person exhibits and you understand. (IC3)

Ultimately, the majority of coaches perceived their team building undertakings to be efficacious endeavours on the whole with several referencing the transfer to the field of play; "team building, yes, lead to change, definitely it's often worth doing, in all cases it did, on pitch" (IC4). The performance improvement end goal is referenced here; "all of

my work in relation to everything I've done would be based on 'how do you bring this into a training capacity and do the players not understand what you're talking about?'. So we would constantly refer back" (IC3). The longitudinal benefits were also identified;I've found that 90 something % of the teams I've done that with <team building> finished up successful at the end of the year. They always have, I've done it with the school, club and county teams, visiting teams. They all seem to get something out of it, getting feedback, following their progress afterwards, they've all achieved success. Maybe not always that year, maybe the year afterwards. Any you meet afterwards, that day sticks out a lot in their mind, more so than any of the training sessions perhaps. (IC2)

A broad range of insightful interpersonal relationships issues and interventions have been shown from the perspective and experience of the intercounty GAA coach. The following section will extend these findings by relating them to the relevant literature across the spectrum of sports.

4.4 Discussion

Based on the gaps identified in Chapter 2 this chapter sought to explore team building, in particular interpersonal relationships in GAA teams by elite coaches. The first objective was to ascertain GAA coaches understanding of 'team building'. My results demonstrated that intercounty GAA coaches consider team building to be an aggregation of the process of developing effective environmental knowledge, team cohesion in both of its guises, maturity, and communications methods which culminate in effective performance efforts. When these are measured against the existing definitions in the literature, several commonalities present. 'Environmental knowledge' and in particular the sub-theme of 'team knowledge' is akin to Carron et al.,'s (2015) "common perceptions of group structure". Furthermore from the same definition "patterns of interaction and modes of communication" are mirrored by the GAA coaches who identified the 'communication

environment' and 'interpersonal communications' as core to their understanding. One element of Brawley & Paskewich's (1997) offering i.e. "to increase effectiveness", converges with the themes emerging from the intercounty coaches, that of 'performance efforts' and its sub-themes of 'player lead standards', 'effort levels' and 'improvements in play'. Beer's (1980) aim of "improving the functioning and performance" also subsumes these themes identified by the GAA cohort. Beer also designated team building as a "process", a feature which is mirrored in the GAA coaches theme of 'process based aspects' including the sub-theme that it 'takes time'.

While most definitions infer behaviours allied to or synonymous with cohesion, the definition emerging from Bloom's (2003) study explicitly identifies it as a component, as do the coaches in this study who view it an outcome. Other themes from the cross-sport Canadian coach cohort in Bloom's (2003) study, closely match the findings here, including the 'team environment' and in particular its 'stability', the latter which was identified by GAA coaches as a sub-theme of 'maturity'. The relationship between team building and performance aspects was also a commonality. On the whole, in reviewing the higher order and lower order themes of the GAA cohort, all categories of theme are represented in the dominant definitions of team building presented across the sport psychology literature. But it is particularly interesting that the definition emerging from the coaches in Bloom's (2003) study presents several commonalities with this study, more-so than any of the other main definitions, perhaps owing to the coach based origins of both and how they perceive it operating on the ground.

Chapter 4 has also revealed that GAA coaches appear to intrinsically understand the caveats that accompany high social cohesion as specified in Chapter 2 (Langfred, 1998; Hackman, 1992; Hardy et al., 2005; Rovio et al., 2009). It has been shown that coaches express a preference for functional levels of respect underpinning task work over high

levels of social cohesion. While that didn't result in the omission of efforts to bolster social cohesion altogether, no overt strong opinions on a necessity for high social cohesion were expressed. Therefore in terms of intervention design decisions social cohesion was most often supported chronically via proximity opportunities afforded by the likes of the training environment or add-ons like dinner and drinks, to events such as matches. Social interactions were shown to be most supported by some coaches encouraging players to undertake activities outside of team time.

As shown in Chapter 2, a wide range of intervention formats appear under the umbrella of 'team building', even when those with a focus on interpersonal relationships are prioritised. In taking an overview of the findings of this study and considering them in light of some of the recommending emanating from the literature reviewed previously, it is apparent that GAA coaches would benefit from a more thorough needs analysis process in terms of planning and designing their interventions, particularly the acute type. The potential benefits of a more thorough 'needs analysis' process were only identified by one coach when reflecting on their team building exercises. Overall, coaches tend to rely on personal intuition to guide their team building decisions as oppose to a triangulation of needs by seeking input from players and other team personnel or indeed a formal assessment of team deficiencies. The emergence of the TEAM Assessment (Bruner et al., 2020) instrument may provide a route forward in this regard, but only if information regarding its availability and use are disseminated to this audience. Demographic data suggests that this cohort of coaches may have a higher chance of interacting with it having indicated a preference for getting coaching information from academic journals. It is unlikely to feature as a resource at any existing National Governing Body coaching course, whose syllabus is fixed, even if these advanced level coaches were to attend. Additionally in considering the range of interventions discussed by coaches and in particular those of an acute nature, it was striking that external providers and even sport

psychologists were seldom involved in the needs analysis, design or delivery of the interventions; something which challenges the discussion of literature around both the direct and indirect methods of delivery. As previously stated, Bloom et al., (2008) referenced a potential caveat with team building in that coaches often lack the knowledge or skills to implement it and may also be unaware of the potential for faulty implementation to lead to the development of the likes of team cliques. There was no evidence in the interview data to suggest that intercounty GAA coaches experienced a lack of self-efficacy regarding the implementation of team building activities nor consideration of any pitfalls. Their use of external providers and Sport Psychologists was shown to be minimal.

As previously identified a shortcoming of the team building literature traditionally has been the tendency for studies to assess the efficacy of a single intervention irrespective of the fact that teams are recognised as being dynamic entities. Coach interviews demonstrated that numerous strategies are implemented throughout the training year and perhaps overlapping, thereby making differentiating the effects of any one particular intervention difficult from a research perspective, but necessary in terms of real world competitive team requirements. Of the 5 themes presented across acute interventions, the literature base reviewed provides comparative evidence of methods within 4 of the 5 themes. 'In-house social' activities such as team dinners have been referenced (Bloom et al., 2003), but as activities within the likes of multi-activity 'team training camps'. In terms of 'in-house team development', the use of guest speakers such as Sport Psychologists (Bloom et al., 2003) and psychometrics (Beauchamp et al., 2008) have been referenced. 'Training based activities' have also featured, with the use of the particular exercises and drills aimed at developing interpersonal aspects in addition to technical, tactical or physical components (Bloom et al., 2003). While coaches didn't specifically register the use of adventure activities as a significant modality, similar 'training based

activities' included mountain based activity (runs, orienteering type tasks) and endurance courses. In line with Priest (1999) the challenge factor and sense of adventure can be agents of change here, in addition coaches recognised the novelty aspect.

Psychometrics was an intervention only undertaken by one intercounty coach. He was however sufficiently unfamiliar with the particular instrument and process that only rudimentary detail could be furnished. The key message however was that the undertaking had been useful to the teams interpersonal relations. It is reasonable to suggest that many of the barriers to the use of psychometrics identified in Chapter 2 operate in Gaelic Games, especially regarding knowledge of the process, uses, administration logistics and the financial cost.

In comparing the chronic interventions to the literature, it is perhaps more difficult to access comparative literature, most likely because many of the day to day interventions and activities of coaches would potentially be subsumed under the banner of organising the training environment or coaching activities and not specifically team building interventions although they often facilitate a dual purpose and are specifically engineered and included; nevertheless not distinct targets for academic research. When the literature of Chapter 2 is reviewed in light of the 5 chronic intervention themes, some exceptions present, specifically 'communications' and 'leadership'. Also under the theme of 'training activities' and 'communications' (owing to the method and aim described by coaches), PDMS is included. As stated above it also appears as an acute intervention. This is considered the appropriate categorisation for it. As shown in the quotes above, PDMS appears to be appealing to a cohort of intercounty coaches for a range of reasons. The disclosure element appears to appeal to the intuition of coaches that it will increase the closeness in group and/or provide a communications development opportunity on an individual player basis. This would be in line with the findings of Pain & Harwood (2009)

who demonstrated trust, cohesion, confidence and communication to be team outcomes. Other sports related studies employing PDMS also report its efficacy (Evans et al., 2013; Barker et al., 2014) in addition to a specific procedural guidelines (Holt & Dunn, 2006). No awareness was demonstrated that this is an intervention format with a distinct title and developed procedure. Intercounty coaches reported mixed reviews of disclosure type interventions, but it has to be considered that many didn't carry it out in its designated format, with some using it chronically on a weekly basis at training. It was also striking that reports of players disclosing sensitive personal material weren't considered in terms of the potential emotional knock-on effect nor a need for mental health support.

Under the theme of 'leadership', a trio of leadership practices presented, specifically mentoring, senior leadership groups and the use of senior/ veteran players. Notably reference to leadership as a function of the captaincy wasn't made by any GAA coach. Mentoring was employed frequently, particularly for the socialisation of new players. This is in line with previous findings supporting the impact of mentoring amongst players (Carron, Spink, & Prapavessis, 1997; Chelladurai, 2007). In spite of putting mentoring arrangements in place, coaches didn't go so far as to provide any form of role training for mentors and tended to rely on selecting older players. Selections for leadership roles in general, including mentoring quoted in the literature in addition to years of experience include skill level along with the likelihood of a player starting matches (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Loughead et al., 2006; Moran & Weiss, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2011; Yukelson et al., 1983). The use of multiple leaders in a team has found support as Fransen et al (2014) recommended four categories of player leader. The practice of using Senior Leadership Groups in intercounty GAA appears to have adopted this strategy. Two factors arose from the coaches data as striking, firstly no leadership training was provided and secondly selection methods were predominantly at the discretion of the manager based on their

perception of suitability, typically across a cross-section of ages. Only one coach referenced the use of Social Network Analysis whereby players would input to selection.

The theme of 'communications' was the largest one and communications was identified by coaches as a deficit skill in many players. Therefore a wide range of intervention efforts were enacted to remedy this including strategically structuring team meetings, small group discussions to encourage a range of voices and inputs, the use of social media, visual communications and targeting individuals to speak. As identified in Chapter 2, the importance of communications is widely acknowledged as a key function of group dynamics and interventions to develop verbal communication skills are in disproportion to this with the exception of Sullivan (1993) and Kwon et al (2016). Likewise the intercounty coaches acknowledged the importance of communications, identified the deficiencies but relied largely on structuring their environment as a remedy. The practicalities of time were identified as one barrier to a more elaborate, focused intervention.

Conflict, according to intercounty coaches is inevitable in team relationships. LaVoi (2007), Holt & Knight (2012) and Ishak (2017) concur. Both task and relational conflict were identified by coaches, albeit not in that terminology (LaVoi, 2007; Holt & Knight, 2012). Consideration of the balance between it being a facilitative or debilitative (Dreu & Weingart, 2003) event is similarly balanced in the literature as it is amongst the coaches. In agreement with Feltz (1993) coaches identified the importance of resolving conflict. Corresponding to Holt, Knight, & Zukiwski (2012), one coach felt that the Sport Psychologist was ideally placed to be the one to implement conflict resolution. It is however not always the case in amateur sports such as Gaelic Games that there is a Sport Psychologist employed by the team.

An additional congruence between the coaches and the literature occurred in relation to player selection. Bloom et al (2003) identified 'player recruitment' as key, in that the player must buy into the team ethos. It was similarly identified by GAA coaches that the quality of your dressing room is dependent on the players you have in it.

Overall this study demonstrates intercounty GAA coaches value team building and recognise the importance of interpersonal relationships. It has been shown that they are cognisant of team building benefits and have a range of instrumental aims for it. The potential for development appears to lie in upskilling regarding needs analysis and the delivery of some intervention formats.

The strength of this study lies in the experience base of the coaches in terms of both years of coaching experience and the breadth of team levels. In terms of limitations, while there was no overt sense throughout the interview process that coaches were 'gatekeeping' team building methods they have experienced success with and wish to preserve as a personal competitive advantage, it has to be considered that is a possibility. An additional limitation presented in terms of coach recruitment for the study, in that at the time of the interviews I was employed as sport psychologist with an intercounty team, which featured players across two levels, Under 21 and Senior Intercounty. Ethically the implication of this was that a cohort of coaches who may be preparing competing teams had to be excluded as potential candidates. It is also considered that it would have been an interesting extension, even if beyond the design of the current research, to include interviews with players who experienced some of the interventions under these coaches and discover their perception of the interventions compared to that of the coaches. The study also didn't deliberately explore interventions which were considered not to have worked, another angle which may have been interesting and is seldom addressed in the literature.

4.5   Conclusion

As previously stated, team building research into amateur competitive sports is sparse. The current research has served to fill the existing gap by illuminating the team building practices, considerations and experiences of intercounty GAA coaches. In order to extend this enquiry to do likewise for the competitive recreational team sport Chapter 5 will explore and report on team building at club level GAA.

