AN EXPLORATION OF THE NOTION OF FOLLOWERSHIP IN
ELITE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS

By

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ABSTRACT

The sociological analysis of the coaching process has been identified as a largely under-developed and under-researched area. Recent work has subsequently called for the notion of followership, as well as leadership, to be investigated. In response, the aim of this study was to consider the concept of followership in elite coach-athlete relationships within the game of rugby union. The significance of such an investigation lies in generating greater understanding of coach-athlete relationships, particularly in terms of how and why athletes buy into coaches’ directions and agendas. Detailed research questions included ‘What does followership look like in practice?’ ‘How do coaches promote followership within the coaching environment?’ and ‘How do coaches know whether followership has been achieved?’ A constructivist methodological approach was adopted within the rather broad paradigm of interpretivism: more specifically, open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted with four professional rugby union coaches. A grounded theory type approach was used to analyse the data, with the information gained from the interviews being expressed in narrative form. In so doing, an attempt has been made to move beyond the interview transcripts into interpretations of what the coaches actually said. Results revealed that despite not having given any real consideration to the notion of followership prior to the interviews, considering it to be a consequence of effective leadership, on reflection, all of the coaches acknowledged its importance in coach-athlete relationships. Although the coaches saw themselves as leaders, they emphasised the need for a group discourse even if they positioned themselves as ‘first among equals’ within it. The establishment of effective relationships between coaches and athletes and the social interaction involved in building such relationships was considered essential by all coaches. The findings are analysed in terms of both coaching and emerging ‘followership’ literature.

Key Words: Leadership; Followership; Coach-athlete Relationships.

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## DECLARATIONS

## ABSTRACT

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1.1 Background To The Study:

Coaching is a process and the relationship between the athlete and coach is considered an important part of it. Lyle (1999), amongst others, has suggested that there is a need to recognise the sophisticated nature of the coaching process through an appreciation of the inherent interpersonal relationships that exist between the coaches and athletes within it. Therefore, it seems that in order to fulfil their roles as leaders, coaches clearly need to be aware of the social context in which they work. Potrac and Jones (1999), identified this, the sociological analysis of the coaching process, as a largely under-developed and under-researched area.

Good leadership is one of the most important, yet complex characteristics that a coach must possess (Cox, 1994; Mathers, 1997). Much of the work which has been carried out on leadership focuses on the knowledge, skills, abilities and traits of the leader. This focus on the leader’s abilities and traits serves two important social functions: hope for salvation and blame for failure (Barker, 1997). This, however, likens leadership to a 'social delusion that allows “followers” to escape responsibility for their own actions and inactions' (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992, p.119). In recognising the coach as a leader, and appreciating the inherent interpersonal relationships that exist between coaches and athletes, the notion of ‘followership’ must be given consideration. A relational view of leadership highlights the importance of followers as well as leaders in the leadership process (Russell, 2003). Any attempts to understand leadership then, should be concerned with why people comply as well as how one person influences another. ‘When followership rather than leadership is examined, it becomes clear that followership is an active outcome of choice, that followers choose to follow, rather than a simple given of a leader’s position’ (Prince, 2005, p.115).
Gaining consent of the follower is a basic component of the leadership process (Handy, 1984). 'To be adequately understood, leadership must be seen for what it is: part of a duality or a relationship. There can be no leaders without followers’ (Goffee and Jones, 2001, p.148). It is often stated that the essence of leadership is followership (Bjerke, 1999), that without followers leaders do not exist (Kelley, 2004), and that leadership only exists in the interaction between leaders and followers (Grint, 2000). Clearly, this has implications for the coach in respect of coach-athlete relationships.

1.2 Aims and Objectives:

The aim of this study is to explore the notion of ‘followership’ in elite coach-athlete relationships. The subsequent objectives relate to issues concerning:

- What do coaches understand by the notion of ‘followership’?
- What consideration do coaches give to the notion of ‘followership’?
- What do coaches do to promote/ensure ‘followership’?
- What does ‘followership’ look like in practice?
- How do coaches know whether they have achieved ‘followership’?

1.3 Significance of the Study:

Social scientists and behavioural psychologists have studied leadership for many decades, however, there still appears to be no universally accepted definition of leadership. Similarly, there is no clear understanding of what distinguishes successful leaders from less successful leaders or what distinguishes leaders from followers (Murray and Mann, 2006). Leadership has traditionally been synonymous with
authority, and authority is seen as the ability to command others, control subordinates, and make all the truly important decisions yourself (Katzenbach and Smith, 1992). Definitions of leadership tend to focus on the way in which the leader influences the behaviour of one or more members of a group towards their goals (Hemphill and Coons, 1957; Roach and Behling, 1984). Barker (1997, p.344), noted that:

Virtually every definition of leadership encountered in both scholarly and practitioner oriented writings – that is if one is actually offered - focuses on the knowledge, skills, abilities and traits of the leader which are presumed to be the most successful in getting followers to do what the leader wants them to do.

Most of the definitions of leadership which have been proposed can be applied to leadership in a coaching context. Much of the work on leadership in coaching has developed from studies of organisational management and uses organisational theory to explain leadership behaviour. Several leadership models, for example, the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai, 1993), the Contingency Leadership Model (Fiedler, 1967), and the Strategic Leadership Model (Adair, 1990), have been proposed in order to consider the concept of coaching leadership. In the same way, different coaching behaviours have been referred to as leadership styles (Cross, 1999). However, despite the varied interpretations and still incomplete analysis of leadership, there is a paucity of research and conceptual literature about leadership in sport situations (Murray and Mann, 2006), particularly in terms of how to lead in different contexts.

Whilst much of the research in mainstream organisational psychology has attempted to define and measure the effects of leadership on subordinate performance and produced results which are easily verifiable, it fails to consider a two-way influence process (Guest, 1987). More recently, studies have begun to focus on the study of leadership as an interactive process between leader and follower, with increasing interest in ‘followership’. Nevertheless, ‘followership is an area of
research that is relatively neglected and deserving of greater status than it currently receives' (Atik, 1994, p.27). This is particularly so in team sports where the notion would appear to be more relevant due to high coach-athlete ratios and the need to adhere to a set plan. Therefore, ‘only with a greater understanding of followership can leadership be more thoroughly understood’ (Atik, 1994, p.27). The significance of this study then lies in increasing our understanding of this concept by considering the notion of followership in elite coach-athlete relationships within the game of rugby union.

Clearly, there are implications here for coach education. It has been recognised that much of the work relating to coach education to date has taken coaching knowledge as an almost ‘autonomous body of facts that is passed on through generations’ (McKay et al., 1990, p.62). This type of approach has tended to promote coaching as a purely technical and unproblematic process. However, to improve the quality of coaching, coach education programmes must be grounded in real life problems and should aim to develop cognitive and creative interpretations of the fragmentary strands of knowledge that currently exist. Currently, the information provided to coaches in coach education programmes ‘is not appropriate to produce consistent excellence in a complex area of human relations such as coaching’ (Jones, 2000, p.34). Jones (2000, p.36) stated that:

If coaches are to truly maximise the potential of their athletes, an understanding of the social context which could influence behaviour seems obvious, whilst a grasp of the problematic nature of the social bonds that tie the coach to athlete and athlete to athlete, would also appear necessary.

Indeed, research (McCall et al., 1988) has shown that leaders who fail to reach their expected potential were more often found to lack interpersonal skills, especially in relating to subordinates, but not a deficit in their technical skills. Is the same true for coaches? Leaders (coaches) need the skills to engage followers (athletes) in
productive and satisfying mutual pursuits. This is a departure from the usual approach of seeing leader qualities as possessions, rather than interpersonal links to others involved in shared activities (Hollander, 1997). Rather than be separate, leadership and followership exist in a reciprocal, interdependent system as a unity (Hollander, 1992). In focussing on the social context of coaching, and giving consideration to the problems and realities of human interaction, this type of sports leadership research will hopefully provide information relating to the numerous behavioural and situational elements for working effectively with athletes.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
2.1 Introduction

The notion of ‘followership’ has emanated from research which has been carried out on leadership. However, when the followership theme appears in the leadership literature, ‘it is usually as an adjunct to the main leadership theory, rarely as a subject in and of itself’ (Atik, 1994, p.24). Not only have leadership and followership rarely been discussed in the literature as coequal concepts but there was very little discussion about the phenomenon of followership itself (Heller and Van Til, 1982). Consequently, followership has been completely dwarfed by leadership in the literature. This chapter will critically review the research literature on both leadership and followership and, in the interest of clarity, is divided into a number of sections. The first examines attempts to define the concepts of both leadership and followership. The next considers the early approaches to leadership research and, as a result of the difficulties arising out of it, the application of a contingency theory to leadership. The third section examines more recent approaches to leadership research with a consideration of charismatic, transactional and transformational leaders together with links to the concept of emotional intelligence. This is followed by an examination of the research which has been carried out on leadership in sport. Links between leadership and followership are then considered, with the final section considering the notion of followership and the research relating to this concept.

2.2 Definitions

Leadership is an area which has been studied more extensively than almost any other aspect of human behaviour (Goffee and Jones, 2000; Higgs and Rowland, 2001). However, whilst the research on leadership is vast and diverse it has, to date, been inconclusive and often contradictory (Kets de Vries, 1995; Clemens and Meyer, 1999). Burns (1978, p.2) wrote that ‘leadership is one of the most observed and least
understood phenomena on earth'. It would seem that, despite many thousands of studies we still have no generally agreed definitions, nor do we have a detailed understanding of what the concept means. The attributes that conceptualise leadership vary in the literature depending on the researcher’s perspective. Leadership can be ‘…defined in terms of trait, behavioural, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position’ (Yukl, 1998, p.2).

However, according to Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), some significant elements have come to form the nucleus of the leadership notion. ‘Leadership is a behavioural process … is interpersonal in nature … and is aimed at influencing and motivating members toward group or organisational goals’ (p.160). In other words, the basis of leadership seems to be that it is a behavioural process aimed toward influencing group members to work towards the group’s common goal. However, if ‘the key point of leadership is to get everyone else (the non-leaders) to do what the leader wants, that is to say command and control’ (Prince, 2005, p.114), this practically divorces leaders and leadership from all context. This would be seen particularly from the part of the context we call followers who are thus expected to be relatively passive tools in the process (Prince, 1998). Indeed, ‘by and large, followers have been viewed as unproblematic and predictable cogs in the (leadership) machine’ (Collinson, 2005, p.1424).

Recent research, however, has begun to at least recognise that leadership is not an unproblematic process and is as much reliant on those who follow as those who lead. Consequently, growing interest has centred on relationships between leaders and followers, with some writers stressing the need to study followership (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2001). Followership can be defined as a design to coordinate one’s actions or goals with that of another individual – the leader – that has the effect of fostering that individual’s goals (Wortman, 1982) proposed the following definition of followership:
Followership is the process of attaining one’s individual goals by being influenced by a leader into participating in individual or group efforts toward organizational goals in a given situation. Followership thereby becomes seen as a function of the follower, the leader, and situational variables (p.373).

2.3 Early Leadership Research

Several researchers have suggested that the ‘modern’ study of leadership began with the Trait theory in the late 1920s (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Goffee and Jones, 2000; Higgs and Rowland, 2001). This early research concentrated on the personality correlates of leadership, resulting in a laundry list of traits and motives that distinguish leaders from followers. ‘This was a personality-based approach and one which led to generally inconclusive findings’ (Higgs, 2003, p.275). Much of the research has tended to focus on autocratic leadership style versus democratic leadership styles (Shields and Gardner, 1997; Foels et al., 2000; Sheman et al., 2000), while the notion of laissez-faire as an ineffective leadership style has been continuously supported (Bass, 1985). As a result of the limitations of the Trait theory, the emphasis of later research shifted more towards an examination of leader behaviours in light of task demands and the needs of followers - the behavioural theories of leadership. The Blake and Mouton (1964) model provides an excellent example of this approach which was underpinned by a belief that there was a ‘best’ leadership style (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995). Blake and Mouton (1964) characterised five different leadership styles according to the varying emphasis placed upon two behavioural dimensions – concern for production; concern for people. However, numerous examples were later found of successful leadership employing less ‘desirable’ styles (Higgs and Rowland, 2001). No one leadership style or behavioural attribute that results in one being an effective leader thus appears to be agreed upon.
2.4 More Recent Leadership Research

The best way or universal approach to leadership was criticised by those who recognised that good leadership often adapts with the situation. Widely varying circumstances typically require different qualities of leadership. These became known as contingency theories. An alternative to being an autocratic or democratic leader is to be a situational leader. Situational leaders are able to adapt their leadership style to fit their followers and situations in which they are working. Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1993) provided a classic example of a contingency theory known as situational leadership. They suggested that it was not the leaders' style per se which led to effectiveness, but rather the ability of the leader to adapt the style to the needs of the followers (Higgs, 2003, p.275). Hersey and Blanchard characterised leadership style in terms of the amount of direction and support that the leader provides to his or her followers, but also recognised the need to identify the development level of the follower. They said that the leader's style should be driven by the competence and commitment of the follower and came up with four levels: D1 – Low Competence/Low Commitment, D2 – Some Competence/Low Commitment, D3 – High Competence/Variable Commitment, D4 – High Competence/High Commitment. The leadership style must then correspond to the development level of the follower and, furthermore it is the leader who must adapt, not the follower. This was one of the first attempts to understand leadership from the follower perspective, a much-neglected area. It can be seen then that in the psychological literature there are, by and large, two competing theoretical perspectives on the origins of leadership. Trait models assume that there is a distinct set of personality traits, distinguishing leaders from followers. In contrast, situational theories of leadership emphasise the importance of the decision situation in determining who leads or follows. 'While the trait theory tended to imply that effective leadership is a matter of selection, the behavioural and situational theories focused more on the development of leadership
Recent decades have seen a revitalization of interest in the concept of the 'charismatic leader'. Such leaders are said to have considerable emotional appeal to their followers and a great hold over them, especially in a time of crisis when there is a strong need for direction. In studying top-level leadership performance, Shamir (1992) identified the common thread of 'charisma'. Charisma has been described as the ability to inspire others to act in a way which is required to realise the leader's vision (Shamir, 1992). During the 1990s the focus for much of the leadership research was on the qualities of the 'heroic CEO' (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Collingwood, 2001a,b). Although this approach also failed to produce compelling results, theoretical support for the importance of charismatic leadership at the top executive level can be found in some of the literature (Day and Lord, 1988; Yukl, 1998). Charismatic leadership can best be understood as a relationship between leader and follower, rather than a personal attribute; charisma can be socially formed by the leader, underlaying the importance of charismatic leadership as a social relationship (Bryman, 1992). Furthermore, 'the multiplicity and variety of effects on followers (empowers, sets challenging aspirations, creates positive images) suggests something more than a one-way leadership process of a transactional nature' (Atik, 1994, p.23). Hollander (1997, p.9) noted that 'interest in charisma is now mostly associated with transformational (TF) leadership and reveals the importance of the followers' perspective in understanding such phenomena'.

 capabilities' (Higgs, 2003, p.275). However, once again research, using both style and contingency theories, failed to provide consistent and compelling evidence for their validity across a wide range of contexts (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995). Clearly, there has been an ongoing controversy in the psychological literature on personality versus situational models of leadership (Bass, 1990; Hogan et al., 1994; Chemers, 2000).
Higgs (2003) referred to the work of Bass (1985) who developed a leadership model which identified different sets of behaviours and characteristics required in situations of organisational transformation and situations of stability. Bass (1985) labelled these as transformational (TF) and transactional (TA) leadership. Transactional leaders engage in a simple exchange relationship with followers, whereby they reciprocally influence each other in order to get the benefits that each party desires (Hollander, 1985). Transactional leadership on the other hand refers to a fair exchange in which the leader gives something to followers and receives esteem and latitude for action in return. Transactional leaders typically control followers with a number of psychological carrots and sticks. In contrast, transformational leadership, which uses the power of inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and vision, encourages followers to forego their immediate selfish outcomes in order to adopt the goals of the leader. A transformational leadership style differs in one unique aspect from a transactional style in that it makes followers actually believe that following the leader in pursuing an activity is in their best interest.

According to the psychological literature (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1997; Tracey and Hinkin, 1998; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Wofford et al., 2001), transformational leadership comprises four core components sometimes referred to as the four I’s: Idealised Influence (otherwise known as charismatic leadership), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualised Consideration. With idealised influence (charismatic leadership), transformational leaders behave in ways that result in them being role models for followers. Leaders are trusted, admired and respected by their followers, as such, followers often emulate and identify with the actions of the leader. Transformational leaders avoid using their position of power for personal gain; instead they look out for what is in the best interest of their followers. Inspirational motivation is where the leader communicates to provide meaning and challenge to followers’ work in such a way that they motivate and
inspire those around them to achieve. The third component of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation, which focuses on encouraging creativity, innovation, and non-traditional thinking among followers. Finally, individualised consideration refers to the way in which the transformational leader pays special attention to the followers’ needs for achievement and development. Here, the leader acts as a mentor and leads each follower to opportunities to reach higher levels of potential. A major source of the power of transformational leaders stems from the followers identifying with them, in essence, viewing them as an extension of themselves (Hogg, 2001).

In more recent times, there has been a significant growth in research into the concept of emotional intelligence. In addition to assertions, and empirical evidence, relating emotional intelligence to individual performance and success, further suggestions have been made that emotional intelligence is strongly linked to effective leadership (Bennis, 1989; Goleman, 1998). Emotional intelligence fits under the umbrella of relationship-oriented leadership. George (2000) explored the impact of emotional intelligence on effective leadership. She argued that, ‘leadership is an emotion-laden process, both from a leader and a follower perspective’ (p.1046), and identified ‘the appraisal and expression of emotion, the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making, knowledge about emotion, and the management of emotion’ (p.1034) as the four major components of emotional intelligence. These attributes result in leaders communicating and making decisions at an optimal level and, therefore, George (2000) argued emotional intelligence has the potential to significantly contribute to effective leadership.
2.5 Leadership In Sport

Horne and Carron (1985, p.137) stated that 'very little systematic research has examined leadership in sport'. Whilst there have been numerous studies which have examined a variety of coaching leadership issues, most of this research has been primarily concerned with a leader's perspective. Less attention has been directed toward studying the two-way interaction between the coach and individual athletes. Poczwardowski et al. (2006) stated that 'if one considers that coaching is an interpersonal process that is largely reflected in the relationship coaches and their athletes develop, then it is important to acknowledge that interpersonal processes involve both sport-specific and non-sport, social-psychological processes' (p.135). While the knowledge base regarding relationship issues has advanced, it can be argued that the field of interpersonal relationships as a domain of sport psychological research per se, remains underdeveloped (Iso-Ahola, 1995).