Chapter 5: Recreational, Competitive Sector

5.1 Introduction

As was evident from Chapter 2 the vast majority of team building research is set in elite sports and the intercollegiate environment, both very different to the constraints of the recreational competitive sports team. While Chapter 4 has addressed the gap in the literature regarding amateur, elite sports team building practices, this chapter aims to do likewise for the recreational, competitive sector. Gaelic Games, having both an elite and sub-elite divisions provides an ideal laboratory to explore both. As expressed by one coach interviewed in this study, "GAA is social fabric, binds a community, it's a culture" (C1). The following media report exemplifies this;

> "It's what the GAA is all about.
>
> Members of the Monasterevan senior football team in Kildare convened for a regular training session last night but their management had something different in mind than sprints and ball drills
>
> Their club captain Paul Kelly broke his leg two months ago, seriously impeding him in his fuel supplies business. Instead of embarking on a regular training session last night, his teammates donned their wellingtons and helped Kelly in this work in the bog. The trailer did sink but the boys will have undoubtedly extricated it. The club posted a video on their Facebook page with the message;
>
> The GAA…where else would you see it…
>
> Our senior captain Paul Kelly broke his leg 2 months ago in a league game against Allenwood. In an unorthodox training session tonight the managers decided they would give Kelly Fuel Supplies a dig out to draw in the turf. All was going well until Kazzy sunk a 10tonne trailer to the heavens. GAA Nua on RTE last night was all well and good but you can't bate a bit of old fashioned GAA spirit every now and again. Don't forget to contact Paul if you're in need of turf this winter".

-Hoganstand.com (2017).

While the above newsworthy team expedition isn't of the regular team building variety to feature in the literature, it does give a sense of 'GAA club life', camaraderie and perhaps the a type of coveted cohesion that many of the interventions detailed in Chapter 2 seek to achieve. But it begs the question as to the team initiative detailed above is the result of existing cohesion or cohesion producing currency, perhaps both? The aim of this study is to examine team building from the perspective of the GAA club coach.

5.2   Methodology

Information regarding the 'research method & paradigm' applicable to this chapter can be reviewed in section 4.2.1.

5.2.1   Objectives

In line with the stated aim, the following research objectives are presented for this chapter:

a. To explore the meaning of 'team building' to club GAA coaches

b. To investigate the acute team building methods employed by club GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

c. To investigate the chronic team building methods employed by club GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

d. To further explore, via the discussion, emergent issues relating to the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships in club GAA teams.

5.2.2 Designing The Study

Information regarding the semi-structured interview design applicable to this chapter can be reviewed in section 4.2.3.

5.2.3 Research Participants

As per the explanation of the terminology of the GAA vernacular between 'coach' and 'manager' explained in Chapter 4, the same will apply in relation to the club positions and therefore the term 'coach' will prevail. Five club level coaches were recruited to undertake a semi-structured interview. Only coaches who had experience working at adult club level and not solely underage, were interviewed. Recruitment took place via personal contacts, intermediaries and a social media request. All interviewees were male, which is representative of the overwhelming disproportion of male to female coaches in Gaelic Games.

Coaches had an experience range of coaching all four Gaelic team sports. Only coaches with a minimum of two years' experience at adult level met the inclusion criteria. The rationale for such was based on ensuring that all coaches both had sufficient experience to contribute to the discourse. Nobody was eliminated on the grounds of not meeting this criteria. Timewise all coaches had extensive coaching experience ranging from <5 to 15 years. Two coaches had attended GAA Coach Education courses, while the remaining three had no formal sports related education. All coaches engaged in non-formal learning from a variety of sources. Table 5.1 summarises the demographic information which was collected via the 'Coach Demographic Form" (Appendix H) in advance of the interviews. An identity code has been issued to each coach to main anonymity i.e. C1, C2 etc.

Table 5.1. *Demographic Information For Club Coaches*

Identity Code	Gaelic Sports Coached	Levels	Coaching Experience	Formal Sports Related Education	Non-Formal Sports Related Education
C1	-Hurling	-Club Underage -Club Adult	-6-10 years	-No	-Books -Academic Journals -Print Media -Internet Research -Youtube
C2	-Gaelic Football	-Club Underage -Club Minor -Adult Collegiate -Club Adult	-<5 years	-GAA Coaching Courses	-Books -Print Media -Youtube -Conferences/ Seminars -Colleagues
C3	-Gaelic Football -Hurling	-Club Underage -Club Adult	-6-10 years	-No	-Internet Research -Youtube -Colleagues
C4	-Hurling	-Club Underage -Club Minor -Club Adult -Intercounty Underage -Intercounty Minor	-11-15 years	-No	-Books -Youtube
C5	-Hurling	-Club Underage -Club Minor -Club Adult	-11-15 years	-GAA Coaching Courses	-Books -Print Media -Youtube -Colleagues -Consultants

5.2.4. Procedure

Subsequent to Ethics Approval being granted from the University of Central Lancashire, an interview schedule was prepared (Appendix L). "Team building" was again maintained as the terminology as I felt that this would be meaningful to coaches.

All interviews were carried out in person, either in hotel lobbies or the participant's club facility. Initial rapport was established by engaging in conversation about contemporary GAA news stories, explaining my applied work history, simply explaining my research project and my interest in their input. Participants were issued with an Information Sheet (Appendix J), an Informed Consent Form (Appendix K) and the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix H). The interview schedule is available in Appendix L. Interviews, lasted from 35 to 45 minutes, were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Each interview ranged from 6 to 8 hours to transcribe, a process than afforded a high degree of familiarity with the data set.

5.2.5 Trustworthiness

Information regarding trustworthiness of this interview process can be reviewed in section 4.2.6.

5.3 Results

Interview transcripts were subjected to an Inductive Thematic Analysis process. The results from the series of semi-structured interviews with the intercounty coach cohort are presented and described below.

5.3.1   Data Analysis: Inductive Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6 Stage Thematic Analysis process was implemented. This is described in detail in section 4.3.1 and a sample of the process undertaken is provided in Appendix F.

5.3.2 Presentation of Results

The purpose of this study was to explore club level GAA coaches' use of team building, particularly for the development of interpersonal relationships in their teams. Emergent themes for the relevant research objectives are presented below. It is also acknowledged that the range and depth of insights gained from my immersion in and interrogation of the data set that is a feature of Inductive Thematic Analysis, would be limited by only relating the data to the specified objectives. As such further elaboration on aspects of team interpersonal relationships that extend the insights below or address adjunct areas are presented in the discussion. A range of supporting quotations from the coaches are presented to provider further insight.

a. Explore the meaning of 'team building' to club GAA coaches.

The first objective was to explore the meaning of 'team building' to club level GAA coaches. This formed the opening section of the interviews. Two questions were devised to elicit information, firstly "tell me about what the term 'team building' means to you?" and to probe further coaches were asked about "the characteristics of 'built' teams?". Table 5.2 presents the results of the inductive thematic analysis process. From an initial 12 lower order themes 5 higher order themes are presented. The theme of 'robust mentality' was the largest emergent theme.

Table 5.2. *Club GAA Coaches Definition of Team Building*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Theme
Social Cohesion Task Cohesion	Team Cohesion
Increased Feelings of Sports Competence Increased Performance Capacity	Playing Attributes
Training Oriented Activities Socially Oriented Activities	Activities
Increase in Motivation Increase in Confidence Increase in Focus	Robust Mentality
Long-term Process Team Specific Demands Increasing Interpersonal Knowledge	Process Based Aspects

Club GAA coaches understand team building as an assimilation of team cohesion, predominantly social cohesion; playing attributes, both how the team feels about their progress and how they improve actual performance; activities both of training and socially motivated objectives; a robust mentality and then the team building developmental 'process based aspects', whereby they recognise that it is an ongoing process that differs from team to team. The task based nature of it both in terms of methods, the underlying mechanism envisaged and outcomes is expressed by a coach as follows;

> You get your group to bond together. How do you do that? From my point of view your training methods from gym work to maybe a trip away to bond your team together. Mainly towards building character in training sessions from the world go through gym work, pitch sessions….you'd be looking for a team that would be really hard working as a group and really, really honest with themselves….a team that would be able to take information on board and carry it out on the

pitch….the players would get to know each other better and then trust each other more on the pitch and then work for each other, if I know more about you and the type of person you are and the qualities and honesty, then I'd go the extra mile. (C4)

An activity focus was also a theme that permeated several views and is described below, also in terms of the perceived mechanism of team development;

Where you bring your team off to a possibly unknown location, hand them over to a group of lads, possibly army rangers. They'd take charge of your team for possibly half a day, where they would put them through obstacle courses, building bridges, going through rivers, carrying bags of sand…character and esteem build up in your team. Hopefully you'd be bringing them home in the evening both stronger and tired, better mentally prepared because they've come through tasks that they wouldn't have known they were able for or ever done before….a built team, never say die, stay going till the final whistle, the will to win. If they achieved and managed to get through a team building day, you'd be hoping they'd get through 60- or 70 minutes of a championship match, (C5)

Both the club context, the benefits of team building including to the coach and a sense of the performance related outcomes are aptly referenced in this except;

I think it's developing a culture within the group that you can always relate back to throughout the year, setting the standard early….in the club environment you have lots of players you don't know what's going on in the background, you don't know what's going on in their lives….it's about getting to know the players, what makes them tick, their characteristics and mannerisms….it's making them believe….it has to be player driven….when you have 22-23 guys who are all capable of coming in and doing the job, knows the role….go out and express themselves. (C1)

In terms of the necessity of undertaking team building, coaches views varied between it being "a must" (C5) or "a certain amount of team building to be done" (C3) and an 'it depends' decision whereby you;

"have to judge the group of players you're with and see what you know. Some groups are really strong. They may be in a small town together, they're really tight, stuck together the whole way up. Maybe not so much with them from a town or big club. You might have to bond fellas together in that kind of a situation" (C4).

In relation to interpersonal relationships, it was as anticipated, with less of an developmental aim and more of a maintenance one owing to the nature of parochial clubs and familial relationships. Such was readily acknowledged by the coaches also;

In a club environment anyway the basis for it is there. Whether people realise it for not, it's there. They're all friends, they've all grown up and went to school together, socialise together, their girlfriends are friends, they're in that group.

The extent of the influence of social relationships was further explored. Perspectives varied between it being perceived as "very important" (C2), "important but not essential" (C1) and interpersonal knowledge being more important;

I think it's very important that that they know each other's characteristics. For example if you're quiet I need to know you're a quiet person from a communication point of view. Once we cross the white line, if I know you're not a communicator then I have to find other ways of knowing what you're going to do on the pitch. They don't really have to like each other but they have to know each other inside out. It does help if they like each other and get on socially. (C4)

All coaches confirmed that they had undertaken activities with a team building aim with their various units, the specific nature of which will be explored below.

b. To investigate the acute team building methods employed by club level GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

The second objective was to specify the nature of acute interventions that club level GAA coaches employ. Coaches were initially asked whether they have carried out team building with their teams? All coaches reported having conducted team building with their teams. Coaches were subsequently asked about the nature of activities undertaken. Three higher order themes were emergent, which are presented in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3. *Acute Team Building Interventions of Club GAA Coaches*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
Physical Activity Away Day Off-Site Physical Training Sessions	Training Based Activity
Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing Small Group Discussions Guest Speaker/ Coach	Team Development
Social-Physical Activity Social Activity	Social Activity

Three higher order themes are presented, specifically 'training based activities', 'team development' activities' and 'social activities'. The strongest preferences demonstrated were for 'social activities' which included the likes of a team pub night, crazy golf and an icebreaker activity. Goals related to interpersonal development amongst club coaches were not dominant, a feature which was accounted by the club team context, in that large cohorts of players will have longstanding relationships with team mates from underage sport, school, neighbourhoods and familial relations. Therefore team building goals were more based around interpersonal relationship maintenance and relief from the pitch

routine. The use of social activities to remedy a typical club situation of an age gap between players is explained;

> Think it helps if a group of players are away from training, play golf together or go to the races. I've seen a club situation with an age gap from the 18-22year olds to the 30s and I've had a situation where we had 1 to 1s with players and you get the older ones giving out about the younger ones and vice versa. If I you can socialise together and the older players get to know this is the way younger people operate now, they might understand each other when things happen during the year. (C4)

The use of adventure activities featured as another acute intervention of choice;

> We went to Killaloe <Outdoor Activity Centre> where people had to work as a team to achieve certain goals. Again that's very useful. It gets people outside their comfort zone, into a different environment. They've got to work together. It builds a but of unity, fun, there has to be a fun aspect or people wont play it. <Content> We left that to them, essentially what we did, we went down, he had a talk with them, he reported back to us something we didn't know, that they're nice guys but they don't have that real drive to get over the line. (C1)

Similarly, an account of the use of an external provider of army assault course activities describes the process;

> Army type activities, I find the best because the teams I'm usually involved in have very little army members in it and it's a novelty and will be seen as tough….you'd be leaving it to the lads as it's organised. They're doing their course so you'd stand back. I wouldn't like someone interfering with me if I was taking a session so I wouldn't interfere with them. You'd be giving them an odd nugget that you want them driven on. Sometimes there can be cliques in teams or clubs so you might flag it to the organisers that you want different groups broke up.(C5)

A 'Personal Disclosure Mutual Sharing' type intervention was also implemented by 2 coaches, albeit not in name or with the use of the formalised structure;

I got a group of players in a circle and every player had to call out something that nobody would have known about them. One guy said he was colourblind. Just small things like that stand out in memory, brings out honesty. We all have things people don't know about us, not bad things just things that they don't know so I suppose if you get those out in the open they say 'he was honest in that', it might bring a percentage out in a player. (C5)

Psychometrics, as expected, wasn't employed by any of the club coaches. It was remarked that "if I don't know what makes my players tick I shouldn't be manager of the team. If I don't know the characteristics of different players I shouldn't be managing" (C1). On the whole, it is evident that acute team building interventions appeal to club GAA coaches. They also demonstrate consideration of team context and have specific aims when undertaking interventions.

c. To investigate the chronic team building methods employed by club level GAA coaches, with a particular emphasis on the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

The third objective was to specify the nature of the chronic interventions that club level GAA coaches employ. It was accepted that many of these may not 'in-name' be targeted by the coach under their perception of 'team building' but instead be considered to be part of the team management processes, but nonetheless developmental. Table 5.4 presents the emergent themes; 4 higher order themes were formed from 11 lower order themes.

Table 5.4. *Chronic Team Building Interventions of Club GAA Coaches*

Lower Order Themes	Higher Order Themes
Captaincy Appointments Captaincy Activities	Leadership
Proximity Opportunities Small Group Work Orchestrated Communications Existing & External Communications	Communications
In-House Social Events External Socialising	Socialising
Novelty Exercises Cooperative Drills Hard Physical Training Together	Training Activities

Higher order themes are presented as follows; 'leadership', 'socialising', 'training activities' and the largest theme of 'communications'. In terms of the latter, a range of communications modes, either directly influenced by the coach, orchestrated by structuring the environment or recognised as already operating in team amongst players; were identified by coaches. The progression across the season with a team reforming after a long period of dysfunction is described, whereby targeted communications had to be forced initially to progress it;

> When you open it up to them at first everyone is sitting there wondering who will talk first. 'I have something to say but I want someone else to say it, I don't want to be the one always talking'. If nobody was talking I'd say 'well lads we're not leaving here until yee start talking'….at the start same few voices, younger players weren't talking. The older lads were doing the talking. I'd say 'I want the younger lads to talk now'. I suppose they didn't think they had anything to say that the older lads would listen to, but the game was changing. And they were bringing a new dimension, different ideas. The nights before championship 10-15 minute

chat, the younger lads would be doing the talking in the dressing room, before matches, at training, confidence building up. (C3)

The process of promoting communications allied to team training activities, was further described;

I remember saying to them 'we're doing the drills tonight. You can talk amongst yourselves so long as its about training. What you did last night doesn't come into training….Once I had a word with a few, it was all about encouraging each other" (C3).

'Orchestrating communications' was also employed by club coaches, such as "putting players together" (C1) to trigger specific communications or remedy a lack of interpersonal communication. Additionally it was considered useful to;

Break the group into backs and forwards….if I see a guy whose head it down, I'll typically ask him his thoughts, get him involved. I know some guys are vocal and try dominate so I'll go to the guy who's quiet and ask him for his thoughts. It's typically 5 minutes, attention spans are short (C1).

The team training environment structure was also identified as facilitative to communications development whereby players; "

Arrive on to training early, for the that's a big thing, do your activation together, be in communication, sitting together. Are you talking to the same fella every time? Plenty opportunity to talk to each other, doesn't have to be about team matters all of the time. Social then again as well when they meet outside the team. (C4)

Small group work also featured;

We'd bring them in, break them into groups, have the points on flipcharts and ask them. They'd have to have a team leader, put it down, come back with their points and we'd discuss it as a group….I like player input but it has to be positive, you can't open the floor too much but you can't not let them say anything. (C4)

A PDMS type intervention was also described for the specific purposes of communication development; "younger players we'd have found that as a problem, we'd have brought them into a room and grouped them up and asked them questions and got them to talk about different personal things, not too personal, things they wouldn't know about each other, to get them to communicate more. (C4)

Interpersonal relationships and communications were also explored in relation to conflict and conflict management. The coach cohort has mixed views on the effects of team conflict. The majority of coaches felt that it had the potential to be either positive or negative, while two coaches were adamant that it was wholly negative. The sense of the inevitability, circumstances and the potential role of team building as a remedy is discussed;

> <Conflict> it happens, probably more regularly than we think. For example in a rural community you could have 2 players and 1 girlfriend. Conflict can creep in easily enough. There would be affairs taking place between lads. All these lads are living in each other's pockets, girlfriends out with them. You want to identify it and deal wit hit or sometimes pretend you don't know is a way of dealing with it. Depending on the age group, problem, there are different and set ways for dealing. Team building day could be a way of getting rid of it by putting them on the same team. It's hard to go in and go bald headed for the players, you mightn't know the full facts….Obviously conflict is negative, everyone is looking for a happy environment whereby there's no problems, no issues but lads being lads and you put 30 lads into a dressing room or a club you'll have some kind of conflict. (C5)

The challenging nature of conflict in team environments and role of communications in the mediation is explained;

> If there's conflict between players it usually comes from what gone on outside the team in their personal lives. Trying to deal with it isn't easy. You're trying to show both you're not on anyone's side, you're the mediator working for the good of

them team. So basically you're trying to get players to put their differences aside and work for the good of the team. I've had a situation where it wasn't easy and it did hurt the group it was a pity, really good players, leaders and they found it hard to put their differences aside. We try to talk about it with the individuals….positive or negative, it can be either. (C4)

The potential two-way nature of conflict and an management approach based around re-framing it was explained. The limitations of the scope as regards club life was also put in context;

In a certain way conflict can be a positive thing, depending on the spin you put on it. If they're going hammer and thongs at it, it can very damaging. But then the flip side is, spin it, they're passionate, it's your club or county, how you dress it up. In certain contexts it can split a camp. I've never experienced that. But if it did happen it's how you resolve it, can we put it into a positive? You only have them for an hour, no point berating them for an hour, they won't come back next week. (C1)

The theme of 'leadership' presented dual strands, namely the appointment of leaders and their functioning thereafter to influence operations and relationships. All of the club coaches appointed captains, one being a joint captaincy and the remaining appointing vice-captains also. No coach had appointed a senior leadership group. Captains were frequently appointed based on seniority or intercounty status. Vice-captaincy appointments were strategic in that they were a means of succession planning or a means of engaging a different demographic within the team, such as having a younger vice-captain to influence younger players on the panel. Both the selection mechanism and an insight into the interpersonal functions are evident in the following excerpt;

We picked a captain and vice-captain at the start of the year. The captain was a former intercounty player so everyone was looking up to him anyway, so he was the obvious choice. Then how do you gel the young lads. You looked at who was gelling well and made him the vice-captain. They all felt part of it….I changed

the captain after 2 years and promoted the vice-captain….You'd find yourself ringing the captain most often, 'this fellas head is a bit down, you might have a word with him', not to be coming from me the whole time. (C3)

The range of considerations around leadership, including the role of communication ability is considered as follows;

You'd be saying in every club there's a couple who stand out. You'd like to try develop it amongst all which is never going to happen. That comes through in the communication thing as well, you'd try get lads to speak up, be a leader. Then there's other players who are on pitch leaders, don't say much but it's how they perform on the pitch. <For the captain> I suppose you'd have to have a good talker, someone who will lead by example and also someone who will be on the team. (C4)

A strategic approach to appointing joint captains was also discussed;

I identify the guy I need to get 20% more out of and I make him joint captain. This is going to make him. He'll be going around confident, hangs around with the young guys so he'll keep them in tow, he has his finger on the pulse. The older guy will lead the older ones. You're shaping future leaders. The oldest lad on the field might not be the best leader. The captain is a reflection of the manager. (C1)

Allied to the function of leadership, the issue of new player socialisation was explored. Club coaches tended towards a more 'hands-off' approach in terms of influencing this interpersonal process such as; "I don't make a big deal out of it, just put him in, treat him like everyone else" (C1). The practice of phasing them in was also described;

Integrating them into the dressing room, you'd be hoping if a player is going to break into a team he's probably around the panel for 12 months. If I'm involved in a panel I'd like to be bringing along new players, letting them see the match day thing, how players prepare themselves for a game. I've seen a situation where you have county boys there doing their activation stuff and their bands and everyone else there watching them. You'd like to think that young players would

buy into that….and when they're ready to break in then wouldn't be overawed by the occasion on the day" (C4).

The approach of a coach of leaving the socialisation function to senior players in an intercollegiate team is explained as follows;

Two-thirds of the team were still around form the year before. They felt for a long time they were left out of the loop, the others had their relationships made. We tried to do team building exercises but it's hard when there's friendships made. It improved towards the end of the year. I spoke to a main player and the more senior players, used the team captain, left it out of my side of things, players had to get their relationships up, I couldn't be handholding, it's important they do that themselves. (C2)

It is the case that the topic of 'socialising' in GAA is synonymous with alcohol oriented events. While coaches recognising the potential benefits of encouraging players to play golf together or go to the races together outside of team time, the majority of coaches focus when 'socialising' is discussed, is to revert to their thoughts on alcohol consumption in teams. It should be noted however that coaches views on alcohol consumption amongst their players, isn't entirely negative but an 'it depends' situation;

I firmly disagree with drink bans in clubs, I encourage people to go out and live theirlife, socialise together, train together, work together, become friend….you have to know your target audience. A guy could be outgoing, abrasive, cocky, arrogant. Another might be a recluse. I have a lad down there and the highlight of his life is going to mass with his mother. I can't put him in an environment wit the boys drinking pints, having the craic. (C1)

Another coach, in judging his team context, opted to make team nights out a regular occurrence as a reward for winning; "basically as we start winning matches and the winning mentality stats to come in, we'll have our social nights as we start to win matches. So we'd play a championship match, next match not for 2weeks, 'right lads out tonight

then'. (C3) A contrary perspective on organised team socialising was also offered; "I think management kinda have enough to do without organising social gatherings. I find with players that they're good at organising one thing and that's their own social events. If it involves alcohol and pubs they're pretty good at that, I don't think they need a hand" (C5)

As has been shown club level GAA coaches embrace team building interventions and demonstrate an awareness of the potential need to influence interpersonal relationships. In reviewing their team building efforts, the perception was that endeavours were fruitful and transferable;

> I would have seen as the year went on, they gained a lot more confidence. It was of real benefit to us because we gained the feedback from it that we could relate to them, integrate it into a drill, a tackling drill, really hammer home that point. That is 'the guy told us you didn't have the will to win', with a bit coarser language but you know. (C1)

The intangible nature of the potential payoffs was also identified;

> You'd often hear them referencing it in the dressing room or showers afterwards about such and such a thing in the team bonding day. I think it'd be built into their minds and psyche going forward for the year. You mightn't actually see a lot of improvement, you'd be hoping it'd build character for the year ahead. (C5)

It has previously been identified that team building literature traditionally has focused on collegiate and elite sports and rarely in recreational competitive sport. The findings from this study will be discussed in light of the literature, maintaining mindfulness of the different team contexts.

5.4 Discussion

Based on the gaps identified in Chapter 2 this chapter sought to explore team building, in particular interpersonal relationships in GAA teams by club level coaches. The first

objective was to ascertain club coaches understanding of 'team building'. My results found that team building, according to club GAA coaches, has 5 constituents; team cohesion, playing attributes, team activities, a robust mentality and the process based aspects. When these are compared to the existing definitions in the literature we find several commonalities related to discrete elements of all of the mainstream definitions. Within the offering of Carron et al., (2015) the components of holding "common perceptions about group structure" and "reciprocating interpersonal attraction" can be said to be related to the GAA coaches lower order themes of 'interpersonal knowledge' and 'social cohesion'. Teambuilding being a means of 'increasing effectiveness' is a key component of Brawley & Paskewich's (1997) definition. Similarly Beer (1980) identified a purpose as improving the "functioning and performance of the team". GAA coaches also reported improvements in 'playing attributes', specifying increases in performance capabilities, competence as lower order themes and improving key facets that combine to enable a 'robust mentality', specifically motivation, confidence and focus levels. Several aspects of the definition elements arising from Bloom's (2003) study also mirror those of the GAA coaches closely. Team cohesion, the season long process and undertaking activities of a social, physical and psychological nature. GAA coaches in comparison also presented the theme of team cohesion, social activities and activities and events resulting in increases in psychological states. Overall it can be concluded that club level GAA coaches perceive team building broadly and in a highly similar way as that presented in the literature.

As previously stated, a number of researchers highlight potential dangers in promoting high levels of social cohesion (Langfred, 1998; Hackman, 1992; Hardy et al., 2005; Rovio et al., 2009. Amongst the club coaches the importance of social relations ranged from "very important" to "important but not essential" and also to a preference interpersonal knowledge over the social aspect. Excepts show that coaches are keenly aware of the club

team context, replete with long-term interpersonal relationships, familial relations and local knowledge; which influence the team environment. The range of interventions undertaken across both the acute and chronic categories demonstrate an appreciation for the value in social activities, both on and off the pitch, but at the same time such activities by no means dominate the team building landscape across the season.

The second objective based on investigating the acute team building modalities, identified training based interventions, team development efforts and social activities. In terms of interpersonal relationship development and maintenance, it presents both direct and indirect mechanisms as per the coaches perceptions detailed above. Several consistencies are noted between the findings og Bloom et al., (2003) and the present study in terms of acute intervention preferences of coaches including dinners and early year social events. Talks by a Sport Psychologist were also referenced in Bloom et al (2003). While the use of Sport Psychologist wasn't mentioned by club coaches at any juncture, talks by guest coaches and intercounty players which were identified as strategies are comparable, with both being having an informative team development aim. Training camps were also referenced in by the coaches in Bloom et al (2003), while training camps would be rare in club level GAA, especially those of a multi-day variety, the away-day training activities referenced serve similar aims. Two further practices mentioned in the findings of Bloom et al., were based around player recruitment and the removal of dissident players from rosters. 'Player recruitment' decisions, based around the fit of a player to a particular team, was not a factor amongst club coaches. It is reasonable to suggest that the challenges surrounding attracting and maintaining club players often mean that coaches don't have the luxury of rejecting personnel on such grounds. The removal of dissenting players was only referenced by a single club coach, presumably for similar reasons surrounding tight playing numbers.