The sport psychological research which has been conducted on interpersonal relationships can generally be considered under one of three approaches. The most extensively developed approach has been focussed on the coach-athlete relationship. Following early research which used a trait approach to study what a coach is, sport psychologists switched their efforts to describing how a coach coaches. Much of this early work focussed on the work of Smoll et al. (1978) who produced the Mediational Model of Leadership which attempted to conceptualise coach-athlete interactions in terms of a social reinforcement and modelling approach (Wylleman, 2000). Another line of research in this area was based on the work conducted by Chelladurai and Saleh (1978, 1980), who developed the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) using the Multidimensional Model of Leadership which focuses on the leader (coach), the members (athletes), and the situation in which they find themselves (the athletic setting). According to Chelladurai (1999), the Multidimensional Model of Leadership
is an attempt to synthesise and to reconcile existing theories of leadership. In effect, situational leadership is a part of the Multidimensional Model of Leadership.

Wylleman suggested that a ‘knowledge gap exists within the discipline of sport psychology on the role of interpersonal relationships in competitive sport’ (Wylleman, 2000, p.558). As interpersonal relationships cannot be fitted nicely within one particular scientific discipline, it can be argued that they lack scientific delineation and thus recognisability (Wylleman, 2000). Most sport psychologists see themselves as mental skills trainers (Morris and Thomas, 1995) and, as a result, their attention to relationship issues has been restricted. There is little evidence to suggest that any of the performance enhancement models have focussed on interpersonal skills, and there has been no development of a sport psychological intervention technique as a means of optimising athletes’ interpersonal functioning. In much the same way, ‘coaching, as an academic and practical subject, has largely developed along bio-scientific fragmentary lines, while the essential humanistic social nature of the total process has remained less well understood’ (Jones, 2000, p.33). Lyle (1999) emphasised the need to recognise the sophisticated nature of the coaching process through an appreciation of the inherent interpersonal relationships that exist between coaches and athletes within it. ‘As athletes do not function in a social vacuum they must be able to use their intrapersonal skills in interpersonal demanding situations in order to determine success and failure’ (Wylleman, 2000, p.561).

The disregard of the highly important social context has been a serious limitation in research on athlete-coach relationships (Poczwardowski et al., 2002). It is essential to consider the broader interpersonal environment of the athlete and coach in order to contextualise the evolving understanding of dyadic relationships in a more complex web of relations with significant others (Poczwardowski et al., 2006).
2.6 Leadership/Followership Links

Atik (1994, p.22) noted that 'much of the research in mainstream organisational psychology has aimed at attempts to define and measure the effects of leadership on subordinate performance'. Mainstream leadership theories have tended to prioritise leaders, addressing followers only in relation to their susceptibility to certain leader behaviours or styles. There has been a failure to consider the more active role followers may play in the leadership process. Through their approach, mainstream leadership studies have tended to portray followers as 'an empty vessel waiting to be led, or even transformed by the leader' (Goffee and Jones, 2001, p.148). Meindl et al. (1985) criticised the tendency to develop overly heroic and exaggerated views of what leaders are able to achieve. They suggested that in the context of causally, indeterminate and unpredictable events, romanticising leaders merely provides a reassuring simplified way of understanding complex organisational processes.

In recent times, a number of writers have begun to question the dualistic assumptions to be found in much of the leadership literature. Gronn (2002) criticises the 'leader-follower' and 'leadership-followership' binaries that remain sacrosanct within leadership studies. He advocated the importance of distributed leadership in schools, which emphasises interdependence, coordination and the reciprocal influence between teaching colleagues. Ray et al. (2004) similarly criticised traditional studies where the leadership relationship is presented as an unremarkable dualism in which leaders are given a voice while followers are rendered silent. A relationship does not reside in the individual but is a product and process shared between two or more people (Jowett, 2005). A relational view of leadership then highlights the importance of followers as well as leaders in the leadership process, while the concept of relational purpose helps explain the complexity of the leadership task and highlights the role of leaders as relational managers. Regarding leadership as a relational process can be seen as a
logical extension of recent trends in the literature emphasising the role of followers, and the importance of relationships between followers and leaders (Bryman, 1992; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1993). Collinson (2005) recognised that leadership is increasingly seen as being distributed up, down and across hierarchies. He stated that:

It is now increasingly common to view leadership as ‘post-heroic’, ‘shared’, ‘quiet’, ‘post-transformational’, ‘follower oriented’ and/or ‘project team-based’ where leaders act as servants rather than as commanders and controllers. This new thinking treats leadership dynamics as more relational and group-based, dependent on fluid, multi-directional social interactions and networks of influence. (p. 1422).

An effective leadership style then is becoming increasingly viewed as dependent on the followers and the needs of the specific situation (Yeakey, 2002). Therefore, the literature has moved further from focussing primarily on the task and closer toward placing more importance on the needs of followers, the relations between the leader and follower, and adaptive leadership (Yeakey, 2002).

2.7 Followership

Recent research has begun to centre on relationships between leaders and followers, with some writers stressing the need to study followership. This has been argued as important, not only because all leaders are also followers, but also because modern notions of leadership place considerable emphasis on the power and importance of followers in ultimately legitimizing and enabling leadership (De Pree, 1993; Lee, 1993). Heller and Van Til (1982, p.405) observed that ‘not only were leadership and followership rarely discussed in the literature as coequal concepts but there was very little discussion about the phenomenon of followership itself.’ When followership does appear in the leadership literature it is usually as an adjunct to the main leadership theory and rarely as a subject in and of itself (Atik, 1994). Rather than be separate, leadership and followership exist in a reciprocal, interdependent system as a
unity, and our understanding of leadership is incomplete if we do not recognise its unity with followership. The usual expectation of the follower role as low power and passive is therefore misleading when considering followership as an active accompaniment to leadership (Hollander, 1992). Amar (2001) also described leadership and followership as intertwined concepts that cannot be separated from one another. In fact, the practice of Japanese business schools is to teach leadership and followership as two integrated facets. Graham (1988) argued strongly for an increased emphasis on the theme of followership in organisational behavioural theory. Indeed, a number of writers have highlighted the importance of ‘exemplary’ and ‘courageous’ followers for successful organisations (Chaleff, 1995; Raelin, 2003; Kelley, 2004). They argue that in the contemporary context of greater team working, empowered knowledge workers, and distributed leadership, good followership has become crucial. Despite this, few can identify a followership model or can speak to the characteristics of effective followers. Unlike leadership, followership has no widely recognised theories providing a roadmap for followers to guide their behaviours. Atik (1994, p.27), stated that ‘followership is an area of research that is relatively neglected and deserving of greater status that it currently receives. Only with greater understanding of the nature of followership can leadership be more thoroughly understood’.
CHAPTER III

METHOD
3.1 Introduction

As has already been stated, the purpose of this study was to explore the notion of 'followership' in elite coach-athlete relationships. No hypotheses have been formulated due to its exploratory nature. In order to understand the different approaches to research, it is important to consider three framework elements: 'philosophical assumptions about what constitutes knowledge claims; general procedures of research called strategies of inquiry; and detailed procedures of data collection, analysis and writing, called methods' (Creswell, 2003, p.3).

3.2 Knowledge Claims

Ontology is the study of the philosophy of knowledge whilst epistemology is the philosophical study of how such knowledge is acquired. Philosophically, researchers make claims about what is knowledge (ontology), how we know it (epistemology), what values go into it (axiology), how we write about it (rhetoric), and the processes for studying it (methodology) (Creswell, 1994). There exist two broad approaches to the nature of knowledge; (a) positivism, and (b) interpretivism. As each of these approaches has different epistemological and ontological assumptions, they will in turn have differing implications as to the methodology adopted, the data collected, and the interpretation of such data by the researcher (Gratton and Jones, 2004).

Positivism adopts a scientific approach to research, whereby the social scientist is able to observe human behaviour, measure facts and then develop laws of behaviour. Positivists assume that the sports' environment is relatively stable and that within such an environment the precise measurement and analysis of given facts allows the development of theories. Such theories can then be tested through further measurement, and used to predict future behaviour. The early years of sports-related
research were dominated by the positivist approach, however, alternative approaches are becoming more widespread (Gratton and Jones, 2004). Postpositivism refers to the thinking after positivism, challenging the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge (Phillips and Burbules, 2000). It recognises that we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behaviour and actions of humans. Those who reject the positivist approach argue that sport is a social phenomenon and, as a result, it is not possible to predict whether X will always cause Y, due to the freedom people have to act in so many different ways. 'Positivism does not account for intangible concepts related to this freedom, such as feelings or emotions, and the role of such concepts in explaining our sporting behaviour' (Gratton and Jones, 2004, p.19). These concepts alternatively form the basis of the interpretive approach.

An interpretive approach sees people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources. 'Interpretivists are concerned with understanding the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities' (Blaikie, 2000, p.115). An interpretive approach allows the researcher to understand the subjects from within which allows intangible concepts, such as feelings or emotions, which may otherwise be missed by a positivistic approach to be identified. Whilst a positivist approach may suggest a relationship between X and Y, an interpretive approach tries to describe and explain that relationship from the viewpoint of those being investigated. As this study was concerned with the interpersonal and dynamic field of coach-athlete relationships and seeks to engage with the sociology of coaching, an interpretive approach was considered to be the most appropriate.

Social constructivism is an alternative knowledge claim within the rather broad paradigm of interpretivism. Following early work by Berger and Luckman (1967), and Lincoln and Guba (1985), numerous other writers have summarised this position
Constructivist researchers recognise that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. 'In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives' (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Constructivist researchers then, focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work and often address the processes of interaction amongst individuals. As the focus of this study was linked to the interactions between coaches and athletes, a constructivist approach was adopted.

3.3 Qualitative vs Quantitative Research

Qualitative research in the sport sciences is relatively new in comparison to its use in other fields. It has been given a variety of names, including ethnographic, naturalistic, interpretive, grounded, phenomenological, subjective, and participant observational (Thomas and Nelson, 1996). Whilst each of these approaches is slightly different, each 'bears a strong family resemblance to the others.' (Erikson, 1986, p.119). Therefore, it is worthwhile considering the nature of qualitative research. Mason (2002, p.2) recognised that 'there have been many attempts to define qualitative research in the social sciences, and to determine whether or not it can or should be differentiated from something called quantitative research.' Qualitative research derives its name from the importance it places on non-numerical data (Hardy et al., 1996). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as:

the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals’ lives. (p.2).
Traditionally, a gulf is seen to exist between qualitative and quantitative research, with each belonging to different paradigms (Layder, 1998). Textbooks oriented towards quantitative methodologies have tended to treat qualitative research as a relatively minor means of inquiry. Silverman (2000, p.3) suggests that ‘qualitative researchers still largely feel themselves to be second-class citizens whose work typically evokes suspicion, where the ‘gold standard’ is quantitative research.’ Qualitative research has been criticised as a result of its implied emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured in terms of quantity, intensity, or frequency.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) made reference to some of the problems facing qualitative research:

> The academic and disciplinary resistances to qualitative research illustrate the politics embedded in this field of discourse. The challenges to qualitative research are many. Qualitative researchers are called journalists, or soft scientists. Their work is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias. It is called criticism and not theory, or it is interpreted politically, as a disguised version of Marxism, or humanism. (p.4).

Despite the criticism aimed at qualitative research, there are those who defend it as a field of inquiry in its own right. Flick (1998, p2) stated that ‘qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations, owing to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds.’ Many of the arguments put forward in support of qualitative research make reference to the advantages that it has over a quantitative approach. Bouma and Atkinson (1995, p.216) suggest that ‘qualitative research offers a deeper more subjective approach to social science than a quantitative approach’, while Haralambros and Holborn (1991, p.707) also lend their support to qualitative research in stating that ‘compared to quantitative data, qualitative data are usually seen as richer, more vital, as having greater depth, and as more likely to represent a true picture of a way of life, of people’s attitudes and beliefs.’ There is also sufficient support to suggest that ‘qualitative research shares good company with the most
rigorous quantitative research, and it should not be viewed as an easy substitute for a "statistical" or quantitative study' (Creswell, 1998, p.16).

Qualitative research often adopts traditional ethnographic and anthropological non-numerical approaches to the pursuit of knowledge. The goal is to obtain rich, in-depth, and detailed information from an 'insider's' view that emphasises the perspective of the subject and attempts to comprehend the circumstances in which the experience takes place. Consequently, 'in order to do justice to the nature of the athlete-coach relationship as a socially construed phenomenon of a highly process-oriented nature, qualitative methods seem very appropriate' (Poczwardowski et al., 2006, p.130).

3.4 The Interview

Choosing the appropriate research methods or techniques is clearly vital (Veal, 1992). Every technique has its value in different circumstances, but it is important that the researcher is aware of the limitations of any particular method and does not make unsubstantiated claims. In research, a 'horses for courses' approach should be adopted; techniques are not considered to be intrinsically 'good' or 'bad' but are clearly considered 'appropriate' for certain situations. (Veal, 1992)

Interviews allow researchers to openly search and probe into new areas of inquiry. This technique allows the researcher to control the line of questioning (Creswell, 2003) and thus probe those areas specific to the study, whilst allowing flexibility for the participant to offer a wealth of information. The interview is the most common source of data in qualitative studies and has the advantage of being able to gain large amounts of data fairly quickly. Interviews are also particularly effective when detailed information is required to investigate a research question in a small, and
comparatively exclusive, sample. Numerous authors have identified a wide range of interview types; (a) standardized interviews; (b) in-depth interviews; (c) ethnographic interviews; (d) elite interviews; (e) life history interviews; (f) focus groups; (g) semi-structured interviews; (h) group interviews; (i) structured interviews; (j) exploratory interviews; (k) informal conversational interviews; (l) interview guide approaches; (m) standardised open-ended interviews; and (n) closed quantitative interviews. Kvale (1996, p.126-7) argues that ‘interviews differ in the openness of their purpose, their degree of structure, the extent to which they are exploratory or hypothesis-testing, whether they seek description or interpretation, whether they are largely cognitive-focused or emotion-focused.’ The issue for the researcher is clearly one of ‘fitness for purpose’.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this study as they prevent many of the problems associated with structured and unstructured interviews. Closed or fixed response interviews often force respondents to fit their experiences and feelings into the researchers’ categories. This can distort what the participant actually means and completely limits their response choices (Patton, 1990). In contrast, unstructured interviews were not appropriate due to the fact that they are less systematic and comprehensive if certain questions do not arise. Data analysis can be quite difficult due to there being no predetermination of question topics or wording (Patton, 1990). Semi-structured interviews, therefore, enabled the researcher to ensure that each topic was fully and accurately explored (Mason, 2002).

3.5 Participant Selection:

Purposeful sampling was employed to select the participants. This involved the establishment of criteria that identified participants who were rich in information relevant to the research question (Patton, 1990). The participants consisted of four
male rugby union coaches who all satisfied the following multiple selection criteria: they were all currently employed as full time professional coaches, they all had experience of coaching international rugby at age-grade level or above, and they each had in excess of ten years coaching experience. Two of the coaches were employed as Regional coaches in Wales, the other two were employed as U21 and Academy coaches by National Governing Bodies. As opposed to a random sampling strategy, the aims of which include extending empirical generalisations from the sample to the population, purposeful sampling facilitates an illuminating insight into particular phenomenon, in this case the notion of 'followership' in coach-athlete relationships (Patton, 2002).

Generally, qualitative research looks to collect a great deal of 'rich' information from relatively few people rather than more limited information from a large number of people (Veal, 1992). Patton (1990, p.184) suggests that:

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative enquiry. Sample size depends on what you know; the purpose of the enquiry; what will be useful; what will be credible; and what can be done with the available time and resources.

Within the current study, the sample size was not determined at the outset but it was hope that the researcher would achieve probable data 'saturation'. This is the point at which any further data collection is unlikely to provide any different information from that which has already been collected. It was felt that saturation had occurred after four interviews.

3.6 Pilot Study

Gratton and Jones (2004, p.144) recommend that 'once a preliminary interview schedule has been developed, then it is important to pilot it.' A pilot study was carried
out on a coach who satisfied the selection criteria outlined earlier, in the presence of a researcher experienced in qualitative research. The pilot study provided an opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the use of the tape recording equipment and allowed for the interview technique to be practiced and refined. It also allowed the researcher to identify any potential problems which may arise and consider means of overcoming such problems (Thomas and Nelson, 1996).

3.7 Interview Procedure

The participants were initially contacted by telephone and a time and place for the interview was arranged at their convenience. They were informed prior to the interview as to its nature and content, and assurances were given in relation to the confidentiality of the interview information. All of the individuals consented to participate in the interviews and the right to use the data generated to complete the study, and therefore the right to analyse and interpret the data gathered in the interview (Mason, 2002).

Although a standardised interview format was followed which involved participants being taken through an identical set of questions, a conversational strategy was employed which allowed for other areas to be explored at the interviewer's discretion. This procedural flexibility enhanced the fluency of the interview and the richness of the information collected whilst still retaining the systematic nature of the data collection between participants (Patton, 2002). The interviewing venue varied between the participants to suit their preferences. Each interview was recorded in order to obtain complete and accurate information, and following each interview, the content was transcribed verbatim.
3.8 Reliability/Validity

Validity and reliability are two important issues that need to be addressed in any type of research. Cohen et al. (2003, p.105) noted that 'it is unwise to think that threats to validity and reliability can ever be erased completely; rather, the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research. Patton (1990 p.11) stated that 'the validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher.' In the view of Gearing and Dant (1991), the interviewer needs to establish a rapport within a trusting relationship in order to obtain significant personal information from the interviewee.

It has to be remembered that reliability and validity are positivist terms, and researchers coming from the naturalistic tradition have argued that trustworthiness is more important than concerns over validity or reliability. Whilst acknowledging that validity and reliability are important considerations, particularly within a positivist paradigm, within the constructivist paradigm more importance is placed on concepts such as credibility, meaningfulness etc. Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p.35) noted that:

The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures .......... Terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

3.9 Organisation and Presentation of Data

A grounded theory type approach was adopted to analyse the data collected in the interviews. With this approach, no 'up-front' theory is proposed, and no hypotheses
are formulated for testing ahead of the research. The essential idea in grounded theory is that the theory will be developed inductively from data. The grounded theory approach places an overt emphasis upon, and offers specific procedures for, the generation of theory that is enhanced by its emergence from the researcher’s observations, as opposed to being generated through logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Patton, 2002). However, this study used a variation of grounded theory in that a pre-conceived notion of followership, as outlined in the introduction, guided the investigative framework.