Several researchers have identified the benefits of adventure activities to sports team development aims (Glass & Benshoff, 2002; Hatch & McCarthy, 2005; Attarian, 2001; Gillis & Speelman, 2008; Priest, 1999). It appears that club coaches hold the same perception with coaches opting for army assault courses and outdoor adventure centres as intervention options. The challenge factor (Priest, 1999), small group task work (Ewert and Sibthorp, 2014) and the nature of the physical and psychological demands (Hastie, 1989) were also identified by coaches as facilitative to their needs. Interestingly, Meyer and Wenger's (1998) recommendation to reference such activities subsequently with top-up discussions, was also identified by coaches as an offshoot.

PDMS featured amongst GAA coaches intervention ideas, albeit not in name nor design formula as specified by Holt & Dunn (2006). It was enacted by one coach as a communication development activity and by another for the purposes aligned with the essential aims of PDMS sessions in creating interpersonal knowledge, leveraging the vulnerability aspect of the activity to harness trust and openness; but without evidence of an awareness of the possible knock-on emotional difficulties for disclosing players.

The third objective was the investigate the chronic interventions employed by club coaches. The themes of communications, leadership, socialising and training activities were emergent. The appointment and activities of the positions of captain and vice-captain encompassed the sum of leadership interventions. Selection criteria for the captaincy in-part mirrored that described in the literature (Bloom et al, 2003), in that selection criteria was most often based around years of experience. Selection criteria for the vice-captaincy haven't emerged as significant findings in the literature. While the use of multiple player leaders has been investigated and deemed facilitative, it is more from the perspective of the senior leadership group as oppose to joint captaincy. Other selection criteria identified in the research such as soft-skills and friendship status didn't present as

considerations amongst GAA coaches. Training for leadership roles was not offered by coaches to their captains, instead personnel chosen were deemed to already meet their requirements and beyond that only some role related discussion took place.

 In terms of communications, coaches overall felt the need to intervene to increase the frequency and variety of contributors to team communications, particularly from their younger player cohorts. Interventions with a communication specific aim were sparse, with the exception of the use of a PDMS exercise with a group of young players. Otherwise, structuring the natural team environment to facilitate increased or specific communications was the mode of choice. As previously identified, communications is seen as pivotal for healthy team environments, however little research exists in sport psychology specifically targeting communications development beyond Sullivan (1993) and Kwon et al (2016). Additionally coaches also were keen to prevent the occurrence of too much player input, input from dominant sources too often.

In relation to the theme of 'training activities', congruence can be found with the findings of Bloom et al., (2003) in terms of the use of 'physical and technical' exercises in training sessions to confer team building benefits in an indirect manner such as cooperating pairs, the use of novelty activities and the feeling of everyone enduring hard physical training together. Coinciding with this Cox (2006) also recommended designing training drills and games which encourage cooperation in the name of team building.

Conflict was an interpersonal issue that coaches had mixed feelings on, either viewing it as a negative occurrence or with mixed feelings, while in line with the literature (LaVoi, 2007; Ishak, 2017), the inevitability of conflict in team dynamics was also identified in GAA. Whereby coaches expressed positive sentiments towards conflict it tended to be in situations where it was task based around demanding accountability or physical altercations on the pitch. Such was also confirmed by Holt & Knight (2012).

When taking both category of intervention, a common deficit was evident amongst club level coaches and external providers, that of the practice of a formal team building needs assessment which would serve to ensure that no gap areas were left deficient. There was very much a sense from coaches that the nature of team building undertaken was most often their sole judgement, habit or activity preference. Contrary to the findings of Yukelson (1997) club GAA coaches showed no evidence of finding team building difficult to implement effectively. On the whole it can be confirmed that club GAA coaches demonstrate an appreciation and inclination towards team building and working to bolster the interpersonal aspects of their team. Given the demographic data presenting also, there is evidence of the existence of an appetite amongst club coaches for information on team development, albeit of an informal nature.

The strength of this study lies in the range of coaches interviewed, with experience and therefore insights in club minor, under20, club senior, junior and intercollegiate presented. The natural constraints of this team context also differentiate it from many of the elite and college teams featuring in the extant literature. However, the club context i.e. amateur, recreational, competitive sports teams with limited resources of time and finances, are simultaneously highly applicable to not only other GAA teams but a host of sports and teams nationally and internationally. In essence this encompasses the situation of the vast majority of adult, team sports but for which the literature base is almost non-existent. The main limitation of this study lies in the fact that there was no differentiation between coaches who had experienced success with teams versus those who didn't. Establishing the criteria for 'success' would be difficult and would go beyond the achievement of a championship trophy, the quality of opposition in the competition etc. As the GAA has struggled during the last decade with falling player numbers, non-competitive recreational games have been introduced ie. 'Gaelic for Mothers & Others' and 'Gaelic for Lads & Dads'; aiming to attract those not inclined towards competition nor continuous

commitment, but who value the activity and social opportunities, especially in locations where alternative activities are few or unavailable. It would also prove interesting to investigate how team building could optimise the offerings of these activities. It would also have been interesting to explore for differences in experiences between coaching male and female teams.

5.5 Conclusion

As shown in Chapter 2, team building research into recreational competitive sport is sparse. The current research has served to fill the existing gap by illuminating the team building practices, considerations and experiences of club GAA coaches. Considering the findings of this volume of research on the whole, Chapter 6 will explore the ramifications of such in terms of progressing professional practice amongst the various stakeholders.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

At the outset of this research project, it was my intention to illuminate the process of teambuilding interpersonal relationship in GAA teams. Chapter 2 explored the full gamut of team building interventions allied to the development and maintenance of interpersonal facets of teams. It recognised the difficulties with the existing research base an a reference tool for coaches and sports psychologists in that it is rife with inconsistencies, heavily cohesion focused, reliant on quantitative measures and short term narrow interventions and investigates only a narrow range of team types. Thus, the process of evidence based working for both coaches and sport psychologists is hampered, especially when operating in the amateur, part-time team environment with scarce time and resources. Chapter 3, sought to address many of these shortcomings by carrying out an action research study, with an elite, amateur team and over the duration of the entire season. It was found that the action research methodology was well suited to this task in the dynamic team environment. A range of acute and chronic interventions were carried out across three naturally occurring phases of the season. My pragmatic philosophy was particularly suitable for this study in that many of the intervention decisions were driven by the team environment features and emerging needs. Chapter 4 sought to illuminate the status quo as regards the team building perceptions and efforts of elite level GAA coaches. It was revealed that intercounty GAA coaches have an understanding of team building which is consistent with the literature. Coaches have a high level of awareness of interpersonal relationships facets of their teams. They employ a range of both acute and chronic intervention modalities across their seasons. Chapter 5 aimed to address a gap in the literature with regard to team development in recreational, competitive team sports by investigating how club level GAA coaches understand teambuilding and thereafter how

their enact it in their teams. It was found that, like their intercounty counterparts, club level coaches understanding of team building is very much in line with the literature. The parochial nature of their teams rendered the maintenance of team interpersonal relationships more significant than development. Club level coaches also employ a range of acute and chronic intervention formats across their seasons.

As the underpinning aim of this thesis was to make a contribution to professional practice via 4 key objectives;

1. To critically investigate extant literature relating to interpersonal relationships development in team sports.

2. To implement and illuminate the development of the interpersonal aspects of an intercounty GAA team throughout the course of a full season.

3. To investigate acute and chronic methods used by elite GAA coaches to develop interpersonal relationships in their teams.

4. To investigate acute and chronic methods used by club level GAA coaches to develop interpersonal relationships in their teams.

It is felt that those objectives have been successfully met through this programme of research leading to the closure of the gap in the literature surrounding the nature of team building and interpersonal relationship development in amateur sports teams. Consequently, a range of implications are salient for various stakeholders.

6.2   Implications for Practice

In considering the findings of Chapter 3, 4 and 5, a number of implications are presented;

6.2.1 Implications for the National Governing Body

Irrespective of the traditional, nationalistic and religious origins and ideals of the GAA, the organisation is considered quite progressive and has shown itself to be open-minded, adaptable and commercially adept. Perhaps one of greatest progressions in Gaelic Sport in recent times has been the rapid adoption of the sport sciences in the intercounty scene and to a lesser extent in many, albeit not all clubs. The Economic and Social Research Institute report on the Social and Economic Value of Sport in Ireland (Delaney & Fahey, 2013) credits the organisation with amassing a wealth of social capital, accounting for over 40% of those who volunteer for sports in Ireland, with many of those volunteers filling coaching roles. The GAA has for many decades provided a programme of coach education, a programme which has been punctuated by reviews and redesigns. GAA coach education certifications have not traditionally been mandatory for coaching the games. The programme structure is shown in Figure 6.1 as follows:

Figure 6.1. *GAA Coach Education Structure*

In examining the syllabus in its current, re-designed format in light of the findings of this programme of research several opportunities to bolster its content present. In relation to education and training on team building and interpersonal relationships in the adult award stream, it is considered that it doesn't adequately convey the fundamental importance of the interpersonal relationship in a team sport, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, let alone provide guidance on developing or maintaining it. The 'OTu Model' (Figure 6.2) the programme is based on has several strands of which 'psychological focus' is one, with 'cohesion' also taking a place in the model.

Figure 6.2. *The OTu Model*

The 'Award 1 Adult Coach Manual specifies that coaches should, in their role, strive to bring out the best in the team, develop them as both a group and as individuals. Included in the "Coaching Principles" are the development of team spirit, encouraging togetherness on and off the field, highlighting team play efforts over individual efforts. However, the coach manual, provides little by way of a 'how to?' enact these principles in practice. Within the 3Cs of the model, "communications" is one strand, but the manual only goes so far as to provide communications guidelines for the coach in terms of communicating

to the team and fails to address inter-player communications needs from the coaching perspective. While 'cohesion' appears on the model graphic, it receives no further coverage in the model. The Level 2 syllabus lists both 'psychological focus' and 'communications' also, but no award manual is available. Level 3 awards appear to be as of yet not developed.

Currently the biggest challenge facing the organisation relates to player numbers, specifically the issue of drop out and increased urban relocation from rural clubs. According to Lunn et al., (2013) in the ESRI Report "Keeping Them In The Game" dropout rates in GAA between the ages of 21 and 26 were 75% in football and 60% in hurling and camogie. This report, which presents information specific to the Irish context, shows that amongst the top eight motivators for taking up a team sport amongst adults are 'socialising', 'improving performance', 'meeting people' and 'competing'. It is apparent that there are multiple areas of overlap here with the team building themes presented in the previous chapters. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that increased understanding of the importance of developing teams in wide holistic ways, may positively affect the player experience and lead to continued motivation, at least at a participatory club level where the problem is most acute. Research also shows that team sports provide a range of positive social, psychosocial and psychological health outcomes for participants, including a sense of belonging, emotional social support, a social network and social interaction opportunities, so long as competitive elements were managed (Andersen et al., 2019). Consequently, the value in enabling coaches to increase their impact via their range of competencies, becomes further apparent.

In terms of the practicalities of addressing this and having reviewed a wide range of team building methods internationally and across a range of sports, it is proposed that coach education offerings be bolstered by an add-on range of modules focused on 'Team

Building- Interpersonal Relationships in GAA'. In considering the practicalities of delivery, demographic data for the coaches presented in Chapter 4 and 5 were reviewed. It was noted that club coaches especially, the likely primary targets of such modules, given the informal coach education resources they expressed a preference for accessing, would be most likely to access them via the GAA website learning portal or Youtube. The proposed 'GAA Team Building Module Menu' is presented in Figure 6.3 below. A sample module is available in Appendix M.

Module 1	Introduction: Team Building Sound Foundations
Module 2	Building 'Us'- Interpersonal Relationships
Module 3	'The More The Merrier'- Socialising Newcomers
Module 4	Kickstarting Team Communications
Module 5	Harnessing Team Leadership
Module 6	Confronting Team Conflict
Module 7	Targeting Via Needs Analysis
Module 8	Acute Interventions & Awesome Away-Days
Module 9	Team Maintenance
Module 10	Team Building With A Sport Psychologist

Figure 6.3. *GAA Team Building Module Menu*

In addition, the issue of leadership was discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 with varying practices presenting. Unlike NGB's with leadership development programmes already operating and reviewed previously, no evidence of such programmes were unearthed for player development. However it would appear to be beneficial in particular at senior level in both club and intercounty settings to have additional leadership capacity and not have to address the lack with remedial action or just use the few identified with leadership aptitude naturally or developed elsewhere. It would seem that scope exists for starting the process in players identified as likely to progress through the grades, from minor level onwards. As such vision and organisation at the County Board Level would appear to be best practice.

Additionally, a range of serious discipline breaches have marred Gaelic Games in recent years, from serious assaults on players and referees leading to match abandonment, long-term suspensions, referees taking strike action and quitting the games. As shown in Chapter 2, emotional intelligence training has become more a more frequent occurrence in many group types. It is suggested that there may be merit in the GAA examining such a mandated course of action for those incurring suspensions or repeated red cards for aggressive acts who wish to continue their participation.

6.2.2   Implications for Coaches

As shown, both intercounty and club level GAA coaches understand, rate and implement team building processes. The findings of this thesis should demonstrate to coaches the fundamental importance of team interpersonal relationships, as the foundations to all that they aim to build on top of that. A primary implication lies in encouraging coaches to re-examine their personal coaching philosophy in line with this, cognisant of the value to their technical and tactical development but also aware of the wider benefits to the individual, the team, player retention, mental health, competitive aspirations and even the wider society.

ESRI data, which is specific to the Irish context, confirms that internal and external pressures are influencing human resources in the GAA, but also provides valuable insight into individuals motivations and gains from their experience in team sports, a significant one of which is GAA. There is guidance in this for the coach who can and will exercise perspective and see beyond the realm of only measuring value in terms of competitive success, which is tenuous anyway for most teams. Players, especially club players, are strongly motivated by the social relationships and opportunities in GAA, it therefore makes sense that coaches would factor this into their team planning.

From a planning perspective, the value in treating each teams needs as distinctive and dynamic is reinforced; as is the requirement for a thorough needs analysis process. Action research affirms the value in that needs analysis process being an ongoing process. Also affirmed is the value in seeking input from multiple parties, players, backroom staff as well as management. Coaches demonstrated an appreciation for both acute and chronic intervention efforts and should continue to do this. GAA coaches are inclined towards upskilling, both formally and non-formally and should perpetuate and expand this always. They also demonstrate intuition towards interventions like PDMS. It would serve coaches well to seek out information on their intervention ideas to check if procedures or caveats exist in advance of forward planning. Above all coaches should recognise the value their provide and reflect on what they gain from their involvement in Gaelic Games and stop regularly to remind themselves to let the old adage drive many of their interpersonal interactions; "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel".

6.2.3   Implications for Players

As stated above, research indicates that player motivations for involvement have both social and performance based roots. Emanating from having experienced a long pandemic enforced hiatus in team activity and the loss of two years of playing time from club careers especially, it is firstly worthwhile for players to reflect on the value of their team involvement to their lives and the contribution of their team relationships to that, all of which was missed during the pandemic closures. By extension thereafter, it is worth further reflection on how each individual might 'level-up' their contribution to team interpersonal relationships, perhaps resulting in increased levels of performance or the retention of players such that fielding teams remains viable. Players can consider their personal role in socialising new players and how that might be optimised? In terms of team communications, proficient communicators can become active agents in

encouraging more reluctant players to engage or seeking out their input. Less agile communicators can seek to identify small, progressive ways to increase their communications and in turn their confidence. Those in designated leadership positions, captaincy roles or senior leadership groups can examine their role and seek to optimise it by accessing the range of leadership literature and resources available and accessible to the lay audience. Acknowledging the occurrence of conflict in the team environment shouldn't be considered by players to encompass a license to engage indiscriminately. Instead assuming a solution focused position and taking a rational and functional approach to mutual accountability is encouraged. Lastly, it is likely that most players during the course of their involvement with teams, will be presented with team building interventions of some type at some stage. Fully engaging with the process and contributing honestly and positively to any needs analysis process or intervention arranged is recommended, as is keeping perspective of the likely 'best intentions' of the coach.

6.2.4. Implications for Sport Psychologists

I am writing this thesis from the operating position of the Sport Psychologist. In hindsight, I admit that I was not expecting an outcome of Chapter 4 and 5 to be confirmation that GAA coaches rely little on Sport Psychologists for their team building needs. Experience has taught me to value both the direct and indirect services mode of consulting on other aspects of psychological preparation of teams and I need to do likewise with the process of team building. As a profession recognising coaches intimate knowledge of their teams, personnel and visions must be a goal (but while also acknowledging that this level of operating is not universal amongst coaches) and supporting their needs where they deem the need to exist is perhaps the best way to serve their team development needs.

Given that GAA coaches are active agents in their own professional development, both in formal and informal ways, perhaps one of the main functions of the Sport Psychologist at this juncture is to translate the academic literature on team building into functional information for coaches, such as with the 'Team Building Module Menu' presented above.

Accounting for the literature reviewed during this extensive process and the opportunity to engage with so many coaches, it has been identified that the formalisation of a needs analysis process would most likely augment the intervention design process for many coaches, but not all. Introducing coaches to the TEAM Assessment discussed previously is probably the most immediate step forward in that regard, not being solely reliant on the instrument but using it to frame the discussion and initiate the planning process.

Chapter 3, my season long action research study reinforced for me again that caution must be exercised when employing quantitative measures in terms of avoiding over-reliance on results and viewing them more-so as complementary information supporting qualitative data triangulated from a variety of sources including observations. For the practitioner not in an immersion situation with a team they may give a rather limited picture of the team status or issue.

6.2.5   *Implications for Future Research*

To advance knowledge in this area at this juncture, the logical next step is to engage coaches in a team building training programme to further empower them in working with their teams. It is suggested that training be tested with two separate modes, an online cohort with access to video material and resources and a face-to-face workshop format, with methods being assessed via coach interviews and focus groups. Currently also, the literature lacks an angle whereby players involved in interventions provide feedback on the intervention format, instead assessing pre-intervention to post-intervention changes team status have dominated players involvement throughout the literature; therefore a

study which includes player perceptions of a range of interventions may provide further insight into key considerations and intervention designs.

The longitudinal action research methodology employed in Chapter 3 is in line with contemporary recommendations for team building research. It would be interesting to see this replicated in different sports and at different levels, especially with an ab-initio team and in a professional team environment. In addition and in hindsight, the inclusion of the Collective Efficacy Questionnaire for Sports (Short et al., 2005) would have provided further interesting insight alongside existing tools in this study, especially given its increasing use in the literature and relationship with many of the variables measured.

6.3   Personal Reflections

As stated above I had certain experience based expectations about what I would find when undertaking the body of research detailed in Chapter 3, 4 and 5, not least of which was surrounding the involvement of Sport Psychologists in team building processes. Surprise! Truth be told, I was most captivated by anticipating interviewing a range of intercounty coaches I had watched operating, mostly successfully from afar for a long time. Some of those materialised and ethical conflicts created embargos on attempting others.

Throughout this marathon project, I have worked with many teams and team types and I continue to - for now. The range of literature I was exposed to throughout the process was broad, some intervention formats I was already familiar with and some new to me that have since become central to my arsenal. Therefore, my personal practice has been changed as a consequence of this process.

Having operated from the perspective of delivering acute interventions to unfamiliar teams and also enjoyed (and 'unenjoyed') immersion experiences in teams in recent years, I am even further convinced of a few 'truths'. Most pertinent is the value that lies in those

interpersonal relationships and 'togetherness' experiences born in fields and dressing rooms during fleeting periods of time beyond performance benefits.

At 11.30pm on August, 5th 2022 I received an unexpected and unwanted phone call while abroad, from a former backroom team colleague; "Sandra, did you hear? Dillon Quirke died during a club match tonight in Semple Stadium, Sudden Cardiac Death they think". The talented, robust, genial 24 year old was a central player on our All Ireland Minor and Under21 winning teams in the years previous. We'd all worked together, lost together, recovered together, won together and celebrated together. I carried out an acute team building intervention, their last one, with that group of players the week before their All Ireland final. All 35 of them completed a set of values sheets, dedicating a sheet to each team mate, specifying why they value him as a team mate and friend. Each player left training that last night with an envelope of personal testaments. I'm the only one who had the opportunity to read all of them. I wish I'd kept copies. In that one simple exercise the value of the interpersonal relationships formed dominated the sheets, all of the sheets. The hurling attributes of the player were second. I hope Dillon felt good about them in that moment and I hope his colleagues take comfort in having had the opportunity acknowledge what they most likely would never have verbalised. I wish and work for coaches and players to understand the value in investing in those relationships as well as the competitive goals, now more than ever.

Ní neart go cur le chéile

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

> **Study:** Evaluate the approach to and impact of acute & chronic
> approaches to team building interpersonal relationships
> in Gaelic Games via an action research study
>
> **Investigator:** Sandra Molloy

Please read the statement and initial in the box opposite to indicate understanding
and agreement

I have read and understand the participant information sheet.	
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for	
I am fully aware of all procedures involving myself and of any risks and benefits associated with the study	
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage during the team's 2019 championship campaign, without giving any reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw from this study all data relating to me will be destroyed. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from any publications or presentations led by the investigator up to this point	
I agree to notes being taken after practice sessions and during the interviews	
I agree to the audio recording and transcription of my interviews	
I understand that anonymised quotes may be taken from me and used to illustrate general themes and points within any publications or presentations resulting from this work	
I understand that the data collected on me will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.	

Participant declaration: I certify that I have had the nature, purpose and possible risks associated with participation in this research study explained and that I have had any questions that have been raised answered. I also certify that the signature below has also been witnessed.

Participant's signature: _____

Signature of investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

_

Participant Information Sheet

Please read the information below thoroughly before deciding whether or not to participate in this study.

_

Project: Evaluate the approach to and impact of acute & chronic approaches to team building interpersonal relationships

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study being conducted as part of a Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance research programme at the University of Central Lancashire. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You will find the relevant contact details below. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this information sheet, which you should keep if you decide to take part in the study.

Purpose of this Study

The study aims to evaluate the impact of a range of acute (i.e., 'one-off' events) & chronic (i.e., 'daily / progressive processes') approaches to developing interpersonal relationships in Gaelic Games. There remains a high level of interest in team sports performance & preparation; however the evidence base for practice in team building is relatively limited. While sport psychologists are increasingly being employed by teams in recognition of their skills in developing the interpersonal aspects of team functioning, there remains a limited reference base for practitioners and coaches which needs to be addressed. This action research proposed aims to address these gaps by applying a range of team building approaches in the actual competitive team environment, over the course of a full season. It is envisaged that the outcomes would provide valuable insight and guidance for future applied practice in team building.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this study because of your experience operating in Gaelic Games at an elite level.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and also be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The study will involve a series of regular, brief semi-structured interviews with the lead researcher (i.e. team sport psychologist) assessing your perception of team building needs and actions. These interactions will take place in the training environment and will consist of typical discussion topics previously engaged in regarding team development and will take approximately 10-15minutes.

Confidentiality

Please rest assured that all information gathered in this study will remain anonymous and strictly confidential. Interviews will be assigned an anonymous code number. When we write the final report and any other academic or professional outputs (e.g., publications/presentations) we will not use your name. All collected data will be held on a password protected computer and in a secure locked cabinet. Data will be stored for five years from the end of the project and then destroyed.

Withdrawing from the study

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question and you can stop answering a question at any point. You have the right to fully withdraw from the study without penalty. Withdrawal can be activated verbally or in writing. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all data relating to you will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw after outputs arising from the study have been communicated (e.g., publications, presentations), please be assured that none of your responses will have been explicitly linked to you in these works.

Risks and Benefits

Your participation and the information you provide will help us understand more about team building practices in Gaelic Games; an area in which there is a dearth of information currently. Through this study, we hope to better inform the team building practices of both coaches and sport psychologists.

Research Ethics

The University of Central Lancashire's research ethics committee has reviewed and approved this study. If you have any complaints or issues about the study please contact Adrian Ibbetson (ABIbbetson@uclan.ac.uk), Head of School, Sport, Tourism, and the Outdoors, UClan.

If you would like to take part in this study or if you require further information please contact:

Sandra Molloy (Lead Researcher) smolloy@uclan.ac.uk / 00353 87 9746506

Andrew Cruickshank (Director of Studies) ACruickshank@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix C: Group Environment Questionnaire

Name: _____ Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS:
This questionnaire is designed to assess your perceptions of your team. There are no right of wrong answers so please give your immediate reaction. Some of the questions may seem repetitive but please answer all questions (on both sides of the page). Your personal responses will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

The following statements are designed to assess your feelings about <u>your personal involvement</u> with this team. Please circle a number from 1 to 9 to indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements.

1. I do not enjoy being part of the social activities of this team.
1……..2……..3……..4……...5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

2. I'm not happy with the amount of playing time I get.
1……..2……..3……..4……...5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

3. I am not going to miss the members of this team when the season ends.
1……..2……..3……..4……...5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

4. I'm unhappy with my team's level of desire to win
1……..2……..3……..4……...5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

5. Some of my best friends are on this team.
1……..2……..3……..4……...5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

6. This team does not give me enough opportunities to improve my personal performance.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

7. I enjoy other parties rather than team parties.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

8. I do not like the style of play on this team

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

9. For me, this team is one of the most important social groups to which I belong.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

The following statements are designed to assess your perceptions of your team as a whole. Please circle a number from 1 to 9 to indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements.

10. Our team is united in trying to reach our goals for performance.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

11. Members of our team would rather go out on their own rather than get together as a team.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

12. We all take responsibility for any loss or poor performance by our team.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

13. Our team members rarely party together.

1……..2……..3……..4……..5……..6……..7……..8……..9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

14. Our team members have conflicting aspirations for the team's performance.

1……..2……..3……...4……...5……...6……...7……...8……...9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

15. Our team would like to spend time together in the off season.
1……..2……..3……...4……...5……...6……...7……...8……...9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

16. If members of our team have problems in practice then everyone wants to help them so we can get back together again.
1……..2……..3……...4……...5……...6……...7……...8……...9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

17. Members of our team do not stick together outside of practice and games.
1……..2……..3……...4……...5……...6……...7……...8……...9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

18. Our team members do not communicate freely about each athlete's responsibilities during competition or practice.
1……..2……..3……...4……...5……...6……...7……...8……...9
Strongly   Strongly
Disagree   Agree

Name: _____

The following questions are designed to reflect how you feel about being a part of your team. Please CIRCLE a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to indicate your agreement with each of the statements.