The information gained from the interviews have been expressed in narrative form. Ely et al. (1997, p.64), emphasised the advantages of such an approach by stating:

"Given that the experience and meaning we take from research projects are reconstructed into text, the rearrangement of events – that is the compressing, emphasising, ignoring, and sequencing – and the narrative aspects of story help us research writers to create vicariously lived and realistically comprehended stories of what was researched."

Through expressing the data obtained from the research interviews in narrative form, an attempt was made to find the ‘subtle, blurred and often important meanings’ that are contained within (Ely, et al., 1997). In so doing, the researcher has not merely accepted these self-portraits per se, but has attempted to generate meanings and insights from them. Therefore, an attempt has been made to move beyond the interview transcripts into interpretations of what the coaches actually said (Jones, et al., 2004).
CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVES
4.1 COACH A

Introduction

Coach A clearly understands and values the importance of effective coach-athlete relationships. He believes that, although the coach should command a position of respect, the relationship must be seen to be a two-way one with the players making an important contribution. Driven by this philosophy, Coach A strives to develop constructive working relationships and emphasises the importance of developing a positive environment within which players are free to express themselves. His understanding of the concept of followership was initially a little vague as it was not really something which he had previously considered. After some reflection, he considered it to be the consequence of effective leadership, with the coach being central to its development within a group. As he put it: ‘Yes, without a shadow of a doubt they’ll come up with stuff but they’ll also need prompting on certain other aspects.....’ Coach A acknowledges that followership is important in the rugby environment and considers it to be linked with the establishment of relationships.

Establishing Relationships

Coach A felt that the establishment of appropriate relationships was essential for any group to work well. When asked what this entailed, he stated that a coach must be seen to occupy a position of authority and that any interaction between the coach and players takes place within a hierarchical structure where the coach provides a lead which the players can follow:

I’m in a position of authority, they have to know that I’m not one of the lads ..... there has to be a huge degree of interaction, but they must also know that there’s a certain line they can’t cross.
Whilst stressing the importance of developing a two-way relationship with his players, Coach A placed considerable emphasis upon the respect which the coach should command. It seems that this respect is something which he believes is linked to the position of authority which he holds as a coach, and that it is the position and not the person which gets the respect. He said:

'So it's .... What I encourage is a two-way interaction and it's not me behind the table with them in the chairs at the front, that there is no barrier between us, but there's just a little degree of respect of the position that one's in.'

Coach A is aware of the potential difficulties which can arise as a result of the coach attempting to gain respect and consequently being seen as an authoritative figure. As he put it: 'if in instilling a degree of authority you're actually putting a barrier in front of the players to come and talk to you in that manner then it defeats the purpose.' This would seem to contradict the notion of a hierarchical relationship mentioned earlier, and perhaps suggests a level of confusion. However, he stressed that this should not prevent the two-way interaction, which he feels is so essential within coach-athlete relationships, from taking place. Indeed, he suggested that given sufficient time with a group of players, a coach should expect to be able to achieve a level of followership even if this is not one hundred per cent:

Yeah, I think if you're in a closed environment or a full time professional environment where you have contact with them on a daily basis, then you would have to question yourself as a coach if there wasn't a degree of followership. Either there's a lack of respect from the players in what you're trying to achieve or there's just a non acceptance of it.

Gaining Followership

Working with National Age-Group squads means that Coach A operates in an environment in which he has a limited amount of time with any given group of players. This does not allow for the easy establishment of effective long-term coach-
athlete relationships which he considered to be so important in gaining followership, and may demand more input from the coach in terms of developing a team culture. He believes that developing 'team spirit' through team building exercises can result in a shared philosophy evolving. Such a philosophy, although driven by the coach, should have had an input from the players and can help in attempting to gain followership from the group:

... at times you have to tinker/tailor your philosophy in order to have followers to come with that. Say with an U21 group, it can be cyclical, you've got to stick to some of your own visions of the game but you've also got to be, I feel, pragmatic.

Coach A saw another important outcome of team-building activities to be the identification of leaders from within the group. He was able to relate important decision-making roles within the team to those which occur in team building activities, allowing for the identification of leaders and followers within a group. He emphasised this accordingly:

Two years ago I brought in army guys and we did six activities which would have been physical, mental etc. Great fun and it does bring out, it does get guys to sort of know that ultimately when they're in a game of rugby, they've got to know that each side of them there's someone there, but there's still got to be guys responsible for making the critical decisions on the pitch just like in those team building exercises.

Coach A felt that a degree of followership can evolve out of an environment which encourages the allocation of specific responsibilities and a shared ownership among the players, together with a high level of interaction between the coach and players. He tried to emphasise this where he said:

... one guy can't captain the side, one coach can't make all the decisions – it's a team effort, it's a combined effort and I think in putting a certain philosophy together that, if everyone can follow that philosophy, then the more successful you're going to be.
Other strategies used to develop followership within the group included goal-setting and the use of role models from outside the group. Goal-setting is again seen to be a shared activity where the coach is able to provide a ‘degree of leadership or guidance’ to the players as a result of the greater experience he is able to bring to such activities. He emphasised this point in saying:

‘Yes, without a shadow of a doubt they’ll come up with stuff but they’ll also need prompting on certain other aspects, and I suppose that where the difference in that is, is because you’re older than them and have the experience of being in tournaments and they’re still learning that, but they’re likely to learn it quicker.

Coach A believes that it is important for players to recognise their contribution to the ‘team’. To this end, he is prepared to look for inspiration from other coaches who were able to develop positive relationships with their players and create shared leadership/responsibility in their teams. One of the coaches he mentioned was Rod McQueen, and he referred to him as ‘someone who apportioned the leadership and the responsibility within the team, not only from the management staff but also from the playing staff’. He associates strongly with McQueen’s ‘we not me’ philosophy and has looked to utilise similar quotes. He described the use of one such quote where he explained:

One of the ones which encapsulated it brilliantly, albeit when you think of rugby it was from the Jungle Book, Rudyard Kipling’s eight line poem, but the last two words were ‘the strength of the pack is in the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is in the pack’, and I think that pretty much encapsulates the whole lot of it. It’s a value I’ve tried to instil into these guys this year ....

Too Many Chiefs

Coach A sees the development of leaders within the group as an important factor in the growth of the team. However, he appeared to be not totally clear as to whether a
team full of leaders is desirable. When questioned about this he responded by saying: ‘... ultimately if all the followers became leaders we’re in an ideal world.’ However, he also noted that it is not possible for everyone to be a leader within the group. He said:

But within the uniqueness of our game there’s also the aspect of (um), if there’s too many chiefs and not enough Indians, then that can become actually like a bad influence on sides because (uh) then it means more talking rather than some sort of action ....

The need for leadership within the group is a recurring theme, and Coach A recognised that not all players will become leaders, nor will they have a desire to. He suggested that: ‘there’s always going to be a degree of guys who it’s in their nature to follow where, if there isn’t someone to follow, where are we going?’ So, whilst he recognised that there is a need to grow leaders within a group, he was also aware of the need to have followers. Within any group, he suggested that there will always be some individuals who are more comfortable as followers and who are looking for leadership. So once again the emphasis is on developing a hierarchical structure within the group and he suggested that: ‘when we’re talking about followership I think certainly within our own sphere, the more leaders that you have, that followers will naturally come on.’

Concluding Thoughts

Coach A clearly believed that developing strong team values/principles is one of the fundamental requirements in developing a culture of ‘followership’ within a group, although he does not really make any reference to followership in his thoughts. Probably the most easily identifiable theme relating to Coach A’s coaching philosophy was his belief in the need to develop an environment in which a two-way interaction between the coach and his players is central. He clearly believes that he
can get respect and followership through strong leadership whilst understanding the need to give his players a degree of latitude. Whilst this might not result in guaranteed followership from the group, he believes it to be crucial in the establishment of effective coach-athlete relationships. In his own words:

I think certainly clear evidence is when, whether it’s on the pitch or in the off the field activity that the interaction and the comfort of the interaction from the players to the coach is there and it’s probably in a clinical way and an educational way. It’s not you know the joker in the pack, it’s having the guys who have grown confident with you because they’ve bought into and agree with what you’re trying to do and then that naturally makes them aware. At the end of the day if you have 60-70% of the group following it’s a lot easier to drag the other 25% rather than the reverse.

Whilst not entirely comfortable with the concept of followership, Coach A believes that a strong ‘team’ culture is essential and sees this as being important in the achievement of goals. He said: ‘When you have a self-belief like that and if everyone has that self-belief and then collectively believe in the values and philosophy of what we’re trying to achieve, well then you can achieve anything.’ Without a degree of followership within this type of environment, the coach’s job becomes significantly more difficult.
4.2 COACH B

Introduction

Coach B’s coaching philosophy emanates from a belief that, in order to succeed, there is a need for him to relate well to his players. He considered that the coaching context is fundamentally a social one, and the need to treat players as individuals is central to his coaching philosophy. In his opinion, there is a great deal more to coaching than training and technique, and this is reflected in his desire to spend time with individual players in order to ‘get to know them as people’ and understand ‘what makes them tick’. Consequently, he feels that he is able to establish a fairly close relationship with his players, and sees this as a very important element of his coaching role. Coach B had not previously considered the concept of followership, but saw this as being linked to the successful achievement of common goals. As he put it: ‘I’m a great believer if we can all be as one, all move forward as one, all believe in the same thing and believe in what we’re doing, then we’ve got a very good chance of success.’

Establishing Relationships

Coach B believes that, in order to succeed, a coach needs to empathise with his players and has to understand them as people as well as athletes. He places a great deal of value upon the establishment of an effective two-way relationship between the coach and his players based upon a mutual respect. He said:

I’m certainly someone who I think is approachable, who the players can come and speak to I like to spend time one on one building up those sort of personal relationships and so, therefore, I think the main thing is probably about respect.

The need to recognise and develop the interpersonal aspects of coaching is at the core of Coach B’s coaching philosophy. He certainly does not feel that effective working
relationships are something which the coach can take for granted purely because of the position they hold. Indeed, he refers to the difficulties faced when such effective relationships have not been established:

I think that it’s something that we need to work at without a doubt and (um) I know that we’ve had quite a few players on this trip for example who’ve been a little bit sceptical about coming for various reasons, particularly about the coaches. I know one coach has had a few personal issues with a few players in the past and because of certain injuries we’ve called on these players who’ve actually come and I think we’ve had to work very, very hard at getting their buy in, getting them involved and part of this sort of culture.

Coach B appears to play down the leadership role of the coach, but there is still a recognition that a hierarchical structure exists within coach-athlete relationships. However, Coach B stresses that whilst the coach might be able to use his position of authority to get his players to do what he wants in the short term, it does not gain followership in the longer term. As he put it:

Yeah, I think (um) I think we probably do expect that and we do expect them to do it, and I think that most of the time they probably will do it but that’s probably only in the short term and I don’t think that will get long lasting results. I do think that we need that belief, and the followers need to be with us.

Gaining Followership

Although Coach B had not really given any consideration to the concept of followership, stating that: ‘it’s probably the first time I’ve heard that term’, it is something which he subconsciously looks to achieve as a coach: ‘I like them to want to believe in me, want to follow me, and I find that it takes a little time to get their buy in’. Whilst he recognises that there are several ways of trying to get players ‘on board’, his belief in the need to get to know his players as individuals, with specific
needs and traits, is central to his coaching philosophy. As he said: ‘it’s actually about getting to know players and how they tick, that’s a major one.’

Coach B’s belief in establishing effective relationships with his players extends to involving them in discussions about the direction of the team. He feels that, although there might be a need for the coach to provide the direction for such discussions, it is important that the players are able to see where they fit into the structure and, indeed, how they as individuals can develop as a result of being in such an environment. So, in many ways it’s about getting the players to agree to his agenda and therefore how much ownership is he prepared to give. In giving them a degree of ownership of the environment, he feels that the players are more likely to develop as leaders and followers. As he puts it:

We have somebody who’s in charge of the lineout and somebody who’s in charge of the defence and we do give them a big say in how the team is run. We, as coaches, speak to them regularly about their views and we’re certainly very open to their suggestions about how they think the team should be playing in certainly their areas of the field. I’m very happy and willing to change to be honest if that suits them and the rest of the players, if that’s what they believe in.

The use of team building activities and the establishment of a strong team culture is another way in which Coach B feels that a degree of followership can be gained. However, there appears to be some confusion as to whether the team values/team goals should be set by the coach or the players. Initially he said: ‘I think they come from us as coaches, I think we set them. We sort of, we set out this clear work hard, play hard philosophy which we quite like them to buy into.’ Later, he adopts a different stance in saying: ‘No, I think in a way it has to come from them as well …. I think its’ understanding the players, understanding what they want and then in a way agreeing to what we all want, and that helps getting their buy in.’ There appears to be an acceptance that one hundred percent followership may never be achieved in the limited time he has with his players and suggests that he can attempt to compensate
by: ‘I think probably doing what most good coaches or teachers probably do and that’s generally appealing to the masses, but then also trying to pick out those at the extremes, at the different ends of the spectrum.’ These are probably the players who may provide the most difficulties in terms of followership, in as much as they will challenge his thoughts or will be completely disinterested.

Concluding Thoughts

Coach B believes that followership can develop through the confidence that the players have in both themselves and the coach. He sees himself as a players coach and places a great deal of emphasis upon the development of the individual. He feels that in order to be successful he needs to be able to relate to his players both as rugby players and, more importantly as individuals. Coach B is aware of the need for him to be able to relate to them as different people with particular needs and traits. He feels that it is necessary to establish a relationship with his players whereby they fully believe that he is working towards their best interests, and believes that getting the players to ‘buy in’ to his philosophy is an essential part of his role as a coach. He described this as: ‘trying to give them a clear vision of where the team’s going, but more importantly I think as individuals giving that vision of where we want them to be and seeing how that mirrors where they actually want to be.’

In terms of followership, Coach B believes that this can often be recognised through action rather than rhetoric in team meetings:

Whether they are actually saying on the field what we’ve been trying to get across to them off the field. It’s easier for them to talk in team meetings, that’s too easy for them. I think it’s actually on the field that we see whether they’re doing those things that we’ve been suggesting to them.
4.3 COACH C

Introduction

Coach C feels that in order to establish effective coach-athlete relationships, there is a need for mutual respect between the coach and his players. Although he considers himself to be close to his players, Coach C is aware of the need to continually work at this relationship and, also, that there still has to be an acknowledgement that the coach occupies a position of authority which creates a hierarchical relationship. He said: ‘I can get a little bit closer to the players than the head coach but, having said that you know you still have to work at it and you need to have a line drawn between us.’ He firmly believes that in order for him to work effectively he must be seen to respect his players, value them, and support them as individuals. As he puts it: ‘I think the players feel that I genuinely respect them and try to get the best out of them, that I’m not in it just for me specifically, but that I’m in it for them and for the team.’ Coach C had not previously given any consideration to the concept of followership but, in attempting to define it, suggested that ‘it would be to try and inspire, instil values, maybe coerce individuals/units to believing in and buying into a philosophy or set of philosophies to achieve common goals.’ There would appear to be a contradiction here between the need to ‘coerce individuals’ and the achievement of ‘common goals’. The coach is attempting to make the players believe that the goals are common even when he is actually driving them.

Establishing Relationships

In attempting to build effective working relationships with his players, Coach C emphasises the ‘friendly’ nature of his approach: ‘I do have a very friendly approach to the players. I do have a common respect – something that we’re working towards
anyway, and a shared opinion type of relationship’. The interpersonal nature of the coaching role is an important part of Coach C’s coaching philosophy, he likes to be seen as a ‘players’ coach’ and takes the time to get to know his players as people as well as athletes. As he puts it:

I think part of the coaching is to know the player off the field as well, you have to understand what their background is you know, where they come from, what’s their home life like – you don’t have to know the ins and outs – but getting an idea and understand what the ‘animal’ is, know your ‘animal’.

Coach C is aware that in order for the coach-athlete relationship to function effectively, there are expectations which have to be met on both sides. As a coach, he has certain expectations of the players in terms of their attitude and professionalism: ‘I expect punctuality, I expect huge discipline, I expect mutual respect, I expect a work ethic. I expect them to have an ego, but not to overstate their ego. I want them to be team players.’ Clearly, if players enter the environment with this type of approach then many of the areas of potential conflict between the coach and his players do not occur and positive working relationships can be developed. However, Coach C also understands that the players will have certain expectations of him, and that he must look to meet these expectations in order to gain the respect of his players and for the relationship between them to flourish. He feels that the players expect him to be an expert and a leader. In his own words:

I think they expect me to be innovative. I think they expect me to teach them something that they don’t already know, make them aware. I think they expect me to have a strong work ethic and to be prepared and organised, but also to be quite succinct and to the point. Also, to have empathy with what they are going through as players … to have an appreciation of the pressure they are under … also as well to pat them on the back when it’s required, when it’s deserved, when they do something good.
Coach C recognises that, as a coach, he is seen to be in a position of authority, and as such he has power over his players. However, he is reluctant to use his position to enforce his principles on the players. Indeed, he emphasises the need to strike a balance between authority and respect, he wants his players to feel that he is approachable and that they can be totally honest in their dealings with him. Similarly, he emphasises the need for honesty in his dealings with the players, something which he feels helps to gain their respect. The importance of this mutual respect and the need for effective two-way coach-athlete relationships in the work of Coach C was summarised where he stated: ‘If you become dictatorial, very authoritative, autocratic to the extent of dictatorship, then at some stage that is going to lead to a rebellion.’

Gaining Followership

Creating an environment in which players are working together towards common goals is seen to be an important part of Coach C’s work. He is of the opinion that coaches cannot simply expect players to fall into line and do as they are told, and that this is something which has to be developed by the coach together with the players: ‘I don’t think they should conform unless they believe in what they’re involved in’.

A number of strategies have been used by Coach C in attempting to develop a culture in which everyone understands and believes in the expectations of them as individuals and as a group. These have involved social activities, team building, one to one interviews, mentor groups, senior player groups, feedback sessions etc. Time spent with individual players is seen to be invaluable, and gives the coach an opportunity to build relationships with his players and to get to know them as individuals. As Coach C puts it:

I try and meet the guys at least once a week for a one on one, whether it be for a coffee, for a sit down chat where they can have an input, or a drive home from
training. Some sort of one to one. One, to feel loved, to feel touched, to have some technical input or two, to find out whether there is anything going on.