_____

1. I feel strong ties to other members of this team.

1-----------2-----------3-----------4-----------5-----------6-----------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

2. I find it easy to form a bond with other members in this team.

1-----------2-----------3-----------4-----------5-----------6-----------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

3. I feel a sense of being "connected" with other members in this team.

1-----------2-----------3-----------4-----------5-----------6-----------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

4. Overall, being a member of this team has a lot to do with how I feel about myself.

1-----------2-----------3-----------4-----------5-----------6-----------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

5. In general, being a member of this team is an important part of my self-image.

1-----------2-----------3-----------4-----------5-----------6-----------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

6. The fact that I am a member of this team often enters my mind.

1-----------2-----------3-----------4-----------5-----------6-----------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

7. In general, I'm glad to be a member of this team.

1------------2------------3------------4------------5------------6------------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

8. I feel good about being a member of this team.

1------------2------------3------------4------------5------------6------------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

9. Generally, I feel good when I think about myself as a member of this team.

1------------2------------3------------4------------5------------6------------7

Strongly   Strongly

Disagree   Agree

Appendix E: Action Research Semi-Structured Interview- Cycle 1 to Cycle 2

Introduction:
•   Purpose of interview- beginning to now- progress/ status/ influencing factors/ experiences/ feedback
•   Confidentiality measures taken
•   Remind participant to seek clarification if any Q isn't clear to them

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
Establish perception of current team development status	Tell me how you think the team unit is functioning at this point in time?	Do you think the team is making progress? In terms of being able to work together how well do you think players are doing? Where is the room for improvement? Are players enjoying being involved? How are players getting on together off-pitch?	Have the following got better in your opinion? -hurling skills? -carrying out tactics? -gym work? -organising yourselves in drills? Games? -contributing to performance discussions? -Do players enjoy coming to training? -What's the atmosphere like in the dressing room? Travelling? -What do we need to get better at now?
Establish perception of changes	Have you noticed any changes in team functioning, team relationships between the Team Foundation Workshop in January and the Club Chship Break? Did you notice any changes between returning from the Club Chship break up until the panel was named?	In all those areas ^ have you notice any changes since the workshop in January? How do you think they were working up to the Club Chship Break? Do you think the team being apart for a few weeks there had an effect on any of those? How have they been since we came back to training? Where would you identify needs most work now?	Which of those areas do you think has made biggest progress so far? Do you think anything has went backwards since the club break? In your opinion have lads settled back in fully yet? If you were running training now, what would you prioritise to develop in the team (besides hurling)? How would you recognise when that had improved?
Assess effect of panel changes	Do you think the departure of the lads who were dropped and the arrival of the new lads affected the team?	How do you feel about the panel cut? Do you think it changed relationships amongst players? How do you think the new lads are settling in? Do you know much about them at this stage? Do the other lads know much about them at this stage?	Do you miss the lads who were dropped? How do the other lads feel about it? Did players expect new players to be brought in? Are they chatty? Do you think they could make the 1st 15? 24? What do they need to improve to catch up?
Status of intrateam knowledge (task)	At this point to what extent do you think	Do you think everyone wants the same thing	In your opinion does every player think we

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
	players have shared goals and expectations of e/o? How well do players know the level of team standards required? How well do players know our playing style? How well do players know performance requirements?	for the team at this point? What do you think is most important to the team? In terms of the team charter and management's 'savagery standards' how aware do you think players are of them and what they require? In terms of the main aspects of how we aim to play, do you think at this point players could state them? In terms of what needs to be achieved in challenge matches and championship matches, do you think players, how aware do you think players are of those?	can win the provincial final and All-Ireland? Is there anyone who isn't bothered if we do or not? Do you think anyone is breaking the team charter? What effect do you think it has had? Could players list management's savagery standards? Could players name they key points of our tactics? Could players list the things to be nailed in challenge matches and performance? What do you think most people would forget to name?
Status of interpersonal knowledge	At this point to what extent do you think players know each other?	How well do you think players know e/o hurling strengths, habits, preferences on the ball? How well do you think players know e/o personalities? How well do you think players know e/o lives off-pitch?	If I called out the name of each panel member in the dressing room how many players could name that lads: -hurling strengths? -what he's likely to do on the ball? -what kind of ball he'd like? -tell details of his life outside hurling? Do you change the way you communicate with different players?
Perception of Influencing Factors	So far what have been the biggest things influencing team development- player relationships. What was useful about that? Is there anything you'd change about it?	You mentioned (team functioning/ team relationships status)- what is the main thing you think has lead to this? Why do you think it had/hadn't an affect? Are there other things you think have taken place to have an impact on them? How do you think it could be made better?	What did you/ players think of the Team Foundation Workshop? What would you change? What was biggest benefit? What do you think pf Performance Profiling? How do you feel about carrying it out? What do you think of the gym sessions? Group WODS? How many players have you been grouped with? How do you find changing partners every session?

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
			Do players get to meet up outside of training? What activities would you like to see happen?
Perception of player communication/ interactions	At this point how well do you think players are communicating/ interacting with e/o? -on pitch -about training/performance -off-pitch (socially)	Do you think players are communicating more or less than they were earlier in the year? Why has this happened? What do you think of communication levels and quality on the pitch? Do players talk about training and performance stuff off-pitch (away from management)? Do players talk about non-hurling stuff? Has that changed in recent months? How?	On a scale of 1-10 what were on-pitch communications at by end of Jan? End Feb? Club Break? What do you base this on? What about off-pitch ratings? Do you talk about your families/ partners/ college/ work/ hobbies/ other stuff besides hurling? Were players always talking about this stuff?
Perception of player leadership	At this point what do you think of player leadership?	Do you think we have leaders on the team at this point? Who are they? What makes them a leader from your perspective? At what point did you notice them leading? Are they effective in your opinion? Is this as good as it can get or is there room for improvement do you think?	Did you expect C to be captain? Why? Did the other lads expect it? Why? Who was his competition? Why? Is he up and running in the role yet? Who else do you think could be a future captain? Who are the most popular players in the dressing room? Who are the most motivational players in the dressing room? Who are the best communicators in the dressing room? Who leads by example but is quiet?
Perception of problems/ conflict	As you see it what problems or conflict has the team had so far?	Does the team have any problems at this moment? Have you seen/ heard any conflict amongst players? How was it handled? Why do you think there hasn't been any? How do you think players would handle it if there was conflict? Do you think conflict would be a positive or negative thing?	Have there been any player rows off-pitch? What do you think of the on-pitch words/schmozzles? Are there players who don't get on? If there was a big row in the dressing room how do you think it'd pan out? Would it knock us off track? How would it get sorted?

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Appendix F: Chapter 4: Inductive Thematic Analysis Sample Process

Braun & Clarke (2006): 6 Stage Process

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Familiarisation with data	Initial Coding	Generating Themes	Validity & Reliability of Themes	Defining & Naming Themes	Producing The Report

Stage 1- Familiarisation via transcription & reading

Stage 2- Initial codes identified
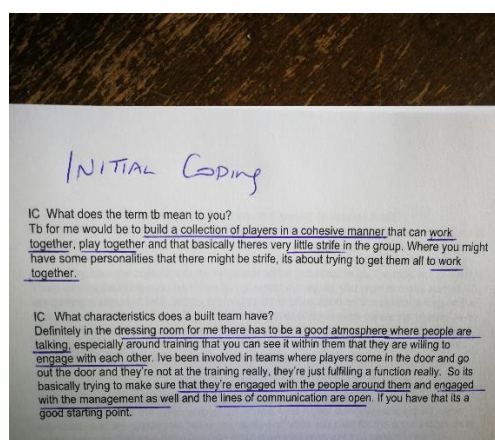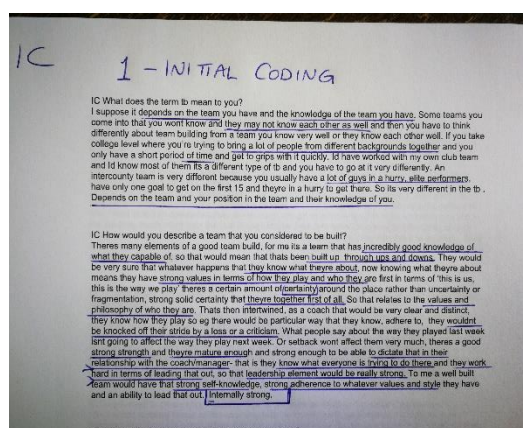
INITIAL CODING

IC What does the term TB mean to you?

For me tb is using whatever mechanism I can to ensure my players understand the team concept. Understand what it means to be part of a team. Its quite difficult in team concepts to get the individual out of the individual and get them to understand their roles within the team, and the benefits of that and everybody would have a different roles, some peoples roles and very clear, some peoples can be a little cloudy and thats where it can be a difficulty in the detail for individual players to see their role within the team. For me always was to clearly define where their role was and how we could help them to understand their role better and to improve on whatever concept we wanted to try and deliver.

IC What characteristics does a 'built' team have?

e.g.

In relation to themselves would be quite strong on values, them understanding their values. what values are, appreciate that we have to understand and work with each other and that certain people have very strong attributes and characteristics but not everybody can have the same because its just difficult at times to have a huge team of leaders. That might sound strange to some people because you're trying as the ultimate to have so many leaders but having so many leaders can mean that theres a difficulty in taking advice or information on board. E.g in one of my club teams I would have worked with, one of the homework sessions they would have got was to do something nice for somebody that you havnt done in a while. Not to come back and let them know youre doing it for a a particular reason but to understand the concept that there are other people around you that you engage with on a daily basis but not acknowledge that theyre part of what you're doing. So that whole understanding and appreciation and that has a varying success. Interpersonally the values systems are important, understanding their role and how best they can do that, for me better people make better footballers. So how I make a better person is the most important thing, honesty, integrity, trust- theyre key issues and we have to work on them. Some people are very clear on them and some people it takes a little bit longer for them to understand.

INITIAL CODING

IC What does the term TB mean to you?

When we start out with a group of players at the start of the year, at intercounty level they're coming from different parts of the county, at a parish level they're coming in at different age groups, you're trying to bring them together to work for the one cause, goal or mission and thats probably doing what you can do to get the best out of the team, work for the one purpose, get the individuality out of it, bringing that together takes time, especially a new team. and sometimes you might not achieve it in the first few months or the first year. That we're all working together for the one cause, that the team is more important than individuals.

IC Characteristics of a built team?

If I was to go up on the bank and watch them playing, and they wernt playing well hurling wise, it was a struggle..but they were still fighting like tooth and nail. There was no give up. they were all encouraging each other, no giving out, all working together, still there for them. No matter how bad it was going they were still hooking and blocking, still working and trying hard even though it was going against them, they were working hard. Then I say to myself we've built a team, it took someone better than them to beat them. Theyve emptied the tank, without any bitching. Nobody talking down to anyone at half time, a no blame society in the group. All taking responsibility for everything done.

INITIAL CODING

IC What does the term tb mean to you?

I very much see it as deciding on a shared and cohesive vision of the team goals and what they represent. I think thats the starting point and unless you have that...i mean we all come from different places, we have different reasons for getting involved in teams, different motivations, any group working together they must have a common, shared goal and it must be very clear and I suppose the management team then is constantly reinforcing that goal and reminding them of what you're about and what you represent.

IC How would you describe your 'built' team?

A mature group that in one sense they drive the standards, driven from within, as a management team you're playing a facilitative role, its the players and the leadership group are driving the standards and pushing things along and asking questions of the management- in a good way of course- and just a strong unit, a united bunch, a team that ...its the intangibles, the body language of a group coming into a room on match day, its hard to place a value on that, you can see a group. they're mature, know what they're about, handles victory and defeat appropriately that when we do have a bump on the road that they react properly, dont throw their toys out of the pram and blaming people and looking for crutches, we cooly evaluate where we went went wrong and what we need to do and go from there.

Stage 3: Generating Themes

Column 1

- Depends on team
- Knowledge of team you have (You)
- How well they know elo.
- Being people from different backgrounds together.
- How long you have to TB.
- I.C => Elite, guys in hurry
- Their knowledge of you
- Good knowledge of capabilities
- Been through ups+downs
- Know what they're about
- Strong value in how they play / who they are
- Certainty around the place
- They're together 1st of All
- Values + philosophy of who we are
- Not knocked off strides by loss/criticism
- Strength - Internally strong
- maturity
- Relationship with mgr
- Know what everyone is trying to do / Self knowledge
- Lead it out
- Leadership strong
- Adherence to values + style

Column 2

- Using whatever mechanism I can to ensure players understand team concept
- Get individual out of individual
- Understand their roles (Define it)
- Understand others roles
- Improve on concept we want to try + deliver.
- Strong on values.
- Understand their values
- Understand elo (differences)
- Work with elo.
- Understanding + appreciation
- Interpersonally the values systems NB
- Understand role
- How best to do it
- Better people = better footballers
- Key Issues —— Honesty / Integrity / Trust.
- Can take time

- Build collection of players in a cohesive manner
- Can work together
- Play together
- Little strife
- Good atmosphere
- People talking
- Willing to engage with elo.
- Engage with mgmt.
- Lines of comm open.

Column 3

- Shared + cohesive vision of team goals (common goal)
- Come from diff places/motivations
- Clear what represent.
- Mature group
- Players define standards +lship ge.
- Management facilitates
- Strong unit
- United bunch
- Body language —— COMMUNICATION
- Know what they're about
- Handles victory + defeat appropriately (react properly)

> Come from different places/levels
> Being together for 1 goal
> Do what you can do to get the best out of the team
> Get individuality out of it
> Takes time
> Team more important then individuals
> Doesn't give up when its a struggle
> All encourage each other
> No giving out
> All working together.
> Empty the tank
> No blame society
> All take responsibility
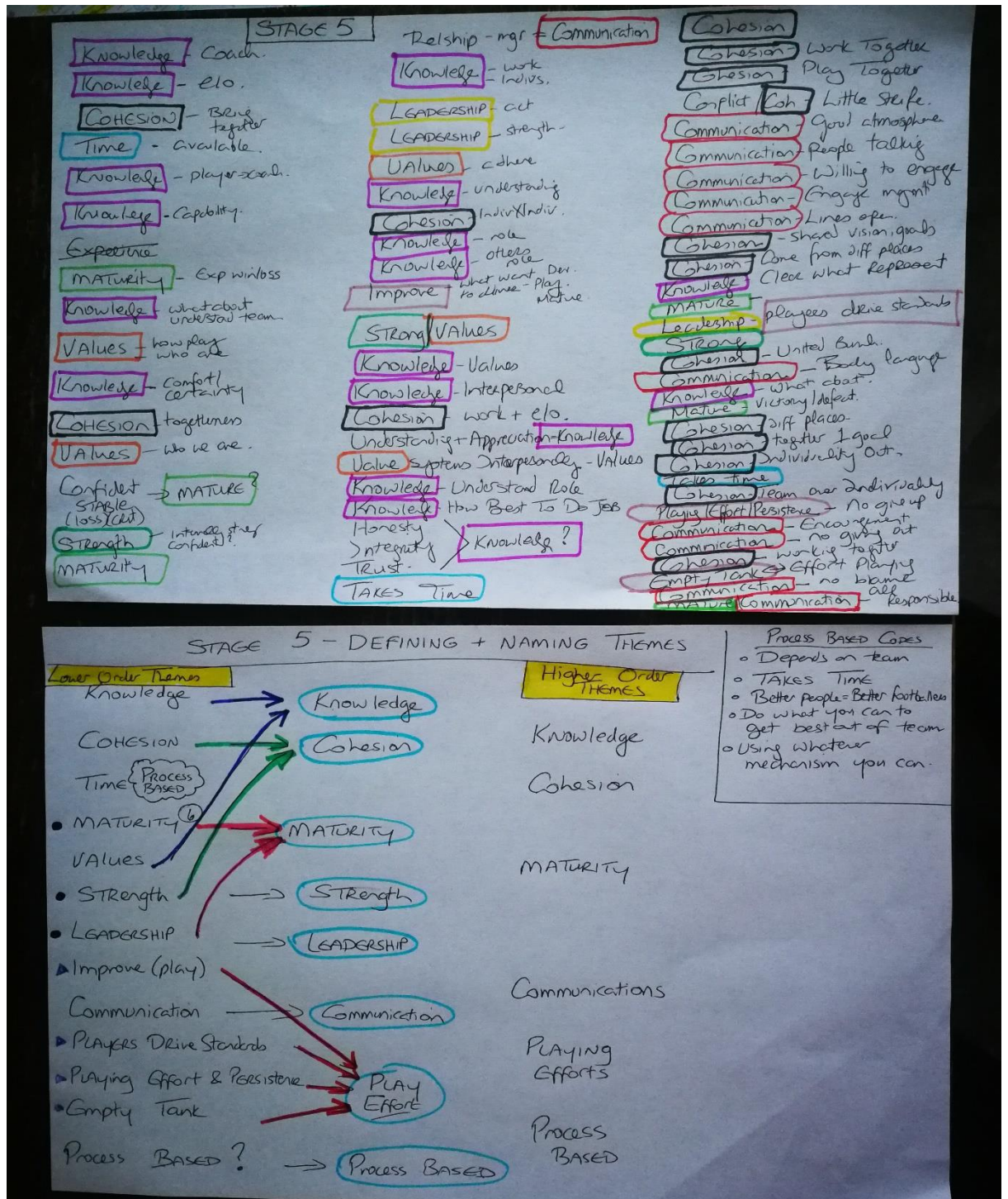
Stage 4: Validity & Reliability of Themes
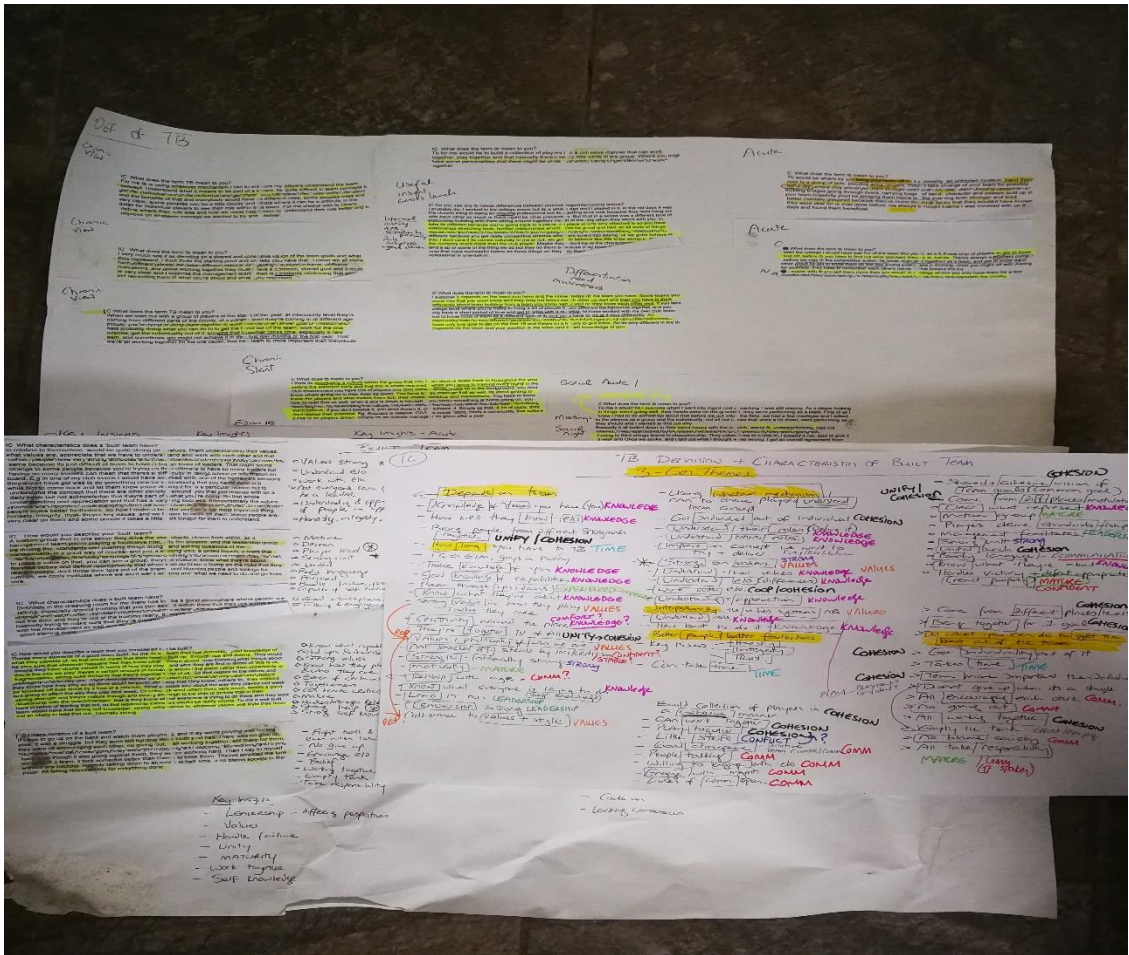
Stage 5: Defining & Naming of Themes

Stage 6: Producing The Report

See Chapter 4- Results Objective 1

Appendix G: Action Research Semi-Structured Interview- Cycle 2 to Cycle 3

Introduction:
- Purpose of interview- beginning to now- progress/ status/ influencing factors/ experiences/ feedback
- Confidentiality measures taken
- Remind participant to seek clarification if any Q isn't clear to them

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
Establish perception of team development	Tell me how you think the team unit is functioning at this point in time? Through championship?	Do you think the team is making progress? In terms of being able to work together how well do you think players are doing? Where is the room for improvement? Are all players enjoying being involved? Subs? How are players getting on together off-pitch?	Have the following got better in your opinion? -hurling skills? -carrying out tactics? -organising yourselves in drills? Games? -contributing to performance discussions? -Do players enjoy coming to training? -What's the atmosphere like in the dressing room? Travelling? -What do we need to get better at now?
Establish perception of changes	Have you noticed any changes in team functioning, team relationships since we last sport/ TB Away Day and now (late chship)	In all those areas ^ have you notice any changes since early June? Any changes since chship started? All-Ireland series? Where would you identify needs most work now?	Which of those areas do you think has made biggest progress so far? Do you think anything has went backwards during chship? Is there any of those that have given us a particular competitive advantage?
Assess effect of new players	How has the integration of the lads who joined the panel late? Seniors who arrived back?	How fully do you think the new lads integrated ? Do players know as much about them at this stage as everyone else? Did the return of the senior players affect the existing panel?	Are the lads who were called in after the drop 100% as integrated as everyone else now? What was it like for players when the senior lads returned? What impact did this have? How well do players know them now?
Status of intrateam knowledge (task)	At this point to what extent do you think players have shared goals and expectations of e/o? How well do players know the level of team standards required? How well do players know our playing style?	Do you think everyone wants the same thing for the team at this point? What do you think is most important to the team? In terms of the team charter and management's 'savagery standards' how aware do you	In your opinion does every player think we can win the All-Ireland? Is there anyone who isn't bothered if we do or not? Do you think anyone is breaking the team charter? Could players list management's savagery standards?

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
	How well do players know performance requirements?	think players are of them and what they require? In terms of the main aspects of how we aim to play, do you think at this point players could state them? In terms of what needs to be achieved in challenge matches and championship matches, do you think players, how aware do you think players are of those?	Could players name they key points of our tactics? Could players list the things to be nailed in challenge matches and performance? What do you think most people would forget to name?
Status of interpersonal knowledge	At this point to what extent do you think players know each other?	How well do you think players know e/o hurling strengths, habits, preferences on the ball? How well do you think players know e/o personalities? How well do you think players know e/o lives off-pitch?	If I called out the name of each panel member in the dressing room how many players could name that lads: -hurling strengths? -what he's likely to do on the ball? -what kind of ball he'd like? -tell details of his life outside hurling? Do you change the way you communicate with different players?
Perception of Influencing Factors	So far what have been the biggest things influencing team development- player relationships. What was useful about that? Is there anything you'd change about it?	You mentioned (team functioning/ team relationships status)- what is the main thing you think has lead to this? Why do you think it had/hadn't an affect? Are there other things you think have taken place to have an impact on them? How do you think it could be made better?	Did the TB Away Day have an impact? How? What did players get from training/bus activity?/multisport centre/ media task?/Dinner & Prize giving? Do players meet up outside of training?
Perception of player communication/ interactions	At this point how well do you think players are communicating/ interacting with e/o? -on pitch -about training/performance -off-pitch (socially)	Do you think players are communicating more or less than they were earlier in the year? Why has this happened? What do you think of communication levels and quality on the pitch? Do players talk about training and performance stuff off-pitch (away from management)?	On a scale of 1-10 what were on-pitch communications at by end of June? Provincial Final? Now? What do you base this on? What about off-pitch ratings? Do you talk about your families/ partners/ college/ work/ hobbies/ other stuff besides hurling?

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
		Do players talk about non-hurling stuff? Has that changed in recent months? How?	More or less than before?
Perception of player leadership	At this point what do you think of player leadership?	Do you think we have leaders on the team at this point? Who are they? What makes them a leader from your perspective? At what point did you notice them leading? Are they effective in your opinion? Is this as good as it can get or is there room for improvement do you think?	How effective is captaincy at leading? What has/hasn't been effective? Have other leaders emerged? How?
Perception of problems/ conflict	As you see it what problems or conflict has the team had so far?	Does the team have any problems at this moment? Have you seen/ heard any conflict amongst players? How was it handled? Why do you think there hasn't been any?	Have there been any player rows off-pitch? What do you think of the on-pitch words/schmozzles? Are there players who don't get on? If there was a big row in the dressing room how do you think it'd pan out? Would it knock us off track? How would it get sorted?

Appendix H: Coach Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____

Which of the following Gaelic Games team sports have you worked in?