The setting up of clearly defined parameters – ‘Tablets of Stone’ – against which performance can be measured, is also seen to be very useful in obtaining player ‘buy in’. Key performance indicators, against which performance is measured and feedback sessions are structured, provide the players with guidelines in terms of the team goals:

They are things like setting skill standards, taking pride in our for and against columns, do for others what you want others to do for you, excite the crowd, these sort of things – tablets of stone – which have then components within that we can relate statistical data to.

Coach C places a great deal of emphasis upon his relationship with individual players and sees this as an important factor in gaining followership from the group. Through building such relationships, he is able to recognise that: ‘there are those who don’t want any responsibility don’t want any leadership, they just want to follow, they like to be led.’ This awareness that certain players will exert a much greater influence over the group than others, and the ability to identify and work with these potential leaders is seen to be crucial in the achievement of common goals. As Coach C put it:

I think what I’ve attempted to do in the past is to spread yourself really thin and try and get every individual in your group to follow and to conform. I think there are, if you can work out and hit it off with, the key guys in your group who you know have a big influence, who are hugely respected, who you know that other players will follow, and get them to do it for you.

Although Coach C values input from all of his players, he also recognises the need for him as a coach to, at times, provide leadership for the group in terms of team values and beliefs. Whilst the emergence of leaders from within the group is seen as a positive, not all players can, or will take up this role.
Too Many Chiefs

The use of highly respected players as leaders is thought, by Coach C, to be a very effective way of gaining followership. Whilst the emergence of such leaders from within the group is seen to be very positive, there is also the recognition that we cannot have a situation where all players are leaders, however unlikely.

We’re in a team environment a team sport, there has to be a contribution from as many people as possible to come with a common theme ... but then again there has to be a coach or leader keeping an eye on it because if the ownership becomes too much, the shared ideas become too grey then you are going to have a problem – too many calls, too many ideas, you get a talking shop.

In delegating responsibility to selected senior players to act as leaders, Coach C is actively encouraging a hierarchical structure within the group. However, he feels that this is widely accepted within the group and goes a long way to solving the problems associated with having too many, or indeed too few, leaders. Players are able to contribute at their level within the hierarchy and feel that they are contributing to the group.

Concluding Thoughts

Coach C is clearly someone who attaches a great deal of importance to the interpersonal aspects of coaching and strives to develop close relationships with his players. He considers himself to be ‘player friendly’ and actively encourages an open dialogue between himself and his players: ‘a friendly, approachable, shared relationship.’ As a coach with strong principles and beliefs, he believes that he must gain the respect of his players by setting the standards for them to follow. Whilst accepting the need for him to adopt a leadership role at times, he considers himself to
be more of a facilitator and looks to develop an environment which is player driven. He relies heavily upon feedback from the players in determining the level success being achieved.
Introduction

Whilst Coach D recognises the importance of establishing effective coach-athlete relationships, he feels that there is often a lack of honesty from the players within these relationships which the coach needs to be aware of. As he puts it: ‘players are fundamentally dishonest, particularly in the professional game, they have one agenda, their own agenda.’ As a result of this apparent lack of trust, he appears to place a great deal of emphasis upon the interpersonal nature of coaching. The ability of the coach to connect with individual players, thereby gaining their trust and respect is regarded as being crucial in order for the desired working relationships to be established.

Coach D acknowledges the need for followership within coach-athlete relationships, but also emphasised the need for the coach to provide direction recognising the necessity to be dictatorial at times. Ultimately, he recognises that followership is likely to occur as a consequence of strong leadership whereby he coordinates the ideas of the group in order to provide direction. He emphasised this point by saying: ‘that comes down to the skills of the guy fronting this group of people up to ensure that a common cause, a common direction, a common consensus does come out of the group, otherwise there’s no direction, there’s no progression.’ This suggests that there might be a level of contradiction here as to whether the consensus comes from the leader or the group.
Establishing Relationships

Coach D comments upon the ‘healthy relationship’ he feels he has with his players, but stresses that effective two-way relationships ‘take an awful long time to develop with any particular group.’ He sums up his role as: ‘I’m basically the conduit between what the head coach wants and what the players need.’ Clearly, Coach D sees himself as a facilitator within the environment and recognises the need for him to develop close relationships with his players in order to carry out this role effectively. He sees coaching as ‘a shared process’, and is keen to draw upon the experience he has within the playing group, but how does this fit in with his insistence upon strong leadership? As he stated: ‘I’m involved in professional sport, I’ve got some highly motivated, highly intelligent athletes working with me; it would be foolhardy of me not to tap into those for their ideas.’ This type of interaction could help in the establishment of effective working relationships between Coach D and his players, particularly with the ‘senior players’ who are used as a link between the management and the rest of the squad.

Much of Coach D’s coaching philosophy relates to his background in psychology and his desire to know his players as individuals. He sees a lot more to his role than purely training and technique, and places great emphasis on the value of psychology in coaching. He stated that: ‘a key issue is an underlying psychological understanding of just how people work. I really think it’s a core component, how individuals work and how groups work, it just underpins everything you do realistically.’ Coach D tends to classify his players in terms of what they bring to the squad and uses terms such as activists, pacifists, terrorists and zombies, to do this. He feels that by making the players aware of such classifications and asking them to consider their own perceptions in terms of their personal contribution to the environment, he is able to develop more effective working relationships.
Coach D understands the need to build effective two-way relationships with his players and does not consider his perceived position of authority as a coach to be sufficient in guaranteeing such a relationship. The need to communicate effectively with players and to involve them in the decision making associated with team matters, are seen as being essential in terms of building relationships. Indeed, Coach D feels that he is unlikely to be able to impose his ideas without building such relationships, he says: ‘if you’re going to go in with a dogmatic, autocratic approach where you know it’s my way or the highway, problems are likely to occur very, very quickly, particularly if results don’t go your way.’

Gaining Followership

Whilst team building activities and social events are seen as being useful, Coach D feels that they are now done so regularly within a professional environment that they are taken as read and may not be as effective in gaining followership from a group as first thought. Similarly, he feels that the establishment of team values and codes of practice can in fact prove to be counter productive if the players fail to buy into them. As such, any type of activity which looks to deal with the establishment of such values needs to be very carefully managed as they cannot be imposed upon a group. Therefore, he may be seen to be managing the search for ‘consensus’ to ensure it occurs.

Coach D sees himself very much as a coordinator of ideas. Having considered the various options available, and following discussions with fellow coaches and players, he tries to establish an agreed philosophy and move it forward. Then, he feels, there is an opportunity to gain followership: ‘once that direction has been agreed upon, I think that’s when the followership really kicks in.’ However, whilst Coach D recognises
the importance of empowerment, and tries to ensure that he creates an environment which is as much player-driven as coach-led, he is also aware that this can in itself create problems. As he said:

So I think you’re always going to be caught in this sort of paradoxical environment where you’re trying to empower, you’re trying to get a common consensus, but the more people you have sat round the table the less likely you are to get a common consensus.

The use of a senior players group as ‘middle managers’, and for the dissemination of information has been seen as a great success in gaining followership from the group. By carefully selecting a group of senior players who are well respected by both management and, in particular, the players, information can be disseminated and decisions reached far more efficiently. Coach D certainly feels that the setting up of this group and the development of their roles as mentors to other groups of players within the squad has been instrumental in attempting to gain followership from the group. When questioned as to how he would know whether he had gained followership from his group, Coach D replied: ‘I suppose the complete answer is you’ll never know for sure. All you can do at any one time is try and ensure there is a consensus of agreement, and I suppose the agreement that matters is with that senior group of players.’ Indeed, Coach D questions whether an environment in which everyone is seen to be a follower is actually what we want to achieve. As he puts it: ‘Really, an environment doesn’t want too many unquestioning followers anyway….. I think you have to be careful as to how many followers you really do want.’

Unlike the other coaches interviewed, Coach D actually questions the desirability of total followership from the group. In referring back to his ‘classification of player types’, he stated that: ‘I don’t think I would like too much of a followership, I think that would perhaps be unhealthy and highlight a huge imbalance of the types of players that you have in your squad.’ Whilst other coaches have warned against the
problems of having too many leaders within a group, Coach D tended to focus upon
the problems associated with having too many followers at the expense of leaders
(activists). As he put it:

I wouldn’t want too many followers, therefore you’re almost promoting the activist
type player. Those activists themselves, the whole point in them being there is to
challenge, is to think more deeply about the game, is to try and move the game on
in tandem with the coaching staff.’

Concluding Thoughts

Coach D recognises the importance of building effective working relationships with
his players and creating an environment with common goals. However, he places
considerable emphasis on the value of understanding the make-up of the individuals
within the group and feels that achieving the right balance between different
personality types is crucial in building a positive environment. He considers a
situation in which all players are seen as followers to be unhealthy and not really
conducive to active followership. He stated that: ‘I think that if you were to have
fifteen pacifists, I would align a pacifist more to a follower or even a zombie, where
they do things unquestioningly, unerringly, I’m not sure that’s healthy.’ However, he
also recognises the problems associated with having too many activists (leaders) in the
group where he states: ‘from a team dynamics perspective, too many activists would
be difficult to pull in any one direction.’

Coach D feels that the coach’s role changes as he or she spends more time with a
group. Initially, the coach may be required to lead more and expect to get
followership from the group purely as a consequence of the position they hold. In
time, he is more likely to empower the group or individuals within the group and his
role becomes more in the way of a coordinator for the group. As he puts it: ‘it’s a
balance of empowerment, coordination of their ideas, and you sometimes have to
make firm and unpopular decisions as well, a mix of all those three.’ So, although not entirely comfortable with the concept of followership, Coach D considers limited empowerment to be the way forward in the establishment of effective coach-athlete relationships. As he said: ‘I think the empowerment process is huge, it’s all about player buy in and giving them a clear, plain rationale for your reasoning.’ The suggestion here is that the players are being empowered to do what the coach wants them to do.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION
5.1 Effective Leadership:

The coaches involved in this study had not given any previous consideration to the notion of followership but, upon reflection, considered it to be a consequence of effective leadership. This is understandable as, 'whichever view of leadership is discussed, there is general agreement that leadership involves influencing others to go in a particular direction' (Crawford, 1998, p.2). Coach C defined followership as, 'getting them to believe in and buy into a philosophy or set of philosophies to achieve common goals.' Such a 'followership' was thought, by all of the coaches, to be essential in the relationship between the coach and the athlete/team. ‘The vast majority of leadership theories and research have been based on the idea that leadership involves a leader and a group of followers’ (Horner, 2003, p.35), with dominance, motivation and influence being primary vehicles. However, much of this work has failed to consider the highly complex, interdependent nature of leadership.

Drath and Palus (1994) considered leadership as a process in which leaders are not seen as individuals in charge of followers, but as members of a community of practice. A community of practice is defined as, 'people united in a common enterprise who share a history and thus certain values, beliefs, ways of talking, and ways of doing things' (Drath and Palus 1994, p.4). It is easy to relate to the sporting community in this way and, therefore, should we be moving away from the notion that leadership involves a leader and a group of followers? Such a view holds certain resonance with the beliefs of the coaches interviewed. In many ways, they included themselves within a group discourse and collective, although positioning themselves as being 'first among equals' within it. As one of the coaches stated, 'we're in a team environment, there has to be a contribution from as many people as possible to come with a common theme … but then again there has to be a coach or leader keeping an eye on it because if the ownership becomes too much, the shared ideas become too
grey then you are going to have a problem.’ So, as Jones et al. (2004, p.164) noted, ‘although desiring a special positive relationship with their athletes, coaches also believe in the requirement to remain one step away from them; thus respecting and using the authoritative coaching role as a resource to direct and organise.’ Drath and Palus (1994) suggest that leadership is the process of coordinating efforts and moving together as a group. The coach may be seen as the coordinator in such an environment, but everyone involved in the activity is assumed to play an active role in the leadership process.

Donnithorne (1993) argued that every leader is a follower and that the beginning of leadership is followership. Coaches will, in most cases, have experienced the role of follower at some stage in their careers. Indeed, it is likely that in order to succeed in sports, they would have had to have been a good follower in their sports team environment. Therefore, if Donnithorne’s view (that in order to be a good leader one must first have been a good follower) has validity, then it could be suggested that extensive experience in sports contributes to the development of followership, which may then lead to good leadership.

5.2 Building Relationships:

Leadership is both systemic and relational, and interaction is the medium through which resources are deployed and influence is exerted. ‘The medium of leadership is, however, not individual action but social interaction.’ (Crawford, 1998, p.18). All of the coaches taking part in this study felt that the establishment of effective relationships with their players was essential in attempting to gain followership from them. The coaches stressed the importance of securing the trust and respect of their players within such relationships in order to carry out their coaching practice effectively. This concurs with the findings of Jones et al. (2004, p.153) who
concluded that ‘the quality of the interpersonal relationships that existed between coach and athlete (defined by many as ‘respect’) directly impacted upon the receptiveness of the athlete to the coach’s pedagogical strategies, athlete learning, and ultimately, competitive performance.’ The way in which coaches attempt to gain such trust and respect is an important consideration.

Whilst the coaches accepted that they occupied positions of authority, and were able to command respect and make decisions through their perceived positions of power, this was not seen to be an effective way forward in the long-term. Such power, derived solely from the position held by the coach, has been termed ‘legitimate’ or ‘positional power’ (Erchul and Raven, 1997). Potrac et al. (2000) found that this source of power in itself is insufficient for a coach to gain and hold the full confidence and respect of athletes, which supports the views of the coaches in this study. Coach C reflected on this where he said ‘if you become dictatorial, very authoritative, autocratic to the extent of dictatorship, then at some stage that is going to lead to a rebellion.’ Jones et al. (2004, p.153) suggests that ‘while most coaches are granted this form of power upon entering the coaching environment, it is their future actions that dictate whether such power is enhanced or eroded.’

In a similar way, other types of power such as expert power, reward power, coercive power and referent power (French and Raven, 1959), have all been examined in terms of coaching behaviour. The coaches in this study stressed the need to get to know their players on an individual basis and demonstrate a genuine care for their progress both inside and outside the sporting environment. Raffel (1998) developed the concept of ‘self in role’ which refers to someone who sees coaching as ‘an embodiment of values, something to actively further and not merely comply with. It is a principled commitment that helps provide for doing more than is expected within the role’ (Jones et al, 2004, p.129). Much of coaching would thus appear to concern
obtaining and maintaining the admiration of athletes and getting them to believe in you as a coach (Potrac et al., 2002). The coaches in this study emphasised the importance of ‘getting to know’ and ‘meeting the needs’ of individual players within their squads. This, they believed, helped them to gain the trust and respect of their players. This relates to referent power, where it is the individual as opposed to the role that is respected. There are clear links between this concept and that of charismatic leadership, which is thought to have a considerable emotional appeal to followers (Weber, 1946).

The involvement of players in decision making was also considered to be an important component in the successful establishment of coach-athlete relationships, if coaches were to ‘get them on board’. This relates to the concept of ‘nutrient’ power (May, 1972) or empowerment (Kidman, 2001), where individuals acquire greater control over the decisions that affect their lives, and is achieved by giving players a voice in the decision making process. The coaches interviewed considered that this helped to generate followership from their groups. However, despite their apparent desire to create an empowered environment, the hierarchical nature of the relationship between coaches and athletes has already been identified. In reality, it appears that coaches only allow their athletes to have an illusion of empowerment (Jones, 2001), whereby they are actually attempting to get the players to ‘buy in’ to their (coaches) ideas. The achievement of this common directive was considered crucial to team success.

5.3 The Role Of Followers:

The coaches interviewed in this study emphasised the importance of developing leaders within their environments. However, there appeared to be some confusion as to whether it would be desirable for all of their players to become leaders. It has already been noted that without followers there can be no leaders, but the role and
status of followers is often undermined. Smith (1997) suggested that following suffers from a serious image problem, whilst Kelley’s (1992) research found that most people ascribe negative qualities to the word ‘follower’. We have a propensity for viewing followers as negative elements in the organisation; that is, a follower is seen as weak, passive, and unmotivated (Deiss, 2006). Because followership is greatly undervalued in society and in business, to the detriment of organisational performance, too little attention is placed on the development of strong and capable followers.

In considering the need for followership, all of the coaches stressed the importance of being able to get their players ‘on board’ or ‘pulling in the same direction’. Clearly, they understand the need for followership and, therefore, followers are afforded some status by coaches even if subconsciously. In any organisation, leadership and followership roles will be required. As Chaleff (1995, p.14) put it. ‘Followers and leaders both orbit around the purpose, followers do not orbit around the leader.’ However, if followership is to occur, leaders need followers to consent to their leadership. This means that leaders need to form and maintain good working relationships with diverse followership, exhibiting a range of relational expectations (Russell, 2003). This relational view of leadership highlights the importance of followers as well as leaders in the leadership process.

Lundin and Lancaster (1990), highlighted the importance of effective followers in suggesting that belief systems which value followership as highly as leadership enrich individuals as well as companies. Within team sporting contexts we do not yet appear to afford followers the same status as leaders despite an apparent dependence upon followership. Emerging theory (Meindl, 1995) has emphasised the importance of followership and suggested that researchers should no longer be concerned at all with leaders. However, ‘by eschewing any consideration of leaders in favour of an
exclusive focus on the social psychological dynamics operating within followers, Meindl inverts, but then reproduces, a similar dualism between leaders and followers.' (Collinson, 2005, p.1424).
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS
Conclusions:

The aim of this study was to consider the notion of followership within elite coach athlete relationships. It has been found that whilst coaches recognised the need to build effective relationships with their athletes in order to ‘get them on board’, the notion of followership was not something to which they had given any real consideration. The role of followers within their environments was somewhat undervalued, with greater emphasis being placed on the development of leaders. However, as Hollander (1997, p.1) stated, ‘we have come a long way from a time when the study of leadership was almost entirely consumed with the leader. In the modern era a more active role is accorded to group and team efforts, which require active followers. The usual expectation of the follower role as low power and passive is therefore misleading when considering followership as an active accompaniment to leadership (Hollander, 1997). Whilst the coaches interviewed were able to relate to the concept of followership, and appreciated its importance in their working environments, they tended to see it as a consequence of their day-to-day work rather than something which they needed to actively promote and encourage. ‘Nurturing effective followership requires doing away with the misconception that leaders do all the thinking and followers merely carry out commands. Followership plays a vital role at every level of an organisation’ (Lundin and Lancaster, 1990, p.18).

At present, coaches are seen as leaders and as such require leadership qualities and styles to suit a wide range of social situations. However, since leadership takes place within such complex social settings, it can only be fully understood relationally, that is, by taking followership seriously. The coaches in this study placed great emphasis on the need to form and maintain good working relationships with a diverse followership exhibiting a range of relational expectations. This has clear implications for coach education programmes, particularly those aimed at elite coaches, as this
increased awareness of a relational element to leadership has identified the need for interpersonal skills in leaders (coaches). Are coaches currently made aware of these requirements and given the opportunity to develop them? It would appear that there should now be a move towards emphasising the importance of distributed leadership, which emphasises the interdependence, coordination and the reciprocal influence between coaches and athletes. Empowered followership, like motivation, requires a joint effort between coaches and athletes. Coaches can help, encourage, reward, applaud, and support the process, but they cannot create followers simply by leading them. Successful followership requires skills and behaviours e.g. interpersonal communication, problem solving, coping with change, and conflict management; that must be learned and practiced before they are mastered (Lundin and Lancaster, 1990).

Future work in this area should look to investigate more fully the complementary and overlapping role requirements which exist between leader and follower. Leader and follower communication, appreciation and efficiencies can be improved through a competencies-based development approach for all. As Smith (1997, p.202) suggested:

We need to craft a different organisational culture, one that self-consciously practices and celebrates both the following and leading skills in all of its people. In this culture, people are not ‘assets.’ They are continually shifting collaborations of individuals who make performance and change happen.
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APPENDICES
Interview 1: Coach A

Date: 19th June 2006

OK, (uh) I'd like to start by thanking you for agreeing to participate in (uh) in helping me with the study and could you please introduce yourself and just give me an outline of your playing and coaching experience.

Of course, Coach in full time employment with the Irish Rugby Football Union. My playing career (uh) stemmed mainly through the nineties, club rugby would have been involved with Blackrock, Shannon and Lansdown RFC. Representatively (uh) played professional rugby with Leinster and Munster, and from International sides I played at every age group and was replacement for Ireland at Senior Level. Probably within that the biggest accolade would have been to be Captain of the Ireland 'A' side for a season. Since then I started working with the Union in 1997 and was combining playing and development. I went through a series of roles within the IRFU starting as a Development Officer which was the first time I had a taste of working with the Irish U21 side, went through a variety of roles leading up to me becoming Elite Player Development Manager and National Academy Manager within the IRFU .... and, align that with Assistant Coach of the Irish U21's, and then in 2004, took up a full time position as Ireland U21 coach.

OK, that's great. (Um) What I'm interested in really is .... The purpose of the interview is to try and examine certain aspects of coach-athlete relationships. So, if we can begin perhaps by me asking you (um) how you see the relationship between you and your players. What your expectations are of your players in that relationship and what your players should expect from you.

No problem. First of all I think because of the age group which we're working with the level of experience both in life and in rugby compared with under aged groups. I think that the first parameter that has to be set with the players is that albeit I'm in a position of authority, that they do know that there is a position of authority and that I'm not one of the lads, I'm far from being one of the lads. That it's important in what we're trying to do to develop them as players, to develop them as professional players within Ireland, but also to encapsulate what an environment of professional rugby is because they are aspiring to be professional rugby players. So within that, yes there's .... there has to be a huge degree of interaction but they must also know that there's a certain line that they can't cross. So it's ... what I encourage is that it's a two-way interaction (eh) and it's not me behind the table with them in the chairs at the front, that there is no barrier between us, but there's just a little degree of respect of the position that one's in.

Oh great, (um) so you're looking at yourself there perhaps as being the leader within that group and your players perhaps as followers and whilst looking at the role of the coach as a leader, and there has been a lot of research on that, I'm interested in perhaps the other side of that and this notion of followership, that as leaders, clearly we need followers and that without followers there can be no leaders. So, if we can go with that term followership first of all, what would you understand by the term followership?
Well, my understanding of it would be that whilst whatever the principle ... either the type of game that you’re coaching and the philosophy that you have, that let’s just say that it’s well good for me to have that philosophy, but if the people can’t understand that and, you know to put it into terminology, follow that well then is there any point in doing it? So, aligning the ... you know like after you’ve done all the physical and mental and technical evaluations of the players, you’ve got to realise is there a capacity within that and at times you have to tinker/tailor your philosophy in order to have followers to come with that. Say with an U21 group, it can be cyclical, you’ve got to stick to some of your own parameters and some of your own visions of the game but you’ve also got to be I feel pragmatic. But then, there’s the challenge as well ... can you get them to follow to where you ultimately want to get and I presume if you’ve achieved that at the end of the season well then not only have you encapsulated with them to become better players, but then there will be more leaders within that because of their ability to follow.

That’s great [ ]. I’d like to pick up on a point you made earlier ... you mentioned the coach as having a position of authority and you know, clearly that is the case. But just through that position of authority, should coaches expect to get followership?

You can’t expect anything can you. It’s (um) if participants can’t understand or can’t follow where/what you’re trying to instil into them, well then you’re, you know, hitting a brick wall. I think that’s a thing where throughout the course of a season it’s like evolution, it’s changing all the time. This particular season would have set out with the parameters that there are no barriers and that the interaction for us to develop as a group and to help me develop as a coach ... that there has to be a two-way interaction and that is from the players and to me. So if in instilling a degree of authority that you’re actually putting a barrier in front of the players to come and talk to you in that manner then it defeats the purpose. The certain individuals that we would have this year have been good and have taken up in that manner and matured as the season has gone on, so now there’s a constant knock on the door with players wanting to come in and get feedback from me for selection or non-selection and also how they played. Their understanding of what you’re going through, their role as a leader on the pitch, some of them need to come and ascertain more ... it’s probably to give them more confidence than anything Chris to be honest with you ... the more understanding they have I suppose it’s with anything, whether it’s with rugby, or whether it’s in college or in a job, if you fully understand what you’re doing well then you can follow it, if you don’t then you’re back to square one.

OK, clearly then I think we’re agreeing that coaches need players to follow, we need followers. Leaders need the skills therefore to engage followers. As coaches we need those skills. What can coaches do perhaps to promote followership within their environment? Do you actively try and promote that in any way?

Yeah! We do it’s like it’s um ... you know we would incorporate a series of team building exercises and (uh) you know those types of exercises can be rugby related or absolutely non rugby related whatsoever, and you know once again it’s trying to encapsulate and incorporate a spirit within a bunch of men, whatever that may be, to get guys to come out of their shells. We would do that so that we would (eh) ... when
we were in camp or when we’re here, there are different committees who all have
different responsibilities within the general lines of what a tournament is about or
what a training camp is about (eh) you know. That can be down to certain things like
the pitch committee, the water committee, the gear committee, social committee (um).
What we would have found is certainly with certain aspects you need to continually
prompt them because they’re not … they don’t think without the box quite a bit and
so one of the team building/getting them to come out of their shells a little bit, would
have been on their training camp where they had a theme night and they had to come
up with a theme for each group and to work together. There was always a guy that
was leading us and certainly from our aspects this year we have a great bunch of guys
in the squad and they’ve all bought into that. So, even right from the off, where
particularly the three or four new fellows who’ve come into the World Cup Squad from
the Six Nation’s, they are much more comfortable in this environment because it’s,
yeah, they’ve had a degree to input into it at all times. So yeah, I think those team
building exercises are very good, sometimes you’ve got to think without the .. think
outside the box because you’ve not got the spondoolies to do structured ones. Two
years ago I brought in army guys and we did six activities would have been physical,
mental etc. great fun and it does bring out, it does get guys to sort of to know that
ultimately when they’re in a game of rugby they’ve got to know that each side of
them there’s someone there, but there’s still got to be guys responsible for making the
critical decisions on the pitch just like in those team building exercises. So yeah,
there’s aspects like that that we use that I’ve found are very beneficial, if it’s just me
talking all the time it becomes mundane and monotonous, you need to bring in
outsiders – people to do different things which could be non rugby related.

Yes, I think there’s an interesting point coming out of that as well, it
appears that through team building type exercises you are looking for leaders to
emerge from your followers. I suppose in an ideal scenario you’d want all your
followers to be leaders. Perhaps there’s something in that.

There is, and I think in getting the leaders and having followers and ultimately if all
the followers became leaders well then we’re in an ideal world. But, within the
uniqueness of our game, there’s also the aspect of (um) if there’s too many chiefs and
not enough Indians then that can become actually like a bad influence on sides
because (uh) then it means more talking rather than sort of action, but one guy can’t
captain the side, one coach can’t make all the decisions – it’s a team effort, it’s a
combined effort and I think in putting a certain philosophy together that if everyone as
you say can follow that philosophy then the more successful you’re going to be
whatever is determined as your successful outcome … and like I would I suppose
because of my time being in sort of the development side of things and then carrying
on into coaching, that within the Irish sphere that Under 21’s and Under 21 people,
coaches who are there have got to know that we are a cog on the wheel to the
professional and ultimately to the National side, and I think maybe if there was a
degree of more consistency within us as a union then we would get a lot more
followers rather than each guy sometimes coaches being sort of unique in their own
way and sort of losing sight of what the bigger picture is. Personally for me it’s that
without having designated leaders as you pointed out, well then there’s always going
to be a degree of guys who it’s in their nature to follow where if there isn’t someone
to follow, where are we going?
Yes, and you know I think that’s particularly so on the field and we’re in a difficult environment we have a change over of players every year and we’ve got a limited time with the players we’re working with so I suppose creating an environment where you can get players on board and following in terms of buying into your philosophy as a coach and what your expectations are for the team and for the group becomes more difficult. But what about things like team values and goal setting, is that anything that you’ve looked at?

What we’d always do is (um) when we before any Six-Nation’s or before any World Cup, we’d always sit down and look at the goal setting side of things. Also, it’s an education thing in some ways for the players because … and this is where a degree of leadership or guidance must succumb to it because some of them won’t understand the difference between performance goals and outcome goals. It’s very simple to say before a Six-Nation’s or before a World Cup, what’s your goal? To win the World Cup! But there are so many factors that hinder that outcome goal, so we’ve (um) certainly would find that yes we would do goal setting, we would do a Code of Practice. I’d steer away from sort of a Code of Conduct because I think that’s too schoolistic to be honest with you, too teacher orientated. At the end of the day they’re men that we’re dealing with now and (uh) so they’ve got to be able to come up with their own things within the confines of what a tournament like this is about. Yes, without a shadow of a doubt Chris they’ll come up with stuff but they’ll also need prompting on certain other aspects, and I suppose that where the difference in that is, is because you’re a degree older than them and have the experience of being in tournaments and they’re still learning that but they’re likely to learn it quicker. So, maybe I have to look at myself and ask is that me or is that the environment they’re coming from?

Perhaps one of the key leadership skills we need as coaches is to get them to do what we want by getting them to think it’s what they want. I think that is probably the key to everything?

Yeah, the way I would approach it this year is to try and get them to follow as quickly as possible, whilst when we started within the screening process didn’t put any structure in the initial part of it and we were trying to get a value of the game, to get a value of trying to be able to play the game with a bit of pace and to be able to play the game with heads up and see exposing opportunities and exploiting opportunities by thinking on your feet, it’s easy to give guys structure and give them two, three, four phases of structure, but we know in the reality of the game that possibly after three, phase three that you can’t choreograph everything and I would feel that purely from a rugby side of things it would be negligent of me to structure everything for them. They have to come up with a certain degree of it for themselves, so in relation to our game plan this season looking at the pitch geography and taking the principles of play within that, I actually gave them the flexibility this year that they came up with that. Now, whether they can carry it out, well then that falls back on me … but yeah, very much with the whole lead in to the 6 Nation’s and the World Cup they are the ones who came up with the structure within the overall philosophy.

OK. The other thing then about trying to create this followership within your environment, would any of your paperwork/visual material that you might use help to promote that as well?
Yeah, I think so. Like one of the ... certainly a person that I’ve found quite inspirational and have used an awful lot of his material either directly or just sort of twisting it to our environment, was Rod McQueen and his book which took him up to the time when he retired and he ... it’s down in his book, it goes through all of his life from the time when he had two near life-ending experiences, to his rugby side of things and that would have been the first time where I actually saw someone who apportioned the leadership and the responsibility within the team, not only from the management staff but also from the playing staff and you know he was fortunate to have players of great experience within that group, but one of the interesting things within that was that when it came to a half-time talk, the coaches would have had their two or three points but then like as we all know, the players have to play the pitch, play the match ... then it was over to the players. So if there was anything the coaches overlooked the George Gregan’s the John Eales of this world had the esteem within the group and the knowledge themselves to be able to portray that and his whole philosophy was ... one of the key things was to categorise the ‘we not me’ syndrome and he would have had all sorts of quotes ... one of the ones which encapsulated it brilliantly, albeit when you think of rugby it was from the Jungle Book, Rudyard Kipling’s eight line poem but the last two words were ‘the strength of the pack is in the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is in the pack’ and I think that pretty much encapsulates the whole lot of it. It’s a value I’ve tried to instil into these guys this year, had they been the 2004 or last year’s group, there were too many individuals in it ... for many guys who were playing the game for other reasons. Last year I found it difficult, this year I found it easy because they are a good bunch.

OK [blip] if we can (uh) move onto now then ... us as coaches, looking at our environment and I’m really interested in what followership looks like in practice. So, as coaches how do we know whether or not we have achieved followership?

I suppose the ... to look at it in the pure sense of the rugby, is if in putting together a philosophy you’d look at the strengths and weaknesses within the group, and the management and the players within that acknowledging what they are, which then is putting a degree of limitation or if not putting limitations on what you can do and then within that aspect that when you go out to play the game that ultimately no matter what the fifteen or whatever within a group of twenty six, that all of them are comfortable and confident in doing that. That to me would be the biggest challenge, the biggest sort of litmus test because I’d certainly know sitting here that like looking at this competition here that in trying to prepare as best you can in even in looking at the pre-tournament camp that we had ... we weren’t able to get all the players within the outer squad to be available for us. So, now when it came to our last match and there was a guy, two guys who’d been brought in due to injury, so how can they follow because they don’t know what they’re following.

Yeah, an interesting one, so time ... time is obviously a constraint.

Yeah, I think if you’re in a closed environment or a full time professional environment where you have exposure to them on a daily basis, then you would have to question yourself as a coach if there wasn’t a degree of followership. Either there’s a lack of respect from the players in what you’re trying to achieve or there’s just a non agreement to it. It’s maybe your approach might be too dictatorial or it could be too laissez faire, you know and I suppose only from the times of being with a side you
know the parameters on either side as to which way do you go. I think as well at the end of the day we’re all, certainly me as a coach, there’s always bits you can learn from all sorts of other people whether it’s rugby or whatever, but then you’ve gotta have the knowledge and a degree of confidence which are … itself that, that’s the bit I want because it can be applicable to who I’m working with and not just because someone says you should do that … because, you know, the groups that I have or the team that I have are satisfied with their limitations.

When you’ve worked with groups then and you’ve felt that you’ve gained followership from that group, what sort of signs or indicators would be there for you to say ‘yes, I’ve got these’ and followership is evident within this group?

I think certainly clear evidence is when, whether it’s on the pitch or in the off the field activity that (eh) the interaction and the comfort of the interaction from the players to the coach is there and it’s in a probably in a clinical way and an educational way, it’s not you know the joker in the pack, it’s having the guys who have grown confident with you because they’ve bought into and agree with what you’re trying to do and then that naturally makes them aware. At the end of the day if you have 60-70% of the group following it’s a lot easier to drag the other 25% rather than the reverse.

I don’t know whether it’s possible to measure the degree of followership you do have within a group, but are there any sort of indicators that you could use there, any measures/performance indicators?

Well, the degree for me was (um) in 2004 when the Under 21 World Cup was in Scotland. You know like at the end of the day Chris, it’s quite easy for me to take the accolades and say that we got to the World Cup final in which they got comprehensively beaten, but it wasn’t … I just facilitated that group, it was the easiest group I’ve ever had to work with at under age level because they just grew in confidence. They were absolutely comfortable and confident within the game plan that we tried to do for each game and they just took it by the scruff of the neck and they had to mature together and it’s one of the groups with the players that I still keep in touch because they’re men they were men. That’s been the most successful … probably I was fortunate at that time because I had probably a relationship with that group of players from my National Academy times as nearly all of them were on it. They saw from that side of things the general interest that I had in them, at the end of the day I feel as well that if I’ve contributed to Chris Davey going to play for Wales that’s fantastic and I get more heart out of that than say winning the World Cup.

That’s great and it’s a feather in the cap but, but with that bunch of guys everything they did was a close knit, tight bunch and it was just fortunate enough in that year they absorbed and embraced the philosophy, they embraced the mental side of things and psychological side of things that we brought into it, they saw the … what I was tring to get them to think about which was very much along a belief and a self-belief because outside of, you know, anyway which someone they coach. I think that within life if you believe in something and I mean truly believe in something, well then you can train yourself to do it … and I would have used (um) within trying to get them to encapsulate that it’s always easier if you have a true life story to say about so the one that I would have got across to them in that particular year was about Mick Doyle the ex-Irish coach. Most people outside of Ireland would have realised that when he died he got killed in a car crash, but didn’t realise that six years before that he had a blood
clot on his brain and had a 0.16% chance of surviving that operation. But to me that encapsulates what rugby men are about, that he believed he had more to give to this life and more to give to this world and more to give to his family ... so albeit that his operation had to be stalled for six hours so all his family could get back to say his goodbyes, that wasn’t the end of it. That was the spirit he encapsulated within teams that he played in and when he coached ... he got twenty six consecutive caps for Ireland and played for the British and Irish Lions and was the most successful coach of Ireland in the 80's, and when you have a self-belief like that and if everyone has that self-belief and then collectively believes in the values and philosophy of what we’re trying to achieve, well then you can achieve anything.

So, I mean, that I suppose is it in a nutshell for us as coaches. Clearly, with that group followership was not a problem ... the group were there, their self-belief, their belief in what they were doing and their belief in what you were doing was evident. How do we repeat it? How can we do it with another group and with another group? What are the difficulties perhaps you as a coach face in doing that?

The ... I suppose the difficulties that you would have, and certainly that I would have since that time was ... if you have a belief and a philosophy in something well that takes time for it to ... for the management and the team to become part of that. When you don’t have the time it becomes very difficult to instil aspects like that because all your time to concentrate is maybe tactics or it could be technical and both you and I know that at this stage of a tournament that you just don’t have time for the technical stuff you have to take it for granted. So, the vast majority of our job is in the tactical and the mental side of things ... when you get a group that doesn’t necessarily understand it or have the maturity to understand it, well then sometimes you might question yourself as well. Well I certainly would have last year because everything I tried to do no matter what it was, and I was fortunate enough that the manager of the side had twenty five years experience of dealing with under age sides, but at the end of it both of us scratched our heads. That for me was a hard year because I wonder what do I have to do to get myself back up again? Well, you just keep reading material and looking for inspiration from something and at the end of the day, within a group – when you have a group of twenty six – with some of them it might be one word, with some of them it could be a quote, with some of them it might be something that you do. For me as a coach I’ve got to continually challenge myself to try and find what does it for each of them. I might not have the answers at the end of it but I’ve got to keep trying to do it.

So you’re looking for triggers all the time? That’s great, I think we’ve had a real good look at that, I don’t know if there’s anything else that you think is worthwhile adding to what we’ve discussed?

Certainly what’s (um) ... when we’re talking about followership and I think with (uh) certainly within our own sphere, the more leaders that you have, that then the followers will naturally come on. It’s certainly one thing that within our own set-up back home that I feel we’re a bit sort of negligent on, that we don’t look at the leadership role and we don’t constantly challenge the leadership role because there are certain things within ... which are sort of out of your control. The environment in which the young men are growing up now is so different from the environment that
you or I grew up in. Their values are very, very different now ... so sometime it’s ... albeit that they play in a team, there’s four players or four individuals who’ll become followers, a lot of them will come from the home environment and I think if that’s wrong then I think as a coach it’s very difficult to get anyone on board, because their values are just totally different and you know maybe selfish or individualistic in a team sport. You can’t really, in athletics you can be as selfish as you want – if you’re working to be a sprinter you can be as selfish as you want - but within a team environment you can’t. You can be selfish within what you want to achieve, but you can only do that within the team environment. Certainly in Ireland at the moment I think that we sort of neglect that area like its, like there’s the followership as I feel that without the correct leaders in the positions well there’s nothing for them to follow. So, from my side of things the more I can work on that or the more help I can get to work within that and having as I say the ultimate aim for me is within any team to have seven guys on the pitch who are responsible and if they’re responsible and know what they’re doing well then everyone else will follow.

OK that’s great. Thanks for that and I hope all goes well for you in the rest of the tournament.
Interview 2: Coach B

Date: 22nd June 2006

OK if I can start by thanking you for agreeing to participate in the study, and if we could start with you just introducing yourself and giving me a brief outline of your playing and coaching experience.

Yeah, my name is [redacted] (um) I was a full back and I played for Roundhay and then I moved to Sale and I played there for probably twelve years. Towards the end of my playing career I got involved in coaching, I became player coach when [redacted] arrived as head coach and forwards coach. I then took over as head coach very, very briefly with [redacted] as Director of Rugby, [redacted] then moved on, we got a new New Zealander in called [redacted] and I became the backs coach and was still playing a little bit. Then got moved on and I then took over as a full-time head coach/Director of Rugby. I remained there for three years and then two years ago I took up this new post working for the National Academy as a coach.

OK, thanks. The purpose of the interview really is to examine elite coach athlete relationships, so really I’d like to open up by asking you about how you see the relationship between you and your players, particularly in terms of what you expect from your players and what your players might expect from you in that relationship.

Yeah, I um I like to have a fairly close relationship with the players. I like to be fairly clear, be fairly precise in what I’m telling them. I like them to um want to believe in me, want to follow me, and I find that takes a little bit of time to get their buy in. I’m certainly somebody who I think is approachable, who the players can come and speak to. I like to spend time one on one, building up those sort of personal relationships and so therefore I think the main thing is probably about respect.

OK so respect, a two way respect in that relationship – you respect the players’ point of view and obviously they respect you. You mentioned there getting players to want to believe, to want to buy in to your principles and ideas on the game. I’d like to focus in perhaps there on this idea of followership, you mentioned followers and so on. What do you understand by that term followership?

It’s probably the first time I’ve heard that term when you spoke to me about it before, but I think the way I see it is (um) a team has got to be very, very clear and it’s got to work together and there’s a lot of different ways of doing things, but I’m a great believer if we can all be as one, all move forward as one, all believe in the same thing and believe in what we’re doing, then we’ve got a very good chance of success.

So you would place a great deal of importance on that within your environment?

Yes, without a doubt.
So, if we can look into perhaps some of the reasons why we can get that from our players, that’s really what I’m interested in this. Why do you think then that players within your environment are prepared to follow, to follow the principles that you’re looking to put into place or to follow you as a coach?

Um, I think that um ….. it’s a good question, just repeat the question again.

Yes, really what I’m looking at as coaches, should we expect to get followership as coaches or is it something that we need to work at within our environment.

I think that it’s something that we need to work at without a doubt and (um) I know that we’ve had quite a few players on this trip for example who’ve been a little bit sceptical about coming for various reasons, particularly about the coaches, I know […….] has had a few personal issues with a few players in the past and because of certain injuries we’ve called on these players who’ve actually come and I think we’ve had to work very, very hard at getting their buy in, getting them involved and part of this sort of culture. Again, this belief in what we’re trying to do for (a) the individual, and (b) for the team.

OK great. Quite clearly then we seem to be agreeing that as leaders, coaches need skills to engage followers, to engage players and to get them on board. Could you give me any sort of examples of ways in which perhaps you’ve tried to get your players on board, get them to follow?

Yeah, we’ve certainly by sort of provide, by sort of trying to give them a clear vision of where the team’s going, but more importantly I think as individuals giving that vision of where we want them to be and seeing how that mirrors to where they actually want to be. In England to be honest it’s not a massive incentive that we don’t believe them just to be playing England U21 rugby, you know they get paid too much as it is in the clubs so we’ve got to provide something else and for us that’s (um) to develop them as individuals, but develop them with that incentive of playing for their country. That’s something that we really try to sell to them and to get their buy in.

OK so having a vision you talk about what the expectations are for the team, do you see things like … we hear terms like team spirit, team values, team goals, are those sorts of things that you would buy into and use within that environment?

Yes we do use them, we don’t use them extensively … we do use them a bit, we were fortunate this year in that we had a quite a good U19 team which [……] had brought from last year, and there was a very good sort of band together already there who had been used to playing together and likewise some good younger players from last year’s Under 21. So we were fortunate, we certainly have used team spirit, team culture as part of the sort of the motivation for the team and it certainly worked because they’ve enjoyed eachothers’ company, particularly over these last three weeks.

And things like team values or goal setting individually or for the team, where would those values come from?
I think they come from us as coaches, I think we set them we sort of we set out this clear work hard, play hard philosophy, which we quite like them to buy into. Work hard on the rugby training field, work hard during the games, enjoy yourself in your down time, and that’s something that we’ve had to try and get across to them.

That’s quite an interesting one because I’ve talked to people about two sides of this and team values and they’re saying that they are values which you have perhaps imposed on a group of players, so it’s interesting to see then why those players should buy into those values as a group because if they are values that have come from the group then perhaps there’s more chance of them buying into them, but with you providing the values … have there been any problems there in getting them to accept if you like a set of values which have come from outside of that group?

No, I think in a way it has come from them as well. By knowing the players, by having previously worked with them, we do know what makes them click and it’s certainly not all rugby nauses they do like to live a little bit as well .. they like to go out and have a bit of culture and have a bit of social. I think it’s understanding the players, understanding what they want and then in a way agreeing to what we all want and that helps getting their buy in.

Great. Um … would any of your (um) … I don’t know at this level what sort of documentation/paperwork you may have with the players, would any of your visual material, documentation, paperwork reflect those team values and promote those sort of team goals?

To be honest, not much this year. We did quite a lot last year putting things down on paper, (um) certainly when [ ] was in charge he was very keen on doing a lot of that. We’ve simplified things a lot this year, we did come out wanting to win the World Cup, we’ve said that, that was a sort of aim of the trip. We talked previously about withholding players and we said right this year as coaches we want to win it, that’s how we went to the clubs to try and get their buy in in terms of we did want your best players and because we want to take on the best rugby countries. So that’s how we did it this year, we’ve kept it very, very simple. We’ve not got much paperwork to show for it.

OK, another interesting area before we move on a bit would be within this our expectations as coaches .. and I was quite interested to hear you say that we’ve given the team these values and got them to buy in. Do you think that there is that sort of level of expectation as coaches that we have this position of authority anyway and therefore what we tell players, they are going to do.

Yeah, I think (um) I think we probably do expect that and we do expect them to do it, and I think that most of the time they probably will do it but that’s probably only in the short term and I don’t think that will get long lasting results. I do think that we need that belief, and the followers need to be with us.

Possibly the nature of the environment that we’re in, age group international rugby, time is a limiting factor. The amount of time you have with your players
is probably one of the big constraints, so has that had any influence in that approach?

Yeah I think it does, it certainly does. We’re fairly fortunate in terms of our jobs in that we can get around and look at these players, so we have regular contact with them, not necessarily coaching contact time but we are able to see how they are personally within their clubs, so that extra time does help. We’ve certainly looked at that.

In terms of whether we’ve got the players on board, whether we’ve achieved followership or not, how would you know as a coach whether you’ve achieved or gained followership from your players? What does it look like in practice to you as a coach?

Very good question. I certainly in team meetings am very interested to see if I’ve got them, in particular in terms of they’re agreeing with what we’re saying. To me it comes out in training sessions a lot of the time in terms I was going to say in terms of captain and team leaders and their feedback, but actually it’s all through the team. Whether they are actually saying on the field what we’ve been sort of trying to get across to them off the field. It’s easier for them to talk in team meetings, that’s too easy for them I think it’s actually on the field that if they’re doing those things that we’ve been suggesting to them.

OK and .. I mean I don’t know I suppose as coaches it’s the million dollar question you know if we and it is very much a gut feeling I think that, yeah I’ve got this group and they are with me, but ideally it’s something we want to be able to do again and again and again. So if we do get it right with one group, how can we repeat it with another group? So I’m just wondering whether there are any measures, any indicators that we can sort of hang our hat on and say well those are the key indicators which tell me that this group are on board?

I’d really be interested to find out. Give me your answers when you get them will you? I can’t actually think of any others apart from actually delivery on the field and when things are not going right, can those players put it right, can they put it right from the things we’ve been saying?

OK, great. In terms of constraints or difficulties you as a coach might face in gaining followership from your players, what would you say are the main difficulties?

Um ... I think as an international coach it is a lack of time. It’s actually about getting to know players and how they tick, I think that’s a major one. I’ve certainly been with this group of players, or the majority of them now for well we’ve played ten games so it’s ten weeks or it’s probably just over that and I still don’t quite know how some of them tick ... so therefore how to get behind them, to motivate them and get them to follow me. We’ve actually done some work with ... we’ve got a very good girl who actually used to come and she’s just been made redundant, and she did a lot of one to ones in terms of players and their learning styles and actually what made them tick, and we found that very, very useful particularly for the characters we
couldn’t quite get to the bottom of. So again, just spending time with them is fairly crucial.

**Have you adopted any strategies to try and overcome a lack of time, are there any shortcuts?**

I think probably doing what most good coaches or teachers actually do and that’s generally appealing to the masses, but then also trying to pick out those at the extremes, at the different ends of the spectrum.

**OK (um) just to finish off from me [ ], perhaps going back a little bit, we’re talking the coach as a leader, the players as the followers. Clearly we want leaders amongst our players as well, and you talked about team leaders within the group … do you actually allocate specific roles within the team then as leaders on the field, off the field … and do you think that helps in any way in bringing the group together with this idea of followership?**

Yeah, we do, I think we do what quite a lot of the teams do in that we have somebody who’s in charge of the lineout and somebody who’s in charge of defence and we do give them a big say in how the team is run. We as coaches speak to them regularly about their views and we’re certainly very open to their suggestions about how they think the team should be playing in certainly their areas of the field. I’m very happy and willing to change to be honest if that suits them and the rest of the players, if that’s what they believe in. So I’m a big believer in that and we do give them a lot of time and let them have their say.

**And are they bringing their individual opinion, or the team’s opinion to you then?**

I think a little bit of both to be honest, quite often it is individual but I think sometimes with a little bit of questioning and getting them to do a little bit of research and talking to a few people in those sort of areas I think we can often get out quite a good, some good information and some good ideas. I certainly think that if they think that they’ve added value to it in terms of how the teams playing then it’s a massive, massive help.

**Yeah, I agree with you there. OK [ ] I think that’s just about it … I don’t know if there’s anything else you want to add in terms of leadership/followership, how you see it.**

I just think it’s an interesting area, it’s as you said right at the beginning it’s something that you don’t really naturally think about, it’s all the other way, it’s all sort of from the top really. Most of our thought is about leaders and those up there as opposed to the other way round which perhaps is the most important thing.

**OK that’s great, thanks very much.**
Interview 3: Coach C

Date: 14th July 2006

OK, I’d like to start by thanking you for agreeing to participate in the study. Can we start by me asking you to just give me a brief outline of your playing and coaching experience.

OK, thanks for that. The purpose of the interview is to look at and try and consider certain aspects of coach-athlete relationships. What I’d like to do is open up by just asking you how you see the relationship between you and your players.

I suppose in my current position as an assistant coach, I can get a little bit closer to the players than the head coach, here. But, having said that you know you still have to work at it and you need to have a line drawn between us. Having said that, I do have a very friendly approach to the players, I do have a common respect – something that we’re working towards anyway, and a shared opinion type of relationship. I’d say it’s quite a conducive relationship at the moment, we have a range of ages and abilities albeit at the top end of the game. It’s something I have to manage and not sort of overstate myself if you like and my ego on this group of players. So I’d say it’s a friendly, approachable, shared relationship.

And if we look at it in a bit more detail, how do you see your role in that relationship?

I think I’ve got a number of roles really, I think I have a specific role with back players, to improve them, to develop them and to get the best out of them. But within that particular group of players you have a range of ages and abilities, so with there’s more senior, capable players I play more of a facilitative, questioning type role, bringing them out front, developing them in a more communicative sense getting them to pass on their experiences and knowledge to the younger players. Moving down more to a motivational role with a middle group of players who are starting to come to their peak and are pushing themselves to further honours, so trying to motivate them to be their best and pressure them into performing to a higher standard, and then a more I suppose coach behaviour type role with the younger players where I can afford to be maybe just a little bit harder in terms of attention to detail and again more technical coaching in terms of what they’re able to do and what we need push them onto – so a range really.

OK, and what do you within that coach-athlete coach-player relationship, what do you expect from your players?
I expect punctuality, I expect huge discipline, I expect mutual respect, I expect a work ethic. I expect them to have an ego, but not to overstate their ego, I want them to be team players. I like them to be front line decision makers if possible and communicate to the best of their ability because I’ve found that some people are a little bit more introverted and tend not to want to have too much ownership or too much authority or leadership but (um) I do see it as a challenge to try and bring them out of themselves and improve them in that sense. So I expect them to work hard at various aspects, various goals that we set within the group.

A couple of times there the word respect has come up in this relationship. What do you think gives you that respect as a coach?

Um, I think … that’s a difficult one. I think maybe, and this is a personal opinion, the fact that I haven’t played any international rugby or had a very long career and yet find myself in a position as a paid professional coach of a top team working with top individuals and they see that they are perhaps learning something or improving which has gleaned just that little bit of respect that maybe I have something to offer. That’s just a personal opinion.

A lot of that comes from hard work and drive and ambition on my part to be the best that I can without having those perceived past things to fall back on. But also I think that the players genuinely feel that I genuinely respect them and try to get the best out of them, that I’m in it not just for me specifically but that I’m in it for them and for the [ ] and myself obviously but as a more sort of generic package and maybe not as somebody who’s just trying to take over or push himself forward, I’m there as somebody to help them improve and help them achieve. So that might be if I was to hazard a guess, something that may get some respect. I know that I do because the feedback is good from them, I get a lot of dialogue from them, I encourage them if they want to call a spade a spade they tell me, if they want to say they don’t agree with something or that’s wrong they can come and do that, but very rarely that happens.

So, look at your end of it, what do your players expect from you?

Um. I think they expect me to be innovative. I think they expect me to teach them something that they don’t already know, make them aware. I think they expect me to have a strong work ethic and to be prepared and organised, but also to be quite succinct and to the point. But also to have empathy with what they are going through as players which perhaps is a difficult one because I don’t know if I really know or have experienced personally what they are actually going through in modern rugby now, but to have an appreciation of the pressure they are under – whether it be selection, whether it be the game whether it be the opposition that they’re up against, the expectation – but also as well to pat them on the back when it’s required, when it’s deserved, when they do something good.

OK great. I’m interested you know in looking at … a lot of the research that has come up in terms of the role of the coach and the coach being a leader, the leadership qualities of the coach being perhaps one of the most important qualities. I’m interested in looking at possibly the other side of that notion of leadership, and focussing on what I’m calling followership. What do you understand by that term followership?
Without having done any research on it, uh I would at first point of call suggest that it would be to try and inspire, instil values maybe coerce individuals/units to believing in and buying into a philosophy or set of philosophies to achieve common goals. That would be something that I would say, that you want them to follow you in your beliefs but maybe even draw out group beliefs that they believe in and therefore follow one or two people who are a little bit more in a leader style to try and fulfil those goals. I … other than that I really don’t know Chris.

OK good. Well let’s just chase this one a little bit then. Would you say that there is a need for followership then, you know this notion that without followers we can’t have any leaders. So is there a need for followership in coach-athlete relationships?

Oh I think so, I think if you go back to one of my earlier answers about the age and experience ranges within my group of backs, then even though the younger ones are encouraged to come up with some ideas, to have their own decisions and that then ultimately it generally comes from the coach or senior type figures, inspirational figures within that group. So, the rest of them then really do have to follow, conform, buy into, so yeah you know I see it daily. There are those who don’t want any responsibility, don’t want any leadership, they just want to follow, they like to be led. Again I see that in my group, so yeah I think it’s vitally important that we have that.

OK good and (um) an interesting you know (um) sort of if you want them to conform. Why should players conform?

Well I don’t think they should conform unless they believe in what they’re involved in. Um, having said that there are some times on a rugby field you have to do something, you may not like doing it but things have to be done. We don’t necessarily have to throw it wide five metres out because it looks good and that’s what we’ve done with another team, just conform, just go through your role and we’ll get some success out of it. So making them see the end point, sometimes you have to conform there, that’s the way I see it.

So as coaches then, should we expect to get followership or would you say that it’s something that needs to be worked at?

It needs to be worked at, definitely. Take [deliberate] coming in now, experienced eighty one All Black caps, I wouldn’t expect him to conform to the ideals or the ideas or the philosophies we currently have. Therefore, I’m going to have to maybe manipulate the situation where, you know, I have to work on him conforming or at least bring about a situation where he would suggest something that would make it easier for him to conform to what we’ve presently got. Because we believe that what we’ve presently got works, there are some things that need honing, there are some things that need improving. If I can make him understand and contribute to how that can be honed or improved then we may have a situation where we’ve still got the whole group conforming but a new experienced guy conforming too.

OK good, interesting that one and … as leaders then, and coaches are leaders … clearly, leaders need the skills to what we’re saying engage followers in mutual pursuits. So, how can you as a coach get others, get your players to follow? What strategies have you perhaps used or tried out which you’ve found to be effective?
We’ve tried various (um) strategies … most recently I’ve looked at this three sections within the group by age and experience, you know (uh) a young 18-22 age group, a 23-26/27 then an older bracket, and got them to work as groups to appreciate and understand what each other is going through at a particular time in their career within this team, and then to try and amplify that to the rest of the group. To try and get each sub-group if you like understanding of where the other group is at. So we’ve got some form of idea of being able to help and mentor or work as a team. The mentor situation is another one where we’ve had a senior individual and a younger individual working together to try and get one to follow the other if you like, but within that giving a set of parameters or ideals for the senior guy to work with in the mentoring system. There’s that. Working with individuals myself, coach-athlete relationship, getting them to understand clearly the philosophies that we’re trying to drive by use of video, by use of motivating strategies, self-talk, imagery, statistics showing your improvement from one time to another, and showing whether it be as a result of something on the field or in training how something has actually worked look you can believe in this, this is what we’re practicing. I’m doing it with [redacted] at the moment, this is what you’re practicing, have a look at yourself in training and this is where it works in a game, can’t you see that it works? Now if we just keep hammering away at that, you’re not quite there now you’re functioning at 70-80%, if we can get you up to 90% of what you’re doing, and you’re doing it right then the end product is going to be there for you. So a little bit motivational but then perhaps using more technical means of getting an appreciation of it. So, a number of strategies (um) on a more social scale, you know we have to have a bit of fun, a bit of enjoyment, camaraderie. At the moment I’m doing weights sessions with the players and they enjoy it, they see that I’m trying to buy in to what they’re doing. All I’m trying to do is get a better understanding of what they’re going through, through the summer so that come January/February I’m not shouting at them or commenting on something I know very little about. I’m trying to get an understanding of what they’re going through now because I’m not wearing a jersey in January/February I’m on the outside. So lots of little strategies like that, a bit of team building here and there, youngies v oldies in games and then ultimately putting it all together in a classroom and on the field in a more technical sense and theoretical sense.

And, as a group or within your environment, getting everybody I suppose to sing off the same sheet is important for you in terms of followership. What about things like team values, goal setting, those types of things are they important?

Yes, I think so, I think the (um) I call them tablets of stone. When we first started the [redacted] we looked at what we wanted to achieve, as I said to the players specifically as I said to the backs we now have our tablets of stone in terms of expectations for an [redacted] back player. They are things like setting skill standards, taking pride in our for and against column, do for others what you want others to do for you, excite the crowd, these sort of things – tablets of stone which have then components within that we can relate statistical data to. So I think yes, those we can always go back to, they are tablets of stone that we can refer back to and if we’re not doing it, this is what we agreed on and said boys we’re not doing it here, here and here and our results show, our performances show. What are we going to do, what strategy are we going to implement to improve those again? To get back to these common ideals, and so the process goes round.

So that would be … there’d be paperwork to back that up then [redacted], and sort of specific performance indicators where they are.
Absolutely, we set KPI’s for each and every area of the game both individual, unit and team. Let me give you an example, I measure our kick effectiveness – it’s a subjective skill but it’s valid and reliable because it’s my scale all the time. We set standards for that, they know what’s an effective, an ineffective kick and they measure it across the board and set KPI’s. The other thing in terms of closing the loop is that each game in season time, players individually review games and offer feedback. So I will pick out a movie on let’s say back play attack versus Leinster, I’ll put this movie and then I’ll put a set of questions, two or three questions – what are the good aspects of the clips shown in this movie? And get player feedback. You know when you put all those together you definitely see a followership or you definitely see common comments coming through, which is a reinforcement I think for me as a coach that what we’re trying to get across … it’s the player actually bringing them out you know.

OK that leads us quite nicely into my next section really where I’m quite interested to look at what does followership look like in practice? How do we know whether we’ve achieved followership as coaches?

I think you do all the pre-empting, the goal setting, the motivating and so on and the social strategies, team building or whatever, but then I think you do essentially need the feedback from the players. We’ve tried a number of ways, we’ve tried the very open subjective end where we ask a player to just … suggestion box for one, it’s a very open anonymous if you want, suggestions coming in about training facilities, games, style of play, this back play whatever. Right through to the more specific where you know … please set targets for next weeks game and (um) when you get those in from the players then you can come down with maybe two maybe three common goals for the next week. They become our focus for the next game. And when you see the goals coming through, that are things that you’ve been coached or tried to instil from day one, then I think you know that the players believe in, have bought into, want to implement what it is you’ve been working on. If those goals or those comments come out being derogatory, negative or adverse to what you’re trying to work on then clearly we have a problem. We’ve experienced that as well mind, the difficulty then is in then recognising if it’s a common theme, a common negative thread or is it just one or two bad apples in there who are trying to sour the other apples in the barrel. So other strategies come into play then, maybe individual interviews, heart to hearts, again anonymous feedback to try and understand well actually whereas we thought we had a big problem with the whole squad or the whole unit, it’s just one or two.

And, I suppose that’s the crux of it as coaches, if you have your beliefs, your philosophies on the game in terms of what you want from your group of players. It’s getting those players to buy into and have the same values, beliefs, philosophies as you. In those scenario’s where you are getting that negative feedback, is it a case of you then changing your philosophy your viewpoints to match the player, or trying to bring those to meet you?

That’s a good question that but I think the obvious answer is that we’re in a team environment a team sport, there has to be a contribution from as many people as possible to come with a common theme. So I think yeah, you have to meet somewhere. If you become dictatorial, very authoritative, autocratic to the extent of dictatorship, then at some stage that is going to lead to a rebellion, at some stage. So, I think the more shared it is then you know … but then again there has to be a coach or leader keeping an eye on it
because if the ownership becomes too much, the shared ideas become too grey then you are going to have a problem – too many calls, too many ideas, you get a talking shop. You have to have a sounding board, you have to have some ownership, but again it has to be dragged along and led by one of a group of coaches.

Again an interesting area in terms of we want our players to be decision makers and we want them to be leaders, can they all be leaders or do we need these followers in the group?

Um, no they can’t all be leaders I don’t think and as I said, some don’t want to be. What we try to do, we try to have a senior player group where they offer a buffer if you like in between the coaching set up and the playing staff if you like, it’s a buffer, it’s a sounding board a suggestion box. That senior group of players will act as a voice for the group .. obviously they are a bit more mature. Within that senior group there’s always a ‘youngie’ for the benefit of his experience, and then every now and again that group is gradually rotated where you’ll get a drop off of one guy and a new guy comes in and slowly over time there is a transition in the senior player group but at the same time it acts as a buffer, as a sounding board. We find that works quite well, because players have to have a sounding board because not everyone will follow, but then it’s getting them to come round and understand why you are following. He might not totally agree with it, a New Zealander comes over and we kick the ball thirty five times in a game whereas in the Super 14 they only kick it fourteen times in a game, why do I have to kick it? That’s not conforming, that’s not following, but then if you can gradually bring them round and understand, and the other players can help in that, well up here maybe, actually, you know, it’s a big part of the game in terms of territory, regaining possession, obtaining a penalty, squeezing the nuts off people, whatever you want to call it … then you know those strategies can work. is a classic example.

Yeah, great … and you know last one on this sort of area then is … as coaches, and I don’t know I suppose it’s something that we’re always aware of … have we got the players on board or not? Is it possible for us to measure the degree of followership that we’ve got within our group?

Crikey, that’s a tough one. I think only by, I don’t know if only by, but something springs to mind to answer your question … I can see from a game whether of not they are following what I’m trying to coach or what they’ve said they believe in if they’re exhibiting it on the field. Let’s take a call, there’s a particular lineout and I’ve given them options, we’ve practiced the sub-skills within the options from this particular type of lineout, and they have a decision to make because they have possibly three/four they could choose from. Now if they are continually calling from that three/four and executing it and they can see the success, then I’d like to think that yes they believe in it, they are following, they like it, they’re going with it, they see the success. If all of a sudden they’re doing a ‘triple fandango around the back’, something that they practiced on the sly and I wasn’t aware of, or something they just talked about the night before then I think I’d have a realisation maybe that … well hang on why aren’t we doing what we … we never did that in practice. Now there’s a problem there, there’s a communication breakdown. I think that, that’s one way.
What about (um), I mean on the field you’ve got tangible things you can hang your hat on there. What about off the field within the environment? I’m thinking of the non-playing perhaps aspects of the game.

Yes, sort of behavioural in and around the training camp and ... I think part of the coaching is to know the player off the field as well, you have to understand what their background is you know, where they come from, what’s their home life like – you don’t have to know the ins and outs – but getting an idea and understand what the animal, know your animal. If he goes quiet, all of a sudden he’s not conversing, he’s turning up just five minutes before training when he used to be the first there warming up, his body language is off, he’s losing a couple of kilo’s, the fitness guys are telling me that he’s not quite sharp, then those are tell tale signs I suppose and I don’t think you should leave those things fester either. I try and meet the guys at least once a week for a one on one, backs, whether it be for a coffee, whether it be for a sit down chat where they can have input, or a drive home from training. Some sort of one on one. One to feel loved, to feel touched, to have some technical input or two, to find out if there is anything going on. But, as an assistant, I think you have a bit more leeway to do that. The tell tale signs are selection, obviously they dwell on that, you pick your side and announce it on Tuesday for Friday and three or four guys won’t speak to you for the rest of the week. To try and get them pulled round and to understand why is a challenge. If they’ve followed you from the start, if you’ve outlined those philosophies from the start, that we’re a squad and I’m going to rotate and you’re going to be picked because of this, this, and this, if you’re not it’s because of this, that and the other, then really they should understand.

OK finally then, what difficulties do you as a coach face in trying to gain or achieve followership within your group? What do you think are the main constraints?

Um, different beliefs in styles of play is a big one. Why are we doing this here? Ego is another one, ego in as much as some players want to be involved heavily in aspects of play. Others ... confidence, or lack of, I want us to be able to do this, but they’ll shy away from it because they feel they can’t actually do it or they’re not quite good enough to do it. So there’s three things um ... I would say you know, generally, personality clashes because take my group of players at the moment now, the nature of the personalities of the spread of guys that I’ve got is very difficult to manage. There are some very poor communicators in there, you’ve got some big name stars in there and you’ve got a variety of age ranges. Not necessarily the biggest name out there should be the first guy on the team sheet. So there’s that, there’s the expectation that’s a big one, expectation of who should be playing and in what position. The pressures of outside influences ... that can lead to a lack of followership ... it’s clear that this guy is better in this position, why aren’t you picking him? So that can lead to a bit of distrust and then ... bullshit, can I say bullshit? Any flower or bullshit about things like selection or something that they’ve done wrong or don’t quite understand, again I think again that’s going to lead to a little bit of stand off and then well ... I’m not going with that, I don’t believe that, well why not you should be doing. nah I don’t really believe that what you’re saying is right. Fortunately, it’s not happening too much.

It’s a great subject, I’m finding it hard to ... because we’re dealing with it all the time aren’t we, all the time and yet it’s quite vague because you are trying strategies, sub-strategies all the time just as part of your coaching behaviour I think.
Something that came out in that last section there, we’re talking about coach-athlete relationships and followership within our environment, and then you mentioned that within the players themselves is probably the key area where this followership has to grow. They as a group have to have common aims, common goals. You’ve mentioned some of the difficulties there, what can we as coaches do to bring those very much as individuals together to achieve these common goals for the team?

I think what I’ve attempted to do in the past is to spread yourself really thin and try and get every individual in your group to follow and to conform. I think there are, if you can work out and hit it off with the key guys in your group who you know have a big influence, who are hugely respected, who you know that other players will follow, and get them to do it for you. However, then that will really help ... give an example, we, I put the onus on our defence from first phase onto [redacted], struggling for him to communicate as much as I wanted him to, he’s just a little bit introverted, a little bit quiet, but a hugely respected player. From talking to the other guys, a guy who is revered you know in terms of what he can do, just as a bloke, youngsters look up to him, the oldies respect him. So just by giving him that ownership, rather than me saying ... right from these scrums we’re going to blitz, from this lineout, from this area of the field we’re going to drift, right boys .. yeah ok, and they go out on the field and they do it a different way. If it comes from [redacted], and I work one on one with him in terms of how do you think we should defend from midfield scrums [redacted]? Let’s work it out together, are we agreed? Ok, Sonny’s got the call right boys, they’re all going yeah, yeah. After the game, individual review, look at our defence from first phase, what are the best aspects of our defence in this game? A number of people write [redacted] calling spot on. Then you can pat yourself on the back and think yeah that was a good one, [redacted] was a good one, he may not shout and bawl, this, that and the other, but the message is getting through because of who he is, so that was a good example there. Uh, maybe a bad example might be an inside centre who enjoys crashing it up the middle and he has the responsibility of first phase calls in attack. We’ve got so much strength out wide, those calls never get out wide because it’s an ego thing, it’s a person or an individual .. I’ll show you I’ll crash up the middle. That would be a bad example and the players wouldn’t follow that guy. So there’s some strategies of using the players, um that’s a good one with [redacted] and I’m struggling to think of anything else. I’ve got a potential problem coming up with [redacted] you’d like to think you can give him responsibility around the scrum/ruck area. If his ideas are too ego orientated or some of the players don’t believe in them then there’s a situation to manage, but I think with a guy of his experience I’m going to have to try and ... what’s the word I’m looking for? ... um delegate some responsibilities and hopefully people will follow. I’ll just have to suck it and see.

Good ok. We’re coming to the end I think now [redacted], but just a couple of things I’d like just to throw at you and get your thoughts on. It’s interesting that throughout the interview really you’ve used terms like common respect, and getting to know your players and working with them and we haven’t heard really the word authority, the authority you have as a coach, and you know whether just by being the coach you should expect to get followership from your players, or the power you have as a coach, you mentioned selection ... it is a powerful tool and I’m sure the players will follow in order to get selected and is that the followership that we want? In terms of that authority/power aspect of the coaching role, where do you see that in terms of gaining followership?
Um, yeah I think selection is a big one, um having said that though early on if you set down in your tablets of stone that if you’re good enough you’ll play, you know if you’re showing form and you’re showing that you’re more capable than someone else in the position then you will play. And I think we’ve proved that in giving people like [redacted] a run, [redacted] when he first came in and [redacted] over [redacted] is a good example. So I think that’s one and if they can see examples like that, again the credence is there and the belief and the followership is there … you know knuckle down, work hard, if [redacted] can do it then I can do it. So there’s that and again that’s about being pretty sharp on the performances and getting regular feedback and informing the players and keeping an eye on form. Elsewhere in terms of authority, I think again having the nuts to tell somebody that he’s done something wrong or he needs to improve no matter what his number of caps tally is or how young he is. But again, and we go back to tablets of stone, if we’re all understanding that one of our tablets of stone is attention to detail and I’m going to pick you up on that, we’ve agreed that a long time ago in pre-season and you’ve got it in your file – [redacted] backs tablets of stone – then that’s what we’re going to conform to. We, all of us, me as well, not just being the authority figure, I’m just there to drive it. That’s a big one as well, but I’m lucky in that I have a professional group of players who I’m not having to lean on in authority wise things like discipline and time keeping and behaviour and things like that very rarely come up so it is down to technical and tactical I suppose, and psychological very, more often than not.

**OK um, I think I’m pretty happy that I’ve asked you all of the questions that I want to ask [redacted] I don’t know whether there is anything you would like to add now.**

The only thing is that since this then I haven’t really thought of it in this respect you know. You do in the many traditional respects, you think of the coach-athlete relationship, the coaching process and getting the best out of your players, but I haven’t seen it as followership before and I think it’s really interesting. I think this will really make me look at it in a different light and I’d be keen to see the outcome of your results because I’m always aware from a personal point of view that the mutual respect, the leadership aspect for somebody who isn’t a very big name is always going to be an issue for me up to a point I hope. But it will be an issue that I personally have and so I’m really keen to see the results and maybe I can speak to you at the end of the season to see if there is anything more I can add, because I have struggled, I’ve tried to get through something but I’m pretty vague and I’ve tried to give you the best that I can interpret really.

**It’s been good, thanks [redacted].**
Interview 4: Coach D

Date: 14th July 2006

OK, if I could start off by thanking you for agreeing to participate in the study, and if you could just introduce yourself and just give me a quick outline of your playing and coaching experience.

OK thanks. The purpose of the interview really is to examine and is to consider certain aspects of coach-athlete relationships, so if I can open up by just asking you how you see the relationship between you and your players?

Um, at the current time … or from an ideal world perspective? How?

Um, both really.

I think … I’d like to think that with the current group of players that we have that there is a fairly healthy relationship between me personally and them, and generally between the coaching staff and the players. I think that takes an awful long time to develop with any particular group. My ideal world scenario would be, I’ve actually developed my own model, I was fortunate enough to attend a psychology course up in Derby County Football Club with a guy called Ken Way and George Burley who was manager at that time. They’d actually developed their own model in terms of identifying and compartmentalising their playing squad. And their model … no it’s probably best if I talk about my model first, my model contains four different groups. Group 1 being a group of zombies, group 2 being a group of pacifists, group 3 being a group of activists and group 4 being a group of terrorists. Obviously, a zombie is self-explanatory and you don’t really want to be entertaining a great many of those in your playing squad. Ideally your squad should contain an element of sort of activists and pacifists, in an ideal world you’d want them all to be activists, but from a team dynamics perspective too many activists would be difficult to pull in any one direction. So it’s a balance of all four in reality with regards to the rugby.

OK. In terms of activists/pacifists, how would you define those?
I haven’t gone as far as to do that. I’ve made the rest of the coaching staff aware of my model, and I’ve actually explained or given the players the overview of it myself and asked them where they perceive themselves to be. We did this process or went through this process at the middle of last year because I felt that at the time we’d gone through a bad run of defeats, we haven’t got the strongest squad, we sort of established that there were going to be periods when we lose games and that was an important time to remain tight as a squad. I could just start to see the signs of some fragmentation and was aware that perhaps two or three of them were starting to become disruptive and have those terrorist qualities. So, how can we curtail this? I thought the simplest way is ... let me explain my overview and let them see, or let them explain to me where they see themselves fitting in. It actually served as a good process, because it coincided with the sort of half-season, half yearly reports and so it served a sort of tail-end conversation piece on the back of that where we’d go through their form, their playing stats etc. etc. Where we thought we saw them and then as a sort of bolt on question, where they saw themselves within the squad and how they thought we would perceive them as coaches. Almost all, saw themselves as activists strangely, which was quite disconcerting with many of them.

**How do you see your role then in the relationship between you and your players?**

As, currently I’m an assistant coach, and I’m fortunate in as much as I’ve also done the Head Coach’s role so I understand the different pressures he’s under. Mine’s quite an easy job in respect of, I’m basically the conduit between what the head coach wants and what the players need. A middle management sort of role almost, where I’ll only take issues back to the head coach that I think are relevant and important, and likewise to the players otherwise I sort of manage everything that goes on in between. That allows me to get a little closer to the players, and form a closer bond, a better working relationship because obviously they feel they can come to me with minor criticisms of playing structures, of environmental issues, training facilities etc. etc. I can lend a sympathetic ear to many of them, I just try and keep a status quo, a happy balance between everything. Sometimes it’s a good listening ear, sometimes it’s putting them straight with various issues as to where we’re coming from and sometimes we’ll just simply agree to disagree.

**OK, what do you expect from your players?**

Honesty is a huge thing. Within the [redded] environment over the last two years, interesting that the head coach has come back from England after coaching for a number of seasons and was alarmed by the lack of honesty within each of the environments he was in. So his main thrust has been an honest environment where as long as things are said respectfully, say them. Um, I’ve forgotten what the question is there Chris …

**I’m just thinking what your expectations are of your players in this coach-athlete relationship?**

Yeah, honesty is the fundamental thing for me, players are fundamentally dishonest particularly in the professional game, they have one agenda, their own agenda. Therefore, and I will constantly try and brow beat players into ensuring that whatever agenda or problem they bring to the table, it is for the benefit of the team, not
themselves as individuals, and I will constantly question and ensure that that is the case. So I expect fundamental honesty and issues that will make the team, training and the environment better rather than things that make things a little bit more comfortable for them as individuals.

**OK, leadership is an area that I’m interested in, in terms of this study. Do you see yourself in your role as a coach, do you see yourself as a leader?**

Yeah, with this particular group I do, because of the time I’ve had with the group. On reflection on that answer, I’m not sure whether it’s true. I think that everything is very, very dependent upon how much time you’ve had with the group. Initially with a new group you lead more, and then as you spend time with the group, you empower the group. I think you … the leadership perhaps, diminishes to a certain extent, you become more of a coordinator. There are times when decisions can’t be made by them they have to be made by you, so I suppose it’s a balance of empowerment, coordination of their ideas, and you sometimes have to make firm and unpopular decisions as well, a mix of all those three.

**Ok, and within … I mean in thinking of the coach as a leader, leadership. Then clearly we have the other side of that uh … that notion, which is followership. Without followers there can be no leaders. I’d just like to start off by asking you what you really understand by that term followership?**

Well, I can look at it from two perspectives, I can look at it from the perspective of players following me and ideas, trends, philosophies I might have, and then looking at it from the other perspective of me as an assistant coach following the head coach in terms of his ideas, philosophies etc.

**OK and in terms of players following you, what do you mean by that? Can you give me some examples of how you would want them to follow you?**

Ultimately, as a coach as a head coach, you are there to implement ideas, suggestions, playing patterns, technical issues, tactical issues and, whilst the players might have a fairly good understanding of that, you realise that as a head coach or assistant coach you have to coordinate all of those ideas to give your playing style some shape. I think that takes the type of followership I’m looking at where … yeah I’ll pick on a senior group of players and pick their brains as to what and how they think the game should be played. You obviously look at your strengths and weaknesses within the squad as well and that will shape your decision also in conjunction with other coaches opinions, but it all has ultimately to come to some sort of shape, some sort of direction. Then, once that direction has been agreed upon, I think that’s when the followership really kicks in. They know ultimately where you’re going, they sometimes have to suck it and see as to how you actually get there because there is a trial and error basis here as well involved. I’m not sure I’ve answered that that well.

**Yeah, no I think that’s fine. So really then do you recognise that there is a need for followership in coach-athlete relationships?**
Um, ultimately yes, and I think that can also be a two-way process where at times the coach can follow the players ideas as well, I don’t think it’s necessarily always a one-way process.

Um … if we stay with that idea of followership then, why should players be prepared to follow you as a coach?

Ultimately, depending on the size of your team, my experience has shown that if you sit fifteen people down in a room and ask them to come up with a common consensus, a common way forward, they’ll never do it. So therefore then that comes down to the skills of the guy fronting this group of people up to ensure that a common cause, a common direction, a common consensus does come out of the group otherwise there’s no direction, there’s no progression.

If you are saying then that you are deciding as a coach, the playing policy … those types of things … what I’m trying to get at is, should we then, as coaches, expect players to do what we tell them to do?

I think there’s a … I don’t necessarily like the statement that I’m making the playing policies or tactics … I think it’s always got to be a shared process. I’m involved in professional sport, I’ve got some highly motivated, highly intelligent athletes working with me, it would be foolhardy of me not to tap into those for their ideas, philosophies etc. etc. But the difficulties I’ve experienced are that there are probably too many different opinions, too many different needs to actually allow you to move forward as quickly as you need to move forward. So, you’ll probably pull the ideas out that you think best suit that group and then what players haven’t got a great grasp of either is that sort of helicopter, overview initiative. My experience would suggest that players are very, very expert in their particular position or their immediate unit around them, and they’re also very, very adept at bringing in policies that worked six, twelve eighteen months ago when in actuality, many of those policies … because the game moves on so quickly, wouldn’t work in the current situation for various reasons. Basically, it’s about pulling out the ideas, four ideas from a group of fifty ideas for example, that best suit the individuals, the group and will allow you to progress in the quickest possible fashion.

OK, so are we saying there then that followership is something that needs to be worked at? It’s not something that we should just expect to get, it’s something that needs to be worked at by the coach or within the environment in order to achieve that.

Undoubtedly yeah, again I come back to … a really important aspect of this is where you are with the particular group. Up in [blank] for example, the game turned professional almost overnight, I’d already worked with a group of individuals for two seasons and we were all thrown in the deep end as it were in terms of professionalism, and the dynamic of the group was very open and honest almost naturally. We were a little rudderless all of us in terms of where we were going, but we worked through things reasonably well and there was a great deal of buy in from the players. Sometimes it meant me leading, sometimes it meant me following and so it’s very much a two-way process and I don’t think, or you’d have to be a very, very
knowledgeable or very, very stupid man to expect people to follow you at all times, through all things.

OK, if we can move on now then perhaps to something slightly different [ ], which is what we as coaches can do to try and promote, or encourage, or ensure followership within our groups, so basically how can you as a coach get others to follow?

I think the empowerment process is huge, it’s all about player buy in ... and giving them a clear, a plain rationale for your reasoning. I think it’s shown over the last two or three seasons that if you give players a clear explanation of why we’re doing what we’re doing they’ll buy in particularly if they’ve already been involved in that ideas process prior to you coming out with your overview type plan, followership isn’t then such an issue. I think then if you’re going to go in with a dogmatic, autocratic approach where you know it’s my way or the highway, problems are likely to occur very, very quickly, particularly if results don’t go your way. If players have bought into the policy, bought into the way forward and results don’t go your way that buys you an element of time because they feel the ownership of that as well.

So, when you’re talking about their ownership, within the environment you are working in now, can you give me any examples of the sorts of things that would bring them together as a group to encourage followership within that environment.

Yes, what we’ve implemented for a number of seasons now is a senior players group. That would tend to be your current international players and mixed in with your sort of senior players, players who have been around for a number of years and bring a tremendous amount of wealth to the table, experience of ... a tremendous amount of experience to the table rather. As an aside to that also, because I felt the game was becoming more and more business minded, I’ve experienced the fact that the senior players only liked the bits they liked and I didn’t think they gave enough in terms of the empowerment process. So, we sat the senior group down at the start of last season and explained that if they wanted to get into this sort of senior player they also had to become middle managers and start dealing with some of the crap and start giving up a little more of their time to deal with some of the crap as well. An example would be that um we would discuss and thrash out a playing policy that we thought would work as a group, there was obviously going to be some dissent by other members of the playing group outside the senior group and disagreement which is natural amongst when you’ve got 25-30 people in a room. But, unless there were any real issues we didn’t want to hear about the minor issues, they would deal with them as middle managers which just stopped us having to deal with so much flak. Out of that really came a mentoring type environment where we split the squad under the senior players, we actually gave each of the senior players six players for example to mentor, and they would sit down with their mentor groups once a week and basically pass on information that we as a senior group had talked about so that everyone was aware ... obviously communication is always a huge issue within every group ... messages, Chinese whispers, information at the top by the time it gets to the bottom has changed slightly which causes confusion, so we thought this was a great idea in ensuring that communication was passed on quickly and effectively, that was one issue. And since it the mentor groups have really developed, we’ve also introduced housekeeping
issues within the environment and mentors are responsible for ensuring that their particular group leave changing rooms clean and tidy and leave canteens clean and tidy. If not, we’ve brought in a bit of a penalty system which is fun based in actual fact and at the end of each sort of month, one or other of the teams become awarded or disadvantaged by being at the bottom of the pile and they have to clean up after the whole group in terms of training sessions when we’re together. I’m not sure if I’ve answered that alright.

OK yeah, um other things that have been mentioned which might help to promote it would be team values, team spirit you know. What can we to to try and engender this?

Yeah, I’m not um … been there seen it done it. I think probably to answer you’re question and that’s why I didn’t mention it, I think again I come back to the timing or the amount of time you have with the group. I think team values are a tremendous thing if the group has been together for a reasonable amount of time. It’s very, very difficult in professional rugby because there’s obviously a regular turnover of players coming in. I think the whole values process means very little unless the players are as a group in terms of their dynamics, other than that it just becomes an exercise or a process that nobody really buys into, so I’m always a little guarded as to at the start of every season setting out, thrashing out a set of team values where invariably things like honesty, respect etc. etc. come out as the values and then they’re not adhered to. I see it as an almost undermining process it can be at times.

OK um … individuals, I suppose we can look at this followership theme on an individual basis – getting individual players to buy in, but clearly in a team game like rugby we’ve also got to try and ensure that as a group the players are buying in as well. Are there any particular strategies that you use or that you can think of whereby we can try and bring that group together and make those more of a unity if you like within that environment?

Yeah, again, obviously I overlooked many of the simplest things like team building, social days, social events etc. etc. because they are sort of taken as read now within the professional game and done on a regular basis. I think without any shadow of a doubt, the mentor group issue I mentioned a little earlier has been a real revelation, one because it improves communication and two because I’ve found that from our perspective as coaches we can look upon the senior players as middle managers. Um the players, because they are … the rest of the players not involved in that group look up to that particular group because of who they are and what they’ve done and the management of team/club affairs becomes that much easier because really the conduit between the management and the players are well respected people who have respect from both camps really from the coaching staff and younger players. So almost serendipitously I think we’ve hit on a very, very good system.

OK good, if we can think now then about followership and what it actually looks like in practice, I’m really concerned now with how as coaches we know whether or not we’ve achieved followership. So how would you as a coach know whether you’ve achieved or gained followership within your group?
I suppose the complete answer is you'll never know for sure, all you can do at any one time is try and ensure that there is a consensus of agreement and I suppose the agreement that matters is with that senior group of players. Therefore, regular meetings with regular debates just to ensure that you are all seeing things from the same perspective and you're discussing important issues thoroughly, openly and honestly in that environment. Coming back almost cyclically to my opening statement about an honest environment. Um, of course throughout the season we'll do player evaluations, we'll do player analysis where we'll talk to each and every one of the players on an individual basis, but because of things like lack of confidence um almost too much respect for coaches at times because obviously coaches hold the key to their future selection, their future involvement within the professional game. I find a reluctance for some of the young players to be honest enough with you and open in their view, hence the mentor system coming in .. I've found that they're far more ready to give an honest opinion to a senior player than they are to a coach. It's then up to the senior player to pass that or transport information on to us. I've forgot the question now mate I'm sorry.

We're just thinking whether there are any indicators or signs that we can look for in terms of trying to get a measure if you like for the level of followership we have within a group or whether in fact we've actually achieved followership from a group. If we look at the reverse side of that, what indicators might there be that we haven't achieved that, you know that there are signs that we haven't got followership.

Thinking it a little deeper, perhaps taking it to another level now is to go back to my model of zombies, terrorists, activists and pacifists. Really, an environment doesn't want too many unquestioning followers anyway. I think that in itself would create its own set of problems. Realistically I would like in my team at any one given time six or seven activists, four or five pacifists, and perhaps an odd terrorist because my experience has shown that terrorists are top end activists who are falling off the edge. I don't know whether that makes sense to you in as much as it's an old player who's been there, seen it and done it and is just about to fall off the edge but the good he brings to the team still outweighs the bad. I think that if you were to have fifteen pacifists, I would align a pacifist more to a follower or even a zombie where they do things unquestioningly, unerringly ... I'm not sure that's healthy. I think activists, they will question, as a coach you encourage them to question and encourage them to look deeper into things. So whilst I understand the whole concept of the followership, I think you have to be careful as to how many followers you really do want. That's sort of taking it to a different level now isn't it?

Yeah, I think that's an interesting one you know in terms of, if we're trying to put a gauge on it, is it possible to measure the degree of followership that we've got within a group.

Yeah, I'm just wondering what that measure .. what that measure would provide and whether there's a correlation back to my original four segment model. Whether the two would marry up, that if you had an ideal level of followership then that would indicate a good balance of activists, pacifists within each of those groups. Yes there is scope here for future development.
Yes I think there is, and I think there probably would be quite a close link between those two.

The balance of the two throughout the squad, yes probably so yeah

OK so we’ve looked at a couple of aspects there, the final section really is to try and think of some of the constraints or difficulties you as a coach might face in trying to gain followership from your players.

As I mentioned, I don’t think I would like too much of a followership, I think that would perhaps be unhealthy and highlight a huge imbalance of the types of players that you have in your squad. What this discussion is obviously highlighting is how much followership is healthy? How much is unhealthy? I don’t krow the answer to that question. What was the original question again, sorry Chris?

Are there any constraints or difficulties you as a coach face in trying to gain followership and we were saying, the suggestion is that we don’t want all of our players to be followers, we need leaders within that group. But, I suppose overall as a coach, we’re looking at our environment and if we think of the environment rather than the individuals in there now, is our environment giving us as the coach the followership that we require? Are we getting the outcomes I suppose from that environment, I suppose it’s about as coaches very often trying to get our players to do what we want them to do, but they think it’s what they want to do.

Yes, there’s an element of kidology. I think at the top end of the game it’s going further and further away from that, the players are just too bright to kid now. As you say it comes back to the rationale you give them an honest and constructive rationale as to why you want to go in a certain direction and they can see that there’s a chance of that paying dividends, then they’ll buy into it. In answer to you’re original question .. the constraints against followership, one is obviously the fact that I wouldn’t want too many followers therefore you’re almost promoting more the activist type player. Those activists themselves .. the whole point in them being there is to challenge, is to think more deeply about the game, is to try and move the game on in tandem with the coaching staff. So that’s one constraint but it’s a positive constraint almost. Another constraint to the followership then is of course if you’ve got six or seven senior players in a squad of thirty people which is a realistic number, even within that group of six or seven people you are going to get disagreement. It then falls on the coach really to make a decision, that decision is going to be unpopular with two or three of those senior players, so that really is in direct contrast with what you want to achieve in terms of followership. So I think you’re always going to be caught in this sort of paradoxical environment where you’re trying to empower, you’re trying to get a common consensus, but the more people you have sat round the table the less likely you are to get that common consensus.

OK .. um .. can you give me an example possibly where you’ve faced a situation where .. I’m thinking of a strategy you might have used where there’s been a situation where perhaps you don’t feel that you’ve had the level of followership within the group that you require, you’ve talked about your mentor groups which appear to be solving a lot of the problems with that, but with individual
players are there any other strategies that have been used that may have overcome followership problems?

Yeah, again psychology is a wonderful tool, um there have been a couple of major instances really where players, even the senior group of players, have been reluctant to take on an idea. Probably the best example I can give of that is a blitz defence. Players had seen it working well with South Africa, I’d seen .. worked under [redacted] and thought it was the way forward, players had dabbled with it with the Welsh team the senior group had dabbled with it with the Welsh team but didn’t really like it, weren’t that comfortable with it and so therefore were very reluctant to implement it. I thought, how can i sell this to the players .. because what I find is with players, is that if there is a common consensus not to do something even though they don’t realise it will make us a better team, it’s very difficult to change the mind-set. I’ve probably only experienced this only twice or three times with this particular group where I’ve really gone against the senior players group because I think it’s for the betterment of the team. This was the one instance, I explained the psychological processes of change quite simply where … and I’ve done this with the senior group of players as well as with the squad as a whole. That when anybody brings in a new suggestion, they’ll go through sort of four phases - fear, rejection, interest, acceptance, whereby any new change the first reaction is fear – don’t like change. Secondly, they want to reject it without trying it. Thirdly, if you can work through the first two phases, there’s a degree of interest and then once you’ve got the interest you’ve generally got them hooked. So with the senior players group, after explaining this process, they decided to jump to phase three and show me some interest. The same process was done with the squad as a whole and the squad as a whole bought into the interest process, and it was a bit of a running joke for a while – no fear/rejection, must get the interest – so again fundamental psychological principles I think will work reasonably well depending on what you do.

OK that’s an interesting one [redacted] and you know if I can pick up on the skills that coaches or leaders need to engage followers in productive mutual pursuits, what sort of skills do you think coaches require in order to promote that followership?

Obviously the technical and tactical ability, nous, knowledge whatever you wish to call it, that’s a pre-requisite. I think also, the wider the breadth of knowledge in other fields the more advantageous that has got to be. For example, as a head coach if you’ve got a reasonably good understanding of conditioning, a grasp of physiotherapy type work, etc. etc. but also a key issue is an underlying psychological understanding of just how people work. I really think it’s a core component, how individuals work and how groups work, it just underpins everything you do realistically.

OK that’s great, that pretty much concludes the interview from my point of view [redacted] I don’t know if there’s anything you would wish to add there, anything that’s come to mind?

Probably lots as I’m driving home in the car Chris, but I think I’ve tried to answer them as honestly and to the best of my knowledge as it were. So no, at this point no.
That's great ok so that concludes the interview and I'd just like to thank you again for your participation.