Hurling		Camogie	
Gaelic Football		Ladies Gaelic Football	

Which of the following levels have you worked at in Gaelic Games? Please tick all that apply

Club Underage		Duration:
Club Minor		Duration:
Club Adult		Duration:
County Underage		Duration:
County Minor		Duration:
County Under 20 / Under 21		Duration:
County Intermediate		Duration:
County Senior		Duration:
International (Shinty/ International Rules)		Duration:

Have your undertaken formal sports related education? E.g. coaching course, BA/BSc/MSc; Workshops

Yes		No	

If 'Yes' please specify all that apply below

GAA Coaching Courses	
Other NGB Coaching Course	
3rd Level Cert, Diploma, Ordinary Degree	
Honours Degree	
Masters	
Doctorate	
Online Courses	

Do you undertake non-formal coaching education? E.g. books, articles, youtube, conferences etc

Yes		No	

If you answered 'yes' above please indicate which sources you use

Books	
Academic Journals	
Print Media Articles	
Internet Research	
Youtube Videos	
Conferences/ Seminars	
Colleagues	
Consultants	
Other (please specify below)	

Please state 'other' sources	

Appendix I: Semi-Structured Interview- Intercounty Coaches

Introduction:
• Me/ Research Idea/ Benefit to me and coaches
• "Given your experience with _____ I'm interested in your experiences of developing your team relationships, particularly your experiences at intercounty level, but club/college also".
• Info Sheet/ Informed Consent/ Demographic Questionnaire
• Confidentiality measures taken
• Remind coach to seek clarification if any Q isn't clear to them

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
Define Team Building	Can you tell me what the term 'teambuilding' means to you?	How would you describe a team that you considered to be 'built/ developed'? What characteristics would you ideal team have developed?	How would you know your team knew each other well enough or got on well enough to be effective?
Establish perception of need	Tell me about your views on the necessity of undertaking deliberate tb?	Do you think coaches need to do/ organise tb activities with teams? Why?/Why Not?	Do you think teams develop their ability to work together naturally or do you have to do things to push it on? Do you think team members naturally get on well or do coaches need to do things to develop it?
Experience with team building interventions/ IPR development?	Have you ever undertaken tb with your teams?	If YES- (below) If NO- tell me more about your reasons Is it something you might think about doing in future?	Do you consider tb to be a short term/1 off activity or ongoing process? Have you have to carry out activities or exercises with team to achieve this?
Get detail on tb interventions/ IPR development	When you undertake TB what goals do you have in mind? How do you go about developing/ improving team relationships amongst players?	Tell me more about what prompted your decision? Before it did you have specific goal in mind or problem to solve?	Working On -how well players get on? -how well they communicate? -how well they work together?
Increase detail on coach perceptions of IRP	To what extent do you think players need to get on socially/ like each other to be effective in coordinating performances? How well do you think players need to know	Do you seek to create social opportunities for the team to develop in this way? Or Rely on organic development? Do you think its useful for players to know things about each	Do you ever organise team social events? Do players socialise together? Would you want your players to be friends or is being on same team

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
	each other (off-pitch) to be effective in team? Where do you see the status of IRP in terms of facilitating coaching/training	others lives away from the team? If players get on better does it make life easier for you coaching them? Does it matter? Or do you have an awareness of it?	enough to get the job done? Do you think they can know too little or too much about each other? Do you find that they hold back on giving feedback/ accountability to each other if they're very friendly? Or does make it easier? Does it make them more comfortable communicating to each other or in group?
Establish differentiation between team types	How have you experienced the different, if any, between coaching intercounty/ club/ college teams?		
Intervention detail	Describe your tb activities for me, tell me about your whole process?	One off? Multiple sessions? -External provider/ internally ran? -Needs analysis-Deciding on content? -Did it lead to change afterwards? How so?	What did you do/ where/ how did you decide what to do/ how did it go?/
Day To Day Team Maintenance Efforts	Outside of the activities described, can you tell me about your day to day maintenance of team relationships? Environment?	How do you keep the kind of team culture operating day to day that you want? Top it up? How to tackle it if it wanes?	Team form, humour, standards can go in peaks and valleys throughout the year, how do you keep it where you want it? At what point do you decide to step in and act? What do you usually do to address drops?
Socialisation	Tell me about integrating new players into your teams (types)? Different in intercounty/ club, college?	-How much do you seek to influence the process? -Getting to know e/o roles? -Communications -Knowledge strengths, weaknesses/ preferences?	When a new player joins the team do you formally introduce them to the team? To a few players? Do you get a senior player to mentor them? Do you let them do their own settling in without doing anything?
Team Communications /Interaction- Dev	Tell me about your experiences, practices	How do you find communications levels, abilities in your teams?	Do you find it difficult to get a wide range of players to comm?

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
	regarding team communications?	Have you had to deal with too much player input? Wrong type? Do you seek to train or influence communications (opportunities/ spread/ quantity/ quality) How do you run team meetings? Debriefs?	Do you use any strategies to spread comm? Have you ever done activities to develop comm in team? At team meetings do you open it up to the team to comment? Do you use small discussion groups? Do you give players the opportunity to write their ideas, feedback?
Conflict Management	Tell me about your experiences with conflict and managing conflict in teams?	Have you had to deal with conflict? What types have you experienced? How do you opt to deal with it? Do you consider it to be pos/neg?	If players argue how do you deal with it? What in your experience tends to cause conflict? Where do you draw the line with what is acceptable conflict? What would make you drop or discipline a player for going too far with conflict? Have you ever experienced conflict that was a positive thing?
Personality Considerations Use of Psychometrics	What do you base your player recruitment decisions on (obviously skill, ability in the mix…). Have you ever used psychometric/ personality tests with you teams?	As well as a players ability, what else (if anything) do you base their selection on your panel on? Yes- aim/ type/ who administered/ use of results? No- why not?	Have ever not recruited a player to the team or dropped them because he/she wouldn't be a good personality to have around? Have you ever done personality testing on your teams? E.g. to find out if they were introverts/ extroverts etc
Leadership in teams	Tell me about your views on and experiences of player leadership in teams? How does this differ in intercounty to club teams?	How do you designate/ develop leaders? Basis for captaincy? Use of SLG? Training?	Are leaders born or made? How would you recognise a leader in your team? How do you pick your captain? Vice captain? Have you ever had a player leadership group operate in your team? Did you ever carry out leadership training with your team?

Appendix J: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Study: Evaluate the approach to and impact of acute & chronic approaches to team building interpersonal relationships in GAA.

Investigator: Sandra Molloy

Please read the statement and initial in the box opposite to indicate understanding and agreement

I have read and understand the participant information sheet.	
I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for	
I am fully aware of all procedures involving myself and of any risks and benefits associated with the study	
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project without giving any reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw from this study all data relating to me will be destroyed. I understand that it will not be possible to remove my data from any publications or presentations led by the investigator up to this point	
I agree to notes being taken after practice sessions and during the interviews	
I agree to the audio recording and transcription of my interviews	
I understand that anonymised quotes may be taken from me and used to illustrate general themes and points within any publications or presentations resulting from this work	
I understand that the data collected on me will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.	

Participant declaration: I certify that I have had the nature, purpose and possible risks associated with participation in this research study explained and that I have had any questions that have been raised answered. I also certify that the signature below has also been witnessed.

Participant's signature: _____

Signature of investigator: _____

Date: _____

_____

_

Coach Information Sheet

Please read the information below thoroughly before deciding whether or not to participate in this study.

_____

_

Project: Investigation of Acute & Chronic Approaches to Team Building in Gaelic Games

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study being conducted as part of a Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance research programme at the University of Central Lancashire. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You will find the relevant contact details below. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this information sheet, which you should keep if you decide to take part in the study.

Purpose of this Study

This study is being undertaken with the aim of bridging a gap in the knowledge base on team building perceptions and practices of Gaelic Games coaches operating at the elite level, specifically in relation to developing the interpersonal relationship of teams.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this study because of your experience working in Gaelic Games at an elite level.

Do I have to take part?

It is your decision whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and also be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, up to the point where data is anonymised for processing and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The study will involve a semi-structured interview being conducted with you at a time and venue suited to you. The interview will focus on your perceptions of and experience with aspects of team building. Interviews will take approximately sixty minutes and will be recorded for analysis later.

Confidentiality

Please rest assured that all information gathered in this study will remain anonymous and strictly confidential. Interviews will be assigned an anonymous code number. When we write the final report and any other academic or professional outputs (e.g., publications/presentations) we will not use your name. All collected data will be held on a password protected computer and in a secure locked cabinet. Data will be stored for five years from the end of the project and then destroyed.

Withdrawing from the study

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question and you can stop answering a question at any point. You have the right to fully withdraw from the study without penalty. Withdrawal can be activated verbally or in writing. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all data relating to you will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw after outputs arising from the study have been communicated (e.g., publications, presentations), please be assured that none of your responses will have been explicitly linked to you in these works.

Risks and Benefits

Your participation and the information you provide will help us understand more about team building practices in Gaelic Games; an area in which there is a dearth of information currently. Through this study, we hope to better inform the team building practices of both coaches and sport psychologists.

Research Ethics

The University of Central Lancashire's research ethics committee has reviewed and approved this study. If you have any complaints or issues about the study please contact Adrian Ibbetson (ABIbbetson@uclan.ac.uk), Head of School, Sport, Tourism, and the Outdoors, UCLAN.

If you would like to take part in this study or if you require further information please contact:

Sandra Molloy (Lead Researcher) smolloy@uclan.ac.uk / 00353 87 9746506

Andrew Cruickshank (Director of Studies) ACruickshank@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix L: Semi-Structured Interviews Club/College Coaches

Introduction:
- Me/ Research Idea/ Benefit to me and coaches
- "Given your experience with _____ I'm interested in your experiences of developing your team relationships, particularly your experiences at intercounty level, but club/college also".
- Info Sheet/ Informed Consent/ Demographic Questionnaire
- Confidentiality measures taken
- Remind coach to seek clarification if any Q isn't clear to them

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
Define Team Building	Can you tell me what the term 'teambuilding' means to you?	How would you describe a team that you considered to be 'built/ developed'? What characteristics would you ideal team have developed?	How would you know your team knew each other well enough or got on well enough to be effective?
Establish perception of need	Tell me about your views on the necessity of undertaking deliberate tb?	Do you think coaches need to do/ organise tb activities with teams? Why?/Why Not?	Do you think teams develop their ability to <u>work together</u> naturally or do you have to do things to push it on? Do you think team members naturally <u>get on well</u> or do coaches need to do things to develop it?
Experience with team building interventions/ IPR development?	Have you ever undertaken tb with your teams?	If YES- (below) If NO- tell me more about your reasons Is it something you might think about doing in future?	Do you consider tb to be a short term/1 off activity or ongoing process? Have you have to carry out activities or exercises with team to achieve this?
Get detail on tb interventions/ IPR development	When you undertake TB what goals do you have in mind? How do you go about developing/ improving team relationships amongst players?	Tell me more about what prompted your decision? Before it did you have specific goal in mind or problem to solve?	Working On -how well players get on? -how well they communicate? -how well they work together?
Increase detail on coach perceptions of IRP	To what extent do you think players need to get on socially/ like each other to be effective in coordinating performances? How well do you think players need to know	Do you seek to create social opportunities for the team to develop in this way? Or Rely on organic development? Do you think its useful for players to know things about each	Do you ever organise team social events? Do players socialise together? Would you want your players to be friends or is being on same team

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
	each other (off-pitch) to be effective in team? Where do you see the status of IRP in terms of facilitating coaching/training	others lives away from the team? If players get on better does it make life easier for you coaching them? Does it matter? Or do you have an awareness of it?	enough to get the job done? Do you think they can know too little or too much about each other? Do you find that they hold back on giving feedback/ accountability to each other if they're very friendly? Or does make it easier? Does it make them more comfortable communicating to each other or in group?
Intervention detail	Describe your tb activities for me, tell me about your whole process?	One off? Multiple sessions? -External provider/ internally ran? -Needs analysis-Deciding on content? -Did it lead to change afterwards? How so?	What did you do/ where/ how did you decide what to do/ how did it go?/
Day To Day Team Maintenance Efforts	Outside of the activities described, can you tell me about your day to day maintenance of team relationships? Environment?	How do you keep the kind of team culture operating day to day that you want? Top it up? How to tackle it if it wanes?	Team form, humour, standards can go in peaks and valleys throughout the year, how do you keep it where you want it? At what point do you decide to step in and act? What do you usually do to address drops?
Socialisation	Tell me about integrating new players into your teams (types)? Different in different age groups/ levels of team?	-How much do you seek to influence the process? -Getting to know e/o roles? -Communications -Knowledge strengths, weaknesses/ preferences?	When a new player joins the team do you formally introduce them to the team? To a few players? Do you get a senior player to mentor them? Do you let them do their own settling in without doing anything?
Team Communications /Interaction- Dev	Tell me about your experiences, practices regarding team communications?	How do you find communications levels, abilities in your teams? Have you had to deal with too much player input? Wrong type? Do you seek to train or influence communications	Do you find it difficult to get a wide range of players to comm? Do you use any strategies to spread comm? Have you ever done activities to develop comm in team?

Purpose	Question	Probe	Prompts
		(opportunities/ spread/ quantity/ quality) How do you run team meetings? Debriefs?	At team meetings do you open it up to the team to comment? Do you use small discussion groups? Do you give players the opportunity to write their ideas, feedback?
Conflict Management	Tell me about your experiences with conflict and managing conflict in teams?	Have you had to deal with conflict? What types have you experienced? How do you opt to deal with it? Do you consider it to be pos/neg?	If players argue how do you deal with it? What in your experience tends to cause conflict? Where do you draw the line with what is acceptable conflict? What would make you drop or discipline a player for going too far with conflict? Have you ever experienced conflict that was a positive thing?
Personality Considerations Use of Psychometrics	What do you base your player recruitment decisions on (obviously skill, ability in the mix…). Have you ever used psychometric/ personality tests with you teams?	As well as a players ability, what else (if anything) do you base their selection on your panel on? Yes- aim/ type/ who administered/ use of results? No- why not?	Have ever not recruited a player to the team or dropped them because he/she wouldn't be a good personality to have around? Have you ever done personality testing on your teams? E.g. to find out if they were introverts/ extroverts etc
Leadership in teams	Tell me about your views on and experiences of player leadership in teams? How does this differ in intercounty to club teams?	How do you designate/ develop leaders? Basis for captaincy? Use of SLG? Training?	Are leaders born or made? How would you recognise a leader in your team? How do you pick your captain? Vice captain? Have you ever had a player leadership group operate in your team? Did you ever carry out leadership training with your team?

Appendix M: