

Conflict in Sport:
A Case of Competitive Ice Hockey and Constructive Conflict

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experience of conflict management among a male university ice hockey team and how constructive conflict processes may foster an athlete's perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development. The research question asked, "what constructive conflict processes foster leadership development, personal growth, and performance among a competitive male university ice hockey team?" Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants from a single Canadian male university hockey team. Qualitative thematic analysis revealed that open, honest, and shared communication as a constructive conflict process fostered the perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development of the team. Specifically, performance was perceived as benefiting from an increase in team connections and confidence, athletes experienced personal growth by gaining the ability to be deliberate in conflict with increased selflessness, and members of the team learned how to lead by example during conflict.

Keywords: conflict; sport; culture; communication; personal growth; leadership development; performance

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Bringing a group of people together to form a team focused on achieving shared objectives often presents several challenges. For example, issues of miscommunication and trust among a team may arise given members often have conflicting values, attitudes, needs, perceptions, and expectations (Capozzoli, 1995). Given these challenges, sport and organizational psychology share the same interest in studying group dynamics and team performance (Paradis et al., 2014). However, one aspect of group dynamics which sport psychology has often overlooked, despite its prevalence in organizational psychology, is the study of conflict (Paradis et al., 2014). Since conflict is often an inevitable part of team sports and given the potential implications conflict has for individual and group outcomes, the study of conflict has recently gained some attention in sport psychology (Holt et al., 2012). Yet, there remains a limited amount of research on how conflict is managed within sport and the potential outcomes conflict poses for athletes and sport organizations.

Unfortunately, the conceptual construct of conflict is often unclear and complicated making it difficult to define (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Mediators working in conflict resolution often describe conflict as existing “when a person perceives another person, group, organization, nation, or people as a threat and therefore as an adversary” (Bishop et al., 2018, p. 21). Wachsmuth et al. (2017) defined conflict as “a situation in which relationship partners perceive a disagreement about, for example, values, needs, opinions, or objectives that is manifested through negative cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions” (p. 88). Given the variety of definitions on conflict, a broad definition used in previous qualitative studies on conflict in sport will be adopted for this study, defining conflict as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively influenced by another party” (Holt et al., 2012, p. 136).

Adopting this definition of conflict provides conceptualization clarity when discussing conflict within the context of the presented study.

The limited research on conflict in sport is concerning given the increasing awareness of the prevalence of destructive conflict within sport. Specifically, competitive sport in Canada has experienced serious incidents that have caused significant destructive harm to those involved. For example, the University of Victoria women's rowing club head coach was alleged to have conducted behaviours of harassment and abuse against multiple rowing athletes (Simpson, 2019). As another example, most Canadians became aware of conflict within professional hockey when former professional hockey player Akim Aliu outlined the harassment, abuse, and racism he suffered at the hands of head coach Bill Peters when Aliu was playing in the American Hockey League (Seravalli, 2019). These examples demonstrate the existence of destructive conflict in sport culture and might provide some explanation for why sport participation in Canada has been decreasing across all age groups (Ifedi, 2008, p. 9). Given our awareness of conflict in sport, and how destructive the results can be, it is becoming clear that more research needs to be conducted on how conflict is experienced and managed in sport.

Aside from research on conflict in sport, sport psychology has conducted extensive research on other aspects of group dynamics such as team cohesion and team-building techniques (Carron et al., 1985; Turman, 2003; Yukelson, 1997). Much of this research aims to better understand group dynamics in sport to determine potential outcomes for the athletes and groups which participate in sport. These potential outcomes can often be viewed within three broad categories: leadership development, personal growth, and performance (Fransen et al., 2014; Tamminen et al., 2013; Walinga et al., 2019). Leadership development is mostly focused on creating and implementing programs aimed at developing athlete's leadership competencies

and capabilities (Duguay et al., 2016); personal growth is generally concerned with positive changes within one's perception of self, relationship with others, and philosophy on life (Tamminen et al., 2013); and performance is concerned with factors that may influence athletic performance outcomes (Walinga et al., 2019). There is a limited understanding of how processes used to manage conflict may influence these three conceptual categories. Instead, recent research on conflict in sport has focused on understanding athletes' perceptions of teammate conflict (Holt et al., 2012), the nature of intra-group conflict in sport (Paradis et al., 2014), and the interpersonal conflict experiences of those within a sport organization during competition (Mellalieu et al., 2013). Therefore, it would be beneficial to gain a greater understanding of how the potential outcomes of leadership development, personal growth, and performance may be influenced by conflict in sport.

My Story

Before exploring the influence of conflict in sport, it is necessary to take a moment to explain who I am within the context of the study and why the research is important to me. Being open and transparent about who I am is my attempt at establishing an honest narrative that acknowledges the bias I bring to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In other words, I am sharing my story to provide the reader with an understanding of how my bias shapes and influences the results of the study and how my previous experiences helped determine my methodological approach.

Though this study focuses on university athletes in hockey, I do not personally have any experience competing at an elite level in sports. However, I have been involved in sport continuously throughout my life. Sport has always, and will always, play a critical role in shaping who I am and how I live my life. In fact, my love of sport and desire to work within a

team environment that demanded physical toughness and dedication to reach a shared objective is one of the main reasons I decided to join the Canadian Army (CA) in 2008.

I joined the CA as an Armoured Officer and served as a member of the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) based out of Edmonton, Alberta. Throughout my career, I had the honour of leading some of Canada's best people and I undoubtedly gained and learned more from those I led than they gained from me. I had the opportunity to lead in several different positions and locations and for a portion of the time I was focused on developing and training soldiers for overseas deployments. While employed in this capacity for almost a decade, I noticed a shift in how the leadership group of the CA approached the development of soldiers. The shift I noticed is best summarized as a transition from a singular focus on developing the technical soldier skills of people to a more holistic approach to human development.

Undoubtedly, the shift in the human development approach within the CA occurred partly due to challenges the organization was facing that could not be ignored. These challenges, often transparent and public, created the awareness that change was necessary. First, the CA, and the Canadian Armed Forces in general, have been facing a significant recruitment and retention crisis since the turn of the century (Berthiaume, 2018). Challenges in recruiting and retention have forced the organization to look at how they might change their approach to the leadership and development of people to create a work environment that people wanted to be a part of. Second, the CA has found itself amid a mental health crisis over the last several years. One sad statistic that demonstrates this crisis is found in the suicide rate among CA personnel which reveals that more CA members have taken their own life since the Afghanistan war than members who lost their lives as a result of serving in Afghanistan (Berthiaume, 2020). Lastly, in March 2015, the Honourable Marie Deschamps completed a disturbing report outlining the

sexualized culture in the Canadian Armed Forces. In her report, she described Canadian military culture as a sexualized environment that resulted in, and often encouraged, sexual misconduct among its members (Deschamps, 2015). With the CA facing such large and systemic challenges, the requirement to change how the organization approached the development of people was realized.

As a result, the CA has been working at implementing a new human development approach over the last decade. The approach focuses on developing soldiers as whole people rather than simply developing their soldier skills. The CA has labeled this approach “Mission: Ready – The Canadian Army Integrated Performance Strategy (CAIPS)” (CA, 2015). CAIPS is a strategy that focuses on developing six domains of every member, including: emotional fitness, physical fitness, social fitness, spiritual fitness, familial fitness, and intellectual fitness (CA, 2015). It is envisioned that developing people as whole people by focusing on the fitness of these six domains, the CA will “establish a cultural change that integrates resilience into how we build, strengthen, maintain, and assess soldiers’ competencies across all domains, thereby increasing individual and collective performance, and readiness” (p. 5). In other words, CAIPS aims to instill a focus on the well-being of its members holistically in an attempt to create a more resilient and healthier workforce (CA, 2015). Although CAIPS will take many years to complete, it is well understood among the leadership core in the CA that it is necessary to ensure the successful development of CA members.

It is my belief that the world of sport finds itself in a similar situation to the changing culture that I experienced in the CA. There is a growing awareness that sport needs to move beyond solely focusing on developing an athlete’s athletic abilities and towards a focus on developing athletes holistically (Burleigh, 2015). There is a shift taking place in the culture of

Canadian sport in how athletes are developed through the creation of development models like the Leadership Development in Sport model proposed by Walinga et al. (2019), which focuses on the human and social development of athletes. Another example of a sport development model focused on developing athletes as whole people for the duration of their life is the Development Model of Sport Participation created by Côté et al. (2009). Their model focuses on understanding the person, task, and environment of each athlete to determine the best approach to developing that athlete for a life span of participation in sport (Côté et al., 2009). Both these models demonstrate a shift towards athlete development that focuses on developing the whole person with the proposition that this is the best way to develop an athlete's abilities and performance.

I believe that one of the key factors in implementing a development culture that focuses on developing the whole person is equipping leaders and members of any organization with the skills necessary to constructively manage conflict. It is difficult for an organization to implement cultural change on how members are developed when the leaders of the organization do not possess the necessary skills for implementation. I experienced this incongruence between organizational desires and leadership capabilities during my time as an officer in the CA. I remember spending almost two demanding, challenging, and grueling years of training to be an officer in the CA before I was put in a leadership role over my first troop of 16 people. I was filled with confidence that I would be able to lead my tank troop and the soldiers within it through operational tasks. Yet, I soon realized that leading my tank troop in the field whether in training or on operations was just a small part of what it meant to be a leader to those I was leading. Very shortly after taking command of my first troop, one of my soldiers who had just returned from Afghanistan broke down in my arms after a team dinner. At that moment I had no

idea what to do and I did not possess the skills necessary to lead them through some of the difficulties they were facing. The realization hit me hard and hurt my confidence in my abilities as I began to understand that I had put in two years of training on how to be an officer without ever learning how to be a leader. I now understand that if organizations wish to instill a whole person development culture as the CA claims they do then they must build the capacity of members to constructively manage conflict that arises.

Just as I experienced an organization that needed conflict capacity building for leaders, sports organizations should build the conflict capacity of those within sport as they begin to shift the focus of their development practices towards whole athlete development. Sport in Canada is beginning to understand the requirement for change as organizations like the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC) aim to help national sport organizations understand alternate dispute resolution practices available to national-level athletes (SDRCC, 2020). As another example, the Coaches Association of Canada (CAC) delivers a training module on managing conflict in sport as part of the National Coaching Certification Program (CAC, 2020). However, although important, these are small first steps towards building the capacity of those in sport and more is required to focus the attention of leaders in sport on constructive conflict and its place in whole athlete development. Doing this requires knowledge of how the conflict experiences of elite athletes may contribute to their development and performance.

The Study

This study examined a single case using qualitative thematic analysis (Gagnon, 2000; Tesch, 1990) to better understand the experience of conflict management among a male university ice hockey team and how constructive conflict processes may foster an athlete's perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development. This thesis will begin by

exploring the current literature on constructive conflict and conflict in sport. The review provides the necessary theoretical and conceptual framework for a study that sought to answer the question “what constructive conflict processes foster leadership development, personal growth, and performance among a competitive male university ice hockey team?” Sub-questions aimed at answering the overall research question were (a) how has conflict been experienced among a university ice hockey team? and (b) what strategies contributed to positively managing the conflict among the team? Following the literature review, the methods used to answer the research question will be discussed. Research data collection included interviewing seven personnel from a single Canadian university male ice hockey team competing under the national Canadian governing body U SPORTS. Data analysis consisted of qualitative thematic analysis within the theoretical framework of constructive conflict and the conceptual categories of leadership development, personal growth, and performance. The results of the study indicate that open, honest, and shared communication as a constructive conflict process fosters the perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development of competitive university hockey teams and their members. It is believed that the results of the study may be used to inform current conflict practices and development programs within ice hockey and other sports organizations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review provides the theoretical and conceptual framework for a study that aims to better understand the experience of conflict management among a university male ice hockey team. The following review will first frame the research study within the theory of constructive conflict. Understanding the theory and processes of constructive conflict is important before exploring how conflict processes may foster leadership development, personal

growth, and performance among a male university ice hockey team. Second, the conceptual categories of leadership development, personal growth, and performance will be reviewed to clearly outline what they mean in the context of the study. Third, the literature on the nature and causes of conflict in sport will be reviewed as the study will adopt some of these findings during data analysis. The literature review will end by briefly outlining the current research on conflict management in sport which suggests management strategies for sport coincides with those found in constructive conflict theory.

Constructive Conflict

When discussing organizational teams, Capozzoli (1995) explained that the theory of constructive conflict is that conflict itself is neither bad nor good but rather the results define conflict as either destructive or constructive. Constructive conflict results when conflict is managed effectively and people grow, problems are solved, team involvement is increased, and/or team cohesiveness is increased (Capozzoli, 1995). Organizational psychology has completed a substantial amount of work on exploring constructive conflict and has generally focused on the different styles of handling conflict. For example, Rahim (2015) outlined five different styles of handling conflict within two different basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. These five styles of handling conflict within the two dimensions can be viewed in figure 1 and generally describe which styles are likely to produce constructive outcomes and which are likely to produce destructive outcomes. When conflict is considered within the model, it can generally be stated that the integrating style, a style focused on collaboration, is more likely to produce constructive outcomes than an avoidance or dominating style. The integrating style focuses on collaboration between parties by addressing the conflict deliberately, bringing it out into the open, and then working constructively together through open

and honest communication that seeks to understand differences in perspectives to foster collaboratively shared solutions (Rahim, 2015).

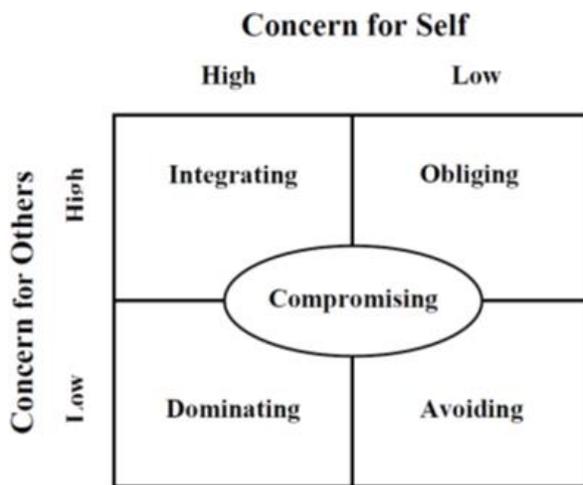


Figure 1. The Dual Concern Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict. Taken from Rahim, 2015, p. 27.

The key elements of the integrative style which contribute to constructively managing conflict are open communication, perspective sharing, active listening, conflict awareness, and the analysis of underlying issues of conflict (Rahim, 2015). However, it must also be stated that any one of the five conflict styles may be appropriate depending on the situation (Mayer, 2012). As stated by Mayer, “we are probably most effective in conflict if we can develop the capacity to use a variety of different approaches depending on the circumstances we find ourselves in and the approaches of other disputants” (p. 44). In other words, from an organizational perspective, it is important to understand the different styles of approaching conflict and how each one may or may not influence any given conflict situation.

One key aspect of constructive conflict emphasized in organizational psychology is the requirement to bring conflict out into the open for change management. For example, Marcus (2014) emphasized that tension must be managed effectively for an organization to complete the

process of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. According to Marcus, a “system cannot change without experiencing conflict” (p. 522). On that same note, Bridges and Bridges (2016), in their popular text *Managing Transitions*, spoke about three phases of transitions: ending, the neutral zone, and the new beginning. The neutral zone is that in-between zone where significant tension exists due to realignments occurring (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). They emphasized that when any organization is going through a transition, that organization needs to spend adequate time within the neutral zone as the conflict found in that zone is an organization’s best chance to be creative and develop into something new. These organizational change management models are important to the theory of constructive conflict as they emphasize the requirement to embrace tension, speak about it openly, and work collaboratively for positive transformation.

Since dealing with conflict constructively depends on the approach, it is important to consider some of the processes which promote constructive conflict. As outlined in *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, edited by Coleman et al. (2014), many conflict management processes exist along a conflict management spectrum, including negotiation, coaching, dialogue, mediation, restorative justice, and litigation. Just like the different styles of handling conflict, any of these process categories may be appropriate depending on the conflict situation. However, within organizations, processes aimed at managing conflict constructively generally reside within the negotiation to mediation spectrum, with a heavy emphasis on dialogue (Rahim, 2015). Schirch and Campt (2007) described dialogue as a “communication process that aims to build relationships between people as they share experiences, ideas, and information about a common concern” (p. 6). They emphasized that dialogue is a unique form of communication that promotes listening for understanding and a sharing of experiences. Often dialogue is facilitated to help a group move through the four

phases of establishing common norms, sharing experiences and perceptions, exploring diversity and commonalities, and finally exploring possibilities for action.

Adopting similar principles, Kaner and Lind (2014) suggested organizations use a process called participatory decision-making to deal with conflict constructively. Participatory decision-making encourages organizations to move past divergent thinking by embracing tension in the “groan zone” and emerging into convergent thinking out of the groan zone. Importantly, the process requires groups to be open, vulnerable, and curious to fight through the struggle of building shared perspectives. These processes provide examples of how organizations may manage conflict constructively by focusing on the principles of openness, curiosity, experience sharing, embracing tension, and active listening for collective growth.

To avoid confusion when considering the different theories found within the study of conflict management, this study adopted the definition of the theory of constructive conflict as the idea that conflict is neither bad nor good but rather the outcomes determine whether conflict is destructive or constructive (Capozzoli, 1995). Further, the study considered the theory of constructive conflict in relation to organizational teams with the understanding that constructive conflict processes generally consist of embracing tension through dialogue. Within sport psychology, the research on conflict in sport suggests similar processes for constructive conflict that will be discussed later in this literature review. This is important to note as the theory of constructive conflict under this definition was used to frame the study and shape the design and analysis of the research. Now that a basic understanding of constructive conflict has been established, it is important to explore the conceptual categories of leadership development, personal growth, and performance in sport.

Leadership Development, Personal Growth, and Performance

When considering sport, there are three important conceptual categories to consider as potentially being influenced by constructive conflict. These conceptual categories are leadership development, personal growth, and performance. All three have been explored in research on sport but have rarely been considered under the theoretical framework of constructive conflict.

Sport and Leadership Development

There is a desire within sport to develop the leadership capabilities of athletes to increase their performance and skills within both their athletic and personal life. Currently in Canada, the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) program is the main framework used for guiding sport participants and athlete development. However, as stated by Ford et al. (2011), the LTAD model is mostly focused on physiological development. Therefore, in their single case study of a 1992 Canadian Women's Olympic rowing team that captured multiple medals, Walinga et al. (2019) attempted to design a leadership development model that positively developed athletes' leadership competencies for sport performance and skills outside of sport. The result of their study was the creation of the non-hierarchical model of leadership development in sport. In the model, athlete development begins with non-hierarchical processes and structures characterized by collaboration, curiosity, and transparency; permeated by the values orientation of the coach which focuses on honesty, integrity, and diversity; influencing the athlete's values, attitudes, and behaviours towards developing competencies and abilities that contribute to peak performance in sport and other realms of an athlete's life (p.23). Importantly, many of the attitudes and behaviours required for effective leadership development are found in the principles discussed under constructive conflict. Further, the model reiterates the requirement to embrace tension for change by viewing conflict as a potential avenue for growth. This is important to the current

study as the research will consider these principles when analyzing constructive conflict and leadership development. The study provided a significant contribution to the research on leadership development programs in sport and emphasized the requirement to develop the leadership capabilities of all athletes for use both within and outside of sport.

Researchers in other sport leadership literature have discussed the requirement to focus on developing the leadership capabilities of all athletes within sport. Fransen et al. (2014), in their study of formal and informal leadership roles on sports teams, determined that there were many different leadership roles on any single sports team and the formal leader filled all those leadership roles less than one percent of the time. This study suggested that leadership is generally shared among sports teams and the development of leadership competencies for all athletes is important because multiple people on the team will fill roles within the four different categories of task, social, motivational, and external leaders. Building on the idea of shared leadership, Duguay et al. (2016) conducted a study looking at the effectiveness of an athlete leadership development program conducted with 27 female varsity athletes from two different teams at the University of Windsor, Ontario. By implementing four leadership intervention sessions focused on 10 different leadership behaviours throughout an entire season, the researchers found that all participants reported using eight of the 10 defined leadership behaviours more often than before the interventions. Important to note, the athletes felt better equipped in skills important for constructive conflict management following the leadership development interventions. Specifically, the athletes reported an increase of use in human capacity skills, including showing a deep consideration for other perspectives. Both these studies are important contributions to the understanding of shared leadership in sport and highlight the role constructive conflict competencies have in determining the effective leadership development

of athletes. Therefore, in the context of the current study, the principles of shared leadership and conflict skills as outlined in the above studies will be incorporated into the conceptual category of leadership development used to conduct the research.

Not only has research on leadership in sport emphasized the requirement to develop all athlete's leadership competencies, but it has also highlighted the need to increase leadership skills for those placed in formal sport leadership positions. The idea that formal leaders lacked leadership skills within sport was explored in detail in the study conducted by Voelker et al. (2011). In their research, they studied the experience of high school sports captains by conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 college freshmen who had been high school sport team captains within the previous year. They found that most participants had received little to no formal training in how to conduct their leadership duties. Specifically, the athletes reported difficulty in building relationships and communicating effectively with members of their team and their coach. In fact, seven of the 13 athletes believed that current and future captains should be taught team building, communication, and motivational skills. Voelker et al. concluded that coaches can "foster more effective peer leadership and team success in high school sport by teaching conflict management and promoting more positive collaboration between multiple captains on a team" (p. 62). The study by Voelker et al. is important as it demonstrates the requirement for leadership skills training among sports teams to enable the necessary effective communication and relationship-building techniques needed for conflict management. The necessity to focus on communication skills in leadership training was reiterated in the study on peer-mentorship programs as part of leadership development done by Navarro and Malvaso (2015). Their study, which surveyed 68 student-athletes on best practices in student-athlete leadership development, found that the participants described the increase in communication

skills as the best part of the program. Further, the communication skills they gained helped them both as athletes and as people. This study, and the others mentioned within this leadership development section, emphasize the importance of developing leadership skills in athletes for use both within and outside of sport.

The literature outlined in this section on leadership development in sport will be used to frame the conceptualization of leadership development in the current study. Specifically, leadership development will be considered under the principle of shared leadership and an emphasis will be placed on understanding the conflict skills required for leaders in sport. Using this concept of leadership development in sport will help guide the design of the study and the deductive thematic analysis applied to the data.

Sport and the Personal Growth of Athletes

Building from the concept of leadership development in sport is the idea that sport should do more than simply develop athletic performance. Instead, some of the literature emphasizes that sport should be concerned with developing athletes as whole persons, contributing to their personal growth holistically (Walinga et al., 2019). In fact, the model of leadership development presented by Walinga et al. was “governed by the underlying assumption that sport is for human and social development” (p. 22). The idea that sport is for human and social development is directly linked to athletic development. For example, Burleigh (2015) asserted that to improve performance outcomes, sport should be mainly concerned with the character development of athletes. In other words, by contributing to an athlete’s personal growth in life skills and competencies, sport will elicit greater performance outcomes. However, one aspect of sport concerning the personal growth of athletes that has received little attention in the literature thus far is how conflict can be managed constructively for personal growth. Therefore, the current

study will consider how conflict management may contribute to the personal growth of athletes using the principles of whole athlete development.

A study that did relate to how conflict may contribute to personal growth in sport was the study done by Tamminen et al. (2013). In their study, the authors explored the experience of adversity, and the perceptions of growth following those adversity experiences, among five elite-level female athletes. In this phenomenological study, all five athletes had experienced significant adversity including bullying, sexual abuse, eating disorders, significant injuries, and coach conflicts. Personal growth in the study referred to positive changes to perceptions of self, changes in relationship with others, and changes in philosophy about life. Although the study found some negative experiences with adversity (isolation, emotional disruption, identity questioning), the athletes also reported significant growth from the adversity, including becoming more aware of their strengths and limitations, better perspectives of their sport, increased desire to help others, and viewing sport as an ongoing journey. Interestingly, the athletes reported experiencing personal growth from adversity only once they considered the role of sport in their entire life and increased their social support systems. The requirement for this level of reflection is important as it suggests that personal growth from adversity only occurs once athletes consider sport to mean more to them than athletics. The study is important to the current research as it emphasizes that athletes benefit when considering sport in the context of their entire life and it provides a conceptualization of personal growth from adversity.

Other studies that have explored growth from adversity in sport have sometimes considered how sports injuries may contribute to athlete growth. For example, Wadey et al. (2011) explored perceived athlete benefits following sports injuries by conducting qualitative interviews with 10 athletes who had recently suffered injuries. Their research discovered that

athletes experienced benefits similar to personal growth in areas such as mental toughness, confidence, emotion regulation, and others following their sports injury. The results found by Wadey et al. (2011) were consistent with previous research done by Udry et al. (1997) which conducted interviews with 21 United States ski team athletes and found that “over the long term, individuals felt they grew from their injury experience in positive ways” (p. 245). Although these studies did not specifically explore conflict in sport, they demonstrate how athletes may gain perceived growth benefits from the adversity they face in sport. Similarly, the study outlined in this thesis explores the perceived personal growth benefits of university hockey players when the team manages the conflicts they face constructively.

The literature outlined in this section on the personal growth of athletes following adversity is important to the current study as they provide the conceptualization of personal growth from constructive conflict. In other words, the current study will consider the personal growth of the athletes in accordance with the categories of perceptions of self and others, relationships with others, and whole athlete development (Tamminen et al., 2013). The conceptual category of personal growth will be used to help guide the design of the study and analyze the data through deductive thematic analysis.

Performance of Athletes

Gaining an understanding of what contributes to increased performance in sport is of critical importance to sport psychology. Traditionally, understanding the dynamics of group cohesion has been the focus of sport literature to determine how to increase team cohesion for optimal performance. For example, Carron et al. (1985) created the now widely used Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) to provide an easy and effective way to measure team cohesion levels among a sports team. In doing so, they were able to determine where and how to

provide team-building interventions to increase team cohesion among the measured team (Carron et al., 1997). They argued that team performance would be increased given the “importance of team cohesion as an antecedent of team outcomes” (p. 62). Their focus on team cohesion levels in sport psychology led to other researchers focusing on how to effectively provide either direct or indirect team-building interventions. Yukelson (1997) provided a direct services approach example of team building that focused on creating a shared vision, collaborative teamwork, individual and mutual accountability, team identity, open communication, peer support, and trust levels. This team-building approach was completed to increase team performance as it was well understood that team unity is a cornerstone of effective performance. Both these studies on team cohesion and team-building interventions demonstrated the importance of determining what contributes to effective performance in sport. These studies are important to the current research given conflict management on the participating team will be considered in terms of how it may influence team dynamics and cohesion, and consequently performance.

Other literature in sport psychology remains focused on gaining an understanding of what contributes to performance in sport. Both concepts of leadership development and personal growth in sport are linked to desired performance outcomes. Walinga et al. (2019) designed their leadership development model with the specific objective of determining how development can enhance sport performance. Tamminen et al., (2013) explored the relationship between adversity, personal growth, and perceptions of individual athletic performance. Similarly, the limited literature on conflict in sport has been focused on determining the relationship between conflict and athletic performance (Holt et al., 2012; Pain & Harwood, 2009; Wachsmuth et al., 2018; Mellalieu et al., 2013). Therefore, when it comes to this study, influences on perceived

performance must be explored when considering constructive conflict among sports teams.

The study outlined in this thesis attempts to build off the reviewed literature by exploring how managing conflict constructively may influence team dynamics and consequently the perceived performance of the athletes. Further, the conceptual category of performance as outlined above will be used to help design the study and analyze the data deductively.

The Nature and Causes of Conflict in Sport

Before beginning any research on conflict in sport it is necessary to gain a basic understanding of what the current literature suggests the nature and main causes of conflict in sport are. This section of the literature review will briefly explain the nature of conflict in sport as either task or social conflict and will outline the current findings on the causes of conflict in sport with an emphasis on communication. This section will also briefly explore group culture as an organization's culture is inextricably linked to both conflict and communication.

Task and Social Conflict

Keeping in line with the nature of team cohesion in sport (Carron et al., 1985), the current literature on conflict in sport has described the nature of conflict as being either task or socially driven. For example, by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 current and former university-level athletes, Paradis et al. (2014) concluded that athletes faced several perceived conflicts that can be separated into these two categories. In other words, athletes tended to report experiencing conflict which is either performance or relationship-based (Paradis et al., 2014). These findings on the nature of conflict in sport were consistent with the study completed by Holt et al. (2012) in their attempt to examine female varsity athletes' perceptions of teammate conflict. Also using a semi-structured interview technique, they determined that conflict was a prevalent feature of playing on teams and that relationship conflict was particularly destructive.

Diving even deeper into the nature of conflict among sports teams, Paradis et al. determined that performance conflict generally centered around disagreements on how to achieve team goals while relationship conflict often centered around feelings of isolation or exclusion in relationships within and outside sport. The current study will adopt these categories on the nature of conflict in sport to provide clarity when exploring the constructive conflict processes the team used to manage the conflict they experienced. Specifically, the current study will analyse the experienced conflict using the categories of performance and relational conflict. Further, understanding the nature of conflict in team sports as either task or socially based allows for a focused exploration into the causes of conflict among teams to determine appropriate constructive conflict processes.

Within the context of the above, the next important step is to identify the main causes of conflict in team sports. Laois and Alexopolous (2014) conducted an important study on the causes of conflict among professional basketball teams by interviewing 25 professional basketball coaches. From the coach's perspectives, Laois and Alexopolous concluded that poor communication was the greatest source of conflict among professional basketball teams while personality clashes also contributed to the creation of conflict. Along the same lines, Mellalieu, Shearer, and Shearer (2013), in their mixed-method study of experiences of interpersonal conflict within sport organizations during competition, concluded that breakdowns in communication were the greatest cause of conflict followed by power struggles. In fact, they found that breakdowns in communication accounted for slightly over 50 percent of the conflict reported. Further, their study demonstrated that poor communication leads to both task and social conflict which generally contains cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects. These studies are important because they suggest that conflict management should be focused on strategies that

improve communication among team sports given the prevalence of conflict resulting from breakdowns in communication. A focus on improving communication for the purpose of managing conflict constructively is consistent with the theory of constructive conflict as outlined in this study which proposes that constructive conflict embraces tensions through dialogue and curiosity.

Culture and Conflict

Another important aspect to consider in conflict in any context, including within sport, is the influence of culture. LeBaron (2003) explained that culture is inextricable from conflict as it flows through every conflict within its context. Given the importance of culture, those working with conflict must develop cultural fluency (LeBaron, 2014). LeBaron defines cultural fluency as the “awareness of culturally shaped worldviews – our own and those of others – and the capacity to pay attention to how these cultural lenses affect what we see, interpret, and attribute in conflict” (p. 584). Building one’s cultural fluency requires understanding that culture relates to our symbolic meaning of life, shaping how we make meaning and enacting our identities (LeBaron, 2003). Further, culture is multi-layered, and so there is no substitute for building relationships and sharing experiences for increasing cultural fluency. Therefore, given the current study aims to better understand how conflict is managed among a university hockey team, it is imperative that the culture of that team is considered in the research.

When it comes to groups and organizations like those found in sport, one way to approach cultural fluency is by analysing the culture of the group through the model presented by prolific culture thinker Edgar Schein. In his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein (2017) argued that the culture of a group can be analyzed at three levels: artifacts (visible and feelable phenomena), espoused beliefs and values, and taken for granted underlying basic

assumptions. The artifacts of a group's culture are the visible products of a group that are easily observed but difficult to decipher. The espoused beliefs and values are those which are explicitly articulated within the group as they serve to guide members on how to deal with various situations. Lastly, the basic assumptions of a group make up the essence of the group's culture as they are the often-unconscious beliefs or values that have become deeply embedded in the group through repetitiveness and influence the group's behaviour subconsciously. Schein argued that when seeking to understand the culture of any group it is important to consider and differentiate all three levels and to determine the basic assumptions that ultimately drive the observed behaviours. In the context of organizational or group conflict, Schein's model provides a tool for understanding how culture influences group conflict, both in how it originates and how it is managed. In other words, when analyzing or considering conflict within a group one must consider the culture of that group by seeking to understand the basic assumptions that ultimately drives the group's behaviours. Further, Schein's model of culture provides a foundation for understanding how the culture of a group may contribute to conflict when there is an incongruence between the three levels of culture. Therefore, by using Schein's model, we can gain a deeper understanding of conflict within a group and how leaders within the group influence the organization's conflict culture.

As Schein (2017) argued, the influence of leadership on a group's culture must be discussed when analysing the culture of an organization. One study which focused on understanding the influence of leaders on the conflict culture of an organization was the study done by Gelfrand et al. (2012). By surveying employees at 92 different bank branches, they discovered the existence of three different conflict cultures in groups: collaborative, dominating, and avoidant. Further, and most important to the proposed research project, the conflict culture

of a group was related to the individual conflict style of the formal leader(s) in that group. For example, if the leader's conflict style was more collaborative the conflict culture of the group was found to be collaborative. The study also indicated that a collaborative conflict culture generally produced greater levels of performance (customer satisfaction, work positivity) than the other conflict cultures. The research is important to the current study as it outlines the requirement to understand what constructive conflict processes foster leadership development to positively influence the conflict culture of any given sports team.

Finally, when considering the conflict culture of a sports team, it is important to consider the cultural communication practices given miscommunication is often a major cause of conflict among any sports team. Mayer (2012) outlined three cultural concepts to keep in mind in relation to communication and conflict. First, culture is made up of high-text and low-text communication. High-text communication occurs when communication is implied or understood rather than expressed overtly whereas low text communication is direct and overt. Secondly, depending on the context, culture may have high power distance or low power distance. High power distance are those cultures where those with less power accept the differential of power and the right of people in authority. On the other hand, low power distance cultures tend to value equality in "communication, decision making, social status, and access to power" (p. 98). Lastly, communication culture can be described as either linear or circular. Linear communication refers to those contexts when the cultural norm is to communicate one thing at a time in a structured manner. Circular communication refers to those contexts where the cultural norm is to communicate many messages at once, circling through a discussion of many different issues, and problem-solving in nonlinear or structured ways. Gaining cultural fluency of a group's communication practices, including sports teams, is critical when considering what conflict

management strategies to employ. Further, in staying consistent with the literature on sport conflict which suggests that communication plays a role in sport conflict management, the current study considers the communication practices found within the team culture.

Sport Conflict Management Strategies

After gaining some clarity on the nature and major sources of conflict among sports teams it becomes possible to explore potential constructive conflict processes in sport. Keeping in mind the role communication plays in sport conflict, facilitated dialogue has been explored as a potential constructive process for managing conflict among sports teams as dialogue creates, deepens, and builds human relationships and understanding (Holt et al., 2012). Further, as suggested by much of the current literature, educational processes aimed at providing conflict capacity building for members of sports organizations may be an important step to enabling constructive conflict management. For example, Zimmerman and Herzog (2009) stressed the importance of athletic trainers learning conflict resolution skills so that they could constructively contribute to the conflict management of sports teams. Therefore, although the literature on conflict management strategies in sport is limited, what does exist has largely explored the potential of dialogic processes and capacity building for managing conflict constructively.

Team Structured Dialogue in Sport

Team structured dialogue as a team-based conflict management strategy aims to improve communication practices among teams. In the study completed by Holt et al. (2012), 13 athletes reported that structured team meetings played a role in conflict resolution as it allowed the athletes to discuss issues openly. On the other hand, their study suggested that unstructured team meetings, where a “free-for-all” discussion occurred, often escalated conflict due to poor communication. Building on this research, Wachsmuth et al. (2018) emphasized the importance

of effective communication as a conflict management strategy in their study of practical strategies used by coaches and athletes to manage conflict. By conducting semi-structured interviews of 11 coaches and 11 athletes they determined that conflict management strategies promoting conversational communication improved team members' well-being, increased their dedication to the team, and improved team relationships. Further, the study determined that when conflict occurred, open, reflective, and inclusive communication helped transform the conflict into positive outcomes. Both studies demonstrated that conducting team-structured dialogue sessions potentially manages conflict constructively by creating conditions for effective communication.

Another study that contributed to the literature on communication processes as a conflict management strategy was the research completed by Pain and Harwood (2009). In their study, the authors examined the effectiveness of a team-building intervention based upon establishing a mechanism to discuss team functioning openly and honestly. They adopted a single-case, time-series design that employed mixed-method research by working with a single university soccer team in England for the duration of their season. During the study, they completed four team meetings facilitated by a sports psychologist, each focused on a single topic related to performance, aimed at improving team functioning. The results of their study indicated that open and honest discussion through structured team meetings improved overall perceptions of team functioning, training quality, self-understanding, player ownership, and team performance. Further, the results indicated that the team meetings gave a voice to athletes who otherwise would be hesitant to communicate and promoted reflective practice as a group. Most importantly, their study determined that athletes benefitted from conducting structured meetings aimed at promoting open communication, reflective listening, and honesty. Although the study

focused on improving team functioning rather than managing conflict, it provides an example of how to employ dialogue aimed at improving communication among sports teams.

The above reviewed literature on conflict management strategies in sport are important to the current study as they emphasize the importance of dialogue in sport conflict management which is consistent with constructive conflict processes found in organizational psychology. In other words, the reviewed literature contributes to the framework of the current study by emphasizing the requirement to embrace tension through dialogue to produce constructive outcomes.

Building the Conflict Capacity of Athletes

Whereas team-structured dialogue promotes conflict management through open communication, conflict capacity building sets the conditions for effective team structured dialogue and may help the individuals better deal with both task and social conflict. Holt et al. (2012) suggested that many athletes lacked any conflict resolution skills and often preferred to avoid conflict as a result. While discussing their study, they suggested that athletes receive training on how to work collaboratively with others when dealing with conflict, employing effective communication methods as a team. In other words, conflict management skills training should provide individuals the skills necessary for effective participation in communication processes such as team-structured dialogue. Along the same lines, Laois and Tzetzis (2004) suggested that coaches should understand which conflict management styles are effective in different situations, implying a requirement for conflict capacity building for coaches. These studies demonstrated the importance of conflict management skills training among sports teams and suggest that many athletes and coaches lack conflict resolution skills. Further, the findings that athletes would benefit from conflict capacity building will be considered in the current study

when discussing the findings of what constructive conflict processes fostered the leadership development, personal growth, and perceived performance of the team.

Conclusion

The above literature review grounds the proposed study by outlining the theoretical framework of constructive conflict; exploring the conceptual categories of leadership development, personal growth, and performance; reviewing the nature and causes of conflict in sport; and, briefly outlining current literature on effective conflict management strategies in sport. The study outlined in this report contributes to the literature by filling gaps in the following ways: (a) the study researched a new participant group by focusing on a male university ice hockey team; and (b) the study explored the link between conflict and leadership development, personal growth, and perceived performance in sport.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experience of conflict management among a male university ice hockey team and how constructive conflict processes may foster an athlete's perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development. The specific objective of the study was to identify conflict management strategies that may contribute to the development and performance of athletes. Therefore, the central research question of the study asked, "what constructive conflict processes foster leadership development, personal growth, and performance among a competitive male university ice hockey team?" Sub-questions aimed at answering the overall research question were (a) how has conflict been experienced among a university ice hockey team? and (b) what strategies contributed to positively managing the conflict among the team? Conflict was generally defined as a situation where "one person perceives their interests being opposed or negatively affected by another party" (Holt et al.,

2012, p. 136). In accordance with the literature, conflict was categorized as either task (performance) or social (relationship) conflict. However, participants in the study were not initially provided any distinction, nor were they given descriptions of leadership development, personal growth, and performance, as the goal of the study was to elicit what they meant to the athletes and to understand how they perceived them to be influenced by their experiences with conflict as part of the team. It is hoped that the results of the study will inform sports organizations and sport development programs on what constructive conflict processes to adopt to foster the leadership skills, personal growth, and performance of athletes.

Methodology

From an epistemological perspective, the research was approached within a constructivist worldview. Creswell & Creswell (2018) explained that the constructivist worldview asserts that individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences and thus research under constructivism relies on the participant's views of the situation being studied. In other words, research conducted within a constructivist paradigm focuses on understanding the experiences of the participants with a phenomenon, seeking to discover the subjective meaning that was created, in the attempt to gain knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Typically, given the focus on a participant's created meaning, constructivism is used in qualitative research. Constructivism fits within the constructs of the study as the research attempted to understand the participant's conflict experiences and the perceived outcomes.

Given the focus on the participant's experiences, the research studied a single case using qualitative thematic analysis. Qualitative research involving the study of a single case is often based upon a constructivist paradigm as it recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As explained by Baxter & Jack (2008), case studies

are best used when research is concerned with the context of the participants as the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident. Case studies set clear boundaries around the research to define what will be and what will not be studied. Further, studying a single case within its boundaries allows for the exploration of an in-depth, context-dependent example (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This “force of example” is often underestimated in research (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and is perfectly suited for research involving a sports team considering the limited size and clear contextual boundaries of teams, including competition level and forum (league, national, international, etc.), specific sport, and gender.

A single case was researched in the study rather than multi-cases primarily due to the limitation of resources and time available for the study and the ability of the researcher to conduct a multi-case study in appropriate depth. As stated by Gagnon (2000), “...the cases must be limited to the number that can be investigated in sufficient depth, with the available resources, to provide a valid answer to the research question for each case” (p. 41). Further, given the study was conducted within a constructive conflict theory framework, a single case was explored as a single case study is best used to verify an already established theory (Gagnon, 2000). For these reasons, researching a single team was the best method for answering the research question in sufficient depth.

Focusing on the lived experiences of conflict for participants from a single team was important as it allowed the participants to define what conflict meant to them and what they considered the results of the conflict to be. In other words, the study proposed that the most productive way to better understand how conflict processes may influence leadership development, personal growth, and performance is by gathering and studying the stories of those who experienced the conflict. Additionally, conducting the research using a single team allowed

for the creation of clear boundaries on what was being studied, what was not being studied, and within what context. In the case of this study, the contextual boundaries included the sport played (ice hockey), the level of competition (university), the league the team competes under (U SPORTS), and gender (male). Applying these contextual boundaries ensured the participants viewed their role in sport as an essential part of their identity, provided credibility given the team competes at a competitive level, and contributed to the current research on sport in conflict by focusing on a new participant group. By applying these contextual boundaries, the research project provided an example of how conflict management was experienced among a university male ice hockey team and what emerged from the constructive conflict processes used.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants of the study included the head coach, the assistant coach, and five of the players from a single Canadian university team playing under the U SPORTS banner. U SPORTS is the national governing body of university sports in Canada and represents the highest level of university sport competition in Canada (U SPORTS, 2020). Athletes competing within Canadian university ice hockey have an extensive history of competitive hockey participation which provides credibility, depth, and maturity to their current hockey experience. This maturity and depth of experience provided the research with credible and extensive insights into how a current university team experiences conflict. Only five of the athletes from the team were able to participate in the research due to the significant restrictions and limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. These barriers are discussed within the limitations section of this thesis report. However, although the number of players from the team available for participation in the study was limited, the number of participants sufficiently provided the research with an in-depth understanding of how members of the team experienced conflict management.

As discussed previously, only one team participated in the study to provide an in-depth understanding of conflict and its management within that team. Early recruitment of participants was completed by speaking to stakeholders within competitive and professional hockey. The lines of communication were opened with stakeholders through the network connections already established with those involved in the research as part of the thesis committee members. These connections set the conditions for the recruitment of a Canadian university ice hockey team. In other words, contact was made possible with the participating team because of pre-existing connections through members of the thesis committee. Therefore, a form of convenience sampling was used to recruit a single team for participation given recruitment of the team was made possible through pre-existing relationships between those involved in the research and the participating team (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Once the connection with the team was made, efforts were concentrated on convincing the team of the benefits of the study.

As suggested by Gagnon (2000), significant time and effort were allocated to persuading the participating team of the benefits of the study. Gagnon clearly states that “the subjects should be shown that they have an interest in participating in the study” (p. 51). Therefore, time was spent focusing on presenting the research within a pragmatic and operational framework instead of a theoretical framework (Gagnon, 2000). Concurrently, the researcher continued engagement with competitive hockey stakeholders to set the conditions for recruitment of other appropriate teams for participation to ensure an appropriate team would be recruited within the timeframe allocated for the research. In other words, the researcher began speaking with other people they knew who had pre-existing connections with other competitive ice hockey teams. Once the participating team confirmed their participation the recruitment focus shifted to identifying the specific members of the team available for data collection.

As previously stated, the head coach, assistant coach, and five of the players from the team participated in the study. Purposive sampling criterion was applied to determine which athletes from the team might participate to ensure a diversity of players based on positional roles participated so that team cross-sectional analysis occurred (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In other words, the study aimed to involve various players with different positional roles to ensure a full picture of how conflict is experienced among the team was collected. The point of contact into the team for the research was the head coach and they approached the members of the team asking if anyone would like to voluntarily participate. All volunteer participants were provided the free and informed consent form which can be viewed in appendix B. The fact that the coach was the point of contact into the team was due to the Covid-19 restrictions placed on the study and is discussed in greater detail in the ethics and limitations sections of this thesis. Given the constraints on the team due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only five of the players communicated that they would like to participate in the study. It is important to note that due to scheduling difficulties one of the original athletes was unable to participate and another player offered to take their place in the study. Additionally, the head and assistant coach of the team participated in the study as their perspective was critical in contributing to the establishment of a full picture of how conflict is experienced within the context of the team.

Data Collection

Data collection included in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes. Keeping in line with qualitative research within a constructivist paradigm, the interview guide was semi-structured in nature, consisting of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting the athletes' experiences with conflict management as part of the team. Previous literature on constructive conflict and conflict in sport was used to create the guide and the questions were

discussed with other researchers and the thesis supervisor. The questions were structured into main questions with each main question containing follow up and probing questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher ensured that the main questions were open so that the interview was conversational in nature. The follow up and probing questions were not followed verbatim and were only used as a guide for the interviewer during the conversation. Before the interviews were collected, the researcher conducted a practice interview with a friend who had experience playing professional hockey to test the questions in relation to the study. The interview guide, which can be viewed in appendix A, adopted the semi-structured framework used by Holt et al. (2012) by dividing the questions into four sections: icebreakers, transition questions, main questions, and a concluding question.

When interviewing the participating athletes, ice breaker questions focused on gaining a basic understanding of the individual and building rapport with them. The interview then shifted to transition questions aimed at gaining an understanding of the participant's experience with conflict within the context of their current team. This section included questions such as "what conflict have you experienced as part of the team?" and "what was done to try and manage the conflict?" The interview then moved into the main questions which focused on understanding the outcomes of conflict and the processes used to try and manage it. This section included the questions, "what happened as a result of the conflict and its management?" "what have you learned as a result of the conflict?" and "what have you learned about leadership as a result of the conflict?" These questions aimed to answer the research question by connecting conflict experiences with leadership development, personal growth, and performance. The interview then ended with one concluding question that aimed to give the participants a chance to discuss anything else they thought was important regarding conflict among the team, conflict

management processes, and the perceived outcomes of conflict.

When interviewing the participating coaches, the same semi-structured interview framework was used to gain an understanding of how they experienced conflict management among the team and what they perceived the outcomes to be. However, the interview questions were worded differently to ensure the interview considered the role difference between athletes and coaches. Specifically, the questions focused the participants on what the outcomes of the conflict were for the athletes and the whole team. This is different than the interview questions for the athlete participants, which sought to understand what they considered the outcomes to be on their own development and performance as well as the whole team.

Given the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, which prompted the government of Canada to instill physical distancing rules for citizens during the research period, only virtual means were used for data collection. The study used the video-conferencing software program Zoom to conduct the interviews and all interactions were audio and video recorded. Zoom is an audio, web, and video-based collaborative video conferencing tool that allows for the use of multiple hardware platforms (www.zoom.com). Collecting data through these virtual tools allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of conflict among the participating team while successfully answering the research question.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, a form of qualitative thematic data analysis was conducted to discern meaning from the data and organize that meaning into themes (Gagnon, 2000). Data analysis occurred within the conceptual framework displayed in figure 2 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Further, it is important to note the propositions (Baxter & Jack, 2008) used during data analysis, including (a) university hockey teams and their athletes experience conflict as part of

their group dynamics, and (b) how conflict is managed influences the athlete's development and performance. With these propositions in mind, the researcher began analysing the data.

It is important to note that the conceptual framework displayed in figure 2 was created before data analysis occurred. The framework was created from the existing literature found in the literature review and used to display the intellectual bins adopted by the researcher for collecting the generated themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The framework allowed the researcher to conduct a form of deductive analysis where pre-determined codes were created from the literature review and placed in a codebook (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In other words, the researcher “developed a preliminary codebook for coding the data and then permitted the codebook to develop and change based on the information learned during the data analysis” (Creswell & Creswell, 2019, p. 197). Specifically, the pre-determined codes were born out of the literature on the theory of constructive conflict and the conceptual categories of leadership development, personal growth, and performance.

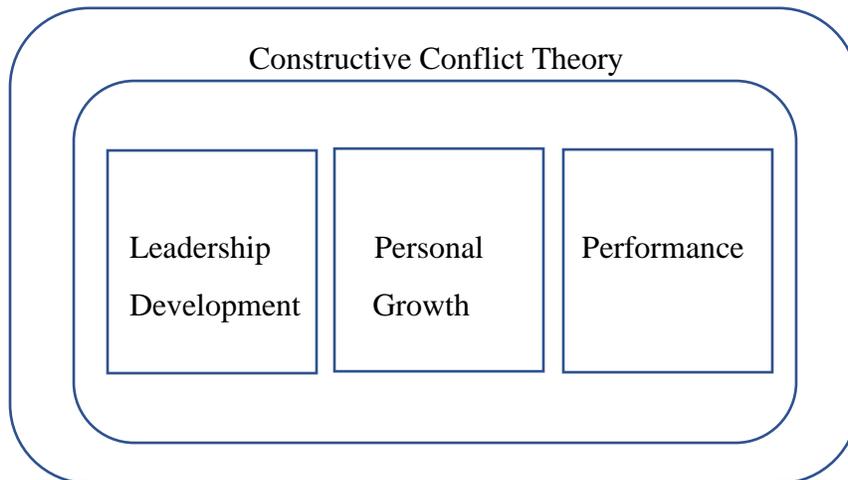


Figure 2. Theoretical Framework.

Additionally, pre-determined codes were adopted from the literature on conflict and culture, with Schein's (2017) model for analysing culture being used to guide the analysis of the culture of the

team in the study. Therefore, the codebook was created with pre-determined codes before data analysis occurred and updated with emergent codes during the data analysis process.

The qualitative thematic data analysis process used by the researcher generally followed Tesch's eight steps in the coding process (Tesch, 1990). These eight steps can be summarized in the following manner:

1. Get a sense of the whole by reading transcripts carefully and recording ideas.
2. Pick one document and ask, "what is this about?" Write down thoughts.
3. After completing step two for several participants, make a list of all topics and cluster similar ones together.
4. Take the list of topics back to the data and abbreviate the topics as codes. Write the codes next to the appropriate sections of the text.
5. Turn your topics into categories and begin grouping topics that relate to each other.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation of each category and organize the codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category and begin analysis.
8. If necessary, re-code your existing data (Tesch, 1990)

In the case of this study, all interviews were first transcribed using the Otter transcription software program (<https://otter.ai/login>). Following transcription, the audio files were reviewed against the transcriptions and revisions were made to ensure the transcriptions accurately captured the interview data. Once the transcriptions were accurate, the researcher listened and read each interview again in detail and conducted memo writing which described the initial insights extracted from each interview. This marked the completion of steps one and two of the data analysis process. Following memo writing, the researcher completed step three by clustering topics discovered as potential emergent codes and began updating the codebook. Next, the

researcher conducted step four by taking the codebook with the pre-determined and emergent codes back to the data and began placing the codes next to the appropriate sections of the text. During the coding, numbers were assigned to each interviewee to ensure confidentiality. Step five was completed next by grouping similar codes into themes and creating theme descriptions. Next, the researcher put the coding process into a data analysis categorization matrix for each participant which described where each code was found in relation to that interview, the code label, the brief description of the code, some quotation evidence found in the data, and the theme that code fell under. This completed step six of the data analysis process. Themes were then analyzed under constructive conflict theory and the categories of leadership development, personal growth, and performance as displayed in figure 2. In other words, these categories provided the intellectual bins for gathering the themes. Appendix C provides a table showing what codes fit within each theme and the category that each theme belongs to. Finally, each theme was placed in a theme quotation table where the major quotation evidence for each theme was displayed. This marked the completion of step seven in the data analysis process at which time the researcher went back through the data to verify the process as outlined in step eight. Once complete, the researcher began the writing process by describing the meaning behind each theme realized during the data analysis.

Following the researcher's data analysis procedure, a qualitative reliability procedure called "intercoder agreement" was used as part of the data analysis process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 202). The procedure consisted of cross-checking codes and themes with an additional researcher to help contribute to the reliability of the study despite the research being conducted by a single researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This intercoder agreement procedure was done with the thesis supervisor and involved cross-checking the codes and themes

for agreement. Further, all participants were provided a summary of the results garnered from the interview data to allow them the opportunity to comment on whether they believed the results to be an accurate depiction of their experiences and whether anything was incorrect. This was done by providing each participant a three-page briefing note on the results of the study. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the briefing note was sent in electronic format and each participant was given the opportunity to respond directly to the researcher with any comments about the results. Therefore, the researcher confirmed the collected data by conducting member-checking to help ensure methodology rigour and data analysis validity (Gagnon, 2000).

Ethics

Given the research study involved human participants, ethical approval was sought and granted by the institutional ethical review board before any research with participants began. Ethical considerations of the study mainly included issues of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and withdrawal, and data usage (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All participants were informed through a comprehensive consent form (appendix B) of their rights and their ability to withdraw from the research project at any time unless the results of the study had already been published. Although the coach was active in communicating the study to the players, the players were not nominated by the coach as all players freely volunteered to be part of the study. Given the coaches were aware of the individual player volunteers, the specific experienced conflict situations of the participants were not included as part of the presented data to ensure individual anonymity. Further, all participant's personal information will remain confidential and anonymous in all references, talks, and publications of the research. To ensure the confidentiality of the individual participants the study does not include any team identifying information aside from outlining that the team is a Canadian university men's ice hockey team

competing under the U SPORTS banner. Regarding data analysis, member-checking ensured that the researcher accurately captured the experiences of the participants. All efforts were made to ensure the final product respects the participant's confidentiality, accurately depicts the participant's experiences, and acknowledges any bias on behalf of the researcher.

Project Outputs

Following the completion of the study, the results will be published through the Royal Roads University thesis publication database. However, other forms of dissemination are planned for the research. It is anticipated that the results of the study may be presented through various forms for sport leadership development programs, future research, training guidelines, conference presentations, and other knowledge-sharing platforms. Specific stakeholder organizations who may be contacted to review the research include Hockey Canada, Coaches Association of Canada, and the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada. When presenting the research, the results will be communicated through short and concise presentations and workshops to operationalize the results. It is hoped that presenting the study through operational forums will increase the capability of organizations to implement the results and to increase the conflict capacity building of sport organizations. Finally, the results of the study may be used in future research which looks to expand the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The results are presented in a format that aims to answer the central research question of the study. By answering the research question, the results convey how the study achieves the aim of better understanding the experience of conflict management among a male university ice hockey team while identifying constructive conflict processes that contribute to the development and performance of athletes. Therefore, this chapter will identify what constructive conflict

management strategies were used among the team and then, secondly, how the use of those constructive conflict management strategies fostered the athlete's perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development. It is important to note that the order in which the outcomes of constructive conflict are presented is different than the order outlined in the research question and literature review because of how the results will be discussed in chapter five.

Specifically, the results section presents the findings in the following order:

1. Competitive university ice hockey teams and constructive conflict processes,
2. Constructive conflict management and perceived performance outcomes,
3. Constructive conflict management and personal growth outcomes,
4. Constructive conflict management and leadership development outcomes.

Throughout the results, quotations from the participants will be woven into the narrative to support the themes presented. Additionally, a table outlining the categories, themes, and some supporting quotations can be found in appendix D. It is hoped that presenting the findings of the study in this format will help show how the study answered the research question while clearly stating what constructive conflict management strategies may foster athlete development and performance.

Competitive Ice Hockey Teams and Constructive Conflict

All the participants discussed experiencing conflict as part of the team and many of them described a team culture that promoted the holistic development of athletes. Therefore, when considering the findings of the research, it is important to first briefly consider how the participants viewed the nature of conflict among the team. Next, the findings will consider how the participants described their team culture given culture is inextricable from conflict (LeBaron, 2003). Finally, what the participants considered to be constructive processes for managing

conflict will be presented.

The Nature of Conflict

Conflict that the participants experienced as part of the team was described as either performance (task) or relational (social) in nature. Performance conflict was described as resulting from a high level of competition among the individuals on the team whereas relational conflict was described as resulting from a threat to a player's ego and occurring off the ice. However, it is important to note that the line between the two was not always clear for the participants and that often relational conflict between members of the team occurred out of some form of performance conflict. For example, one athlete described how conflict they experienced on the ice with another player transformed into further problems off the ice:

I think it was a lot of the time it definitely started on the ice so through battle drills and all that we kind of got, basically bone moves just like butting heads, basically. And we kind of I don't know if I was just like sour about it or what but we kind of carried it from on the ice to off the ice...And that kind of set both of us off when we get off the ice. We don't say anything about it. And then that kind of led to more problems off the ice. (A4)

In other words, the participant described a belief that the conflict they experienced with another player started on the ice but became something more problematic off the ice.

Performance conflict was generally described as occurring on the ice, whether in practice or games, because of the competitive nature of each member of the team. The high level of competitiveness in each member of the team which results in performance conflict was viewed as a positive aspect of team dynamics and not particularly destructive. For example, when talking about performance conflict on the team the coaching staff stated:

There's some conflicts, but I don't feel like we have a lot of, like, real conflicts, even if it's

hard, like, there's some guys that just compete so hard. And then, you know, that is a conflict for somebody who doesn't want to compete as hard as that guy. And it depends on how you're looking at it, from a coach's point of view, you love how hard your guys are competing, you know, when you just can't shut it off, because he's so competitive...That's just kind of how a hockey team is, you know, you've got different personalities and different levels of competitiveness with the players. (C1)

In other words, performance conflict that occurred due to a high level of competitiveness in players was generally viewed as both natural and positive. Performance conflict resulting from competitiveness was confirmed by the athletes with one athlete describing conflict on the ice in the following manner:

We have a really competitive team and I have a few guys in mind that they butt heads strictly because they are so competitive, and they literally want to be the best. They want to be the toughest. That is literally just their nature. Yeah, just awesome for a team, like you need that, but that I would see conflict on our team as like butting heads within practice going out and battling really hard. (A5)

For the participants, a high level of competitiveness was not only perceived as positive but was desired for contribution to the success of the team. The high level of competitiveness on the team meant that they often experienced some forms of performance conflict, with one athlete stating, "There's always a little conflict that way, especially with our team since we are very competitive, and guys love to compete. So, there's always, we always have guys that ride the line" (A1).

When performance conflict did arise on the team, it was generally seen as something that could be managed and resolved quickly and often within the rules of hockey. For example, one athlete

described physically fighting within the rules of hockey as a productive way of dealing with performance conflict:

And sometimes it gets taken too far. Like, there are fights that happen in practice. And its like, its total nature, and then boom, its done. It's over, their best friends again, like, it just happens. (A5)

Therefore, performance conflict was not seen as destructive unless it began to transform into relational conflict between members off the ice.

Relational conflict was described as occurring on the team because of a member's ego and became destructive when members avoided dealing with the conflict. For example, one athlete spoke about conflict off the ice when stating, "And then off the ice, I think a lot of times I find its ego. More than anything, it's more of an ego clash off the ice, it is a personal clash" (A2). Relational conflict resulting from a threat to a player's ego was described as sometimes occurring when a new player joined the team and had to try and fit in with the established groups within the team. This was evident when one player described their own experience joining the team:

I'm coming in and kind of having an ego coming in a lot of the time. When you're new. And you come in with that people are so quick to judge right? Especially when you're coming into a brand new team. (A4)

In other words, relational conflict was described as sometimes occurring due to a desire to try and fit in and prove oneself. Additionally, the existence of groups among the team was described as contributing to conflict, with one athlete stating, "You have guys who are better friends with one guy than the other guy, so they're gonna be on his side where the other half the room is gonna be on the other side" (A2). Members of the team taking the sides of conflict participants

during conflict that occurred off the ice suggests a greater degree of difficulty in managing that conflict when compared to performance conflict. When relational conflict did occur on the team, the participants described the worst way to approach the conflict as avoidance with one athlete stating, “So, avoiding it really is generally the wrong way to deal with that. And, I'd say a lot of times, that's what happens is, people just avoid it” (A3). In the case of the participating team, not avoiding conflict and attempting to manage it constructively was influenced by the culture of the team.

The Systemic Foundations of the Team Culture

The participant's experience of conflict management as part of the team occurred within a team culture that was described by the participants as focused on developing the whole person. Using Schein's (2017) model for analysing the culture of an organization, the emphasis on whole athlete development as a systemic foundation was realized through the espoused beliefs of the coaches of the team and by considering the basic underlying assumptions of the athletes when discussing team culture. In other words, the results revealed an organization that strives to implement athlete development holistically which is evident through both what the coaches conveyed as their beliefs and what the players assumed about the culture of the organization.

The coaches on the team expressed a belief that the team had a responsibility to develop the players as people first and as athletes second. In other words, the coaches worked at creating a system which deliberately focused on all aspects of the player's lives and not just their athletic life. When speaking about their approach to athlete development the coaching staff stated:

My rule is we just want to get guys better, whether it's hockey players, or it's as people or students, we just want to be there, have a real strong support system for them. You know, guys, there's, you know, with the social media, there seems to be so much more out there

for, our players. And what we were just trying to do is just help them and see that there's another side...Well, there's more, there's more than just hockey. (C1)

For the coaching staff, the purpose of the hockey program was primarily to contribute to the positive development of each player's life, both within and outside of the sport. Further, having a system that cared about every aspect of the athlete's life was considered essential to being a good coach and instilling cohesiveness into a team:

And so the whole basis of being a good coach, or let's say, a strong team, is that you really get to know the player, the individual themselves, and you put all the individuals together, and then you get a feel for the whole team. (C2)

The coaching staff believed that the best way to create the conditions for building a "strong team" was to know each individual athlete on a deep and profound level. These characteristics of the team, which seeks to develop all aspects of the player's life, are not only evident by the espoused beliefs of the coaches on the team but also by how the players made assumptions about the system.

When discussing team culture, the athlete participants from the team described an organization, specifically the coaches, that had an interest in seeing them grow as a person instead of simply as an athlete. In other words, they described the team as possessing a culture where the organization invested in their athletes as people first and athletes second. One athlete described the team culture set by the coaches in the following way:

They're unbelievable and a resource I use all the time. You know, they are always there trying to make sure that they are not as much invested in you as a hockey player as they are a person. They want you to be a good person, right? Because you know what, eventually we're all not gonna play hockey till we're 90 and being a good person goes a

long way with a lot of different things...But yeah, it's just being at [the university] has helped me grow as a person, you know, as a player, I think just an all-around better person with, you know, driven goals and driven beliefs that I have and where I want to be. (A2)

In other words, the participants described a deeply held belief that the coaches cared about them as people and not just as athletes on the team. Another athlete participant described the team culture as one that genuinely cares about their athletes as people which was made evident while they struggled through the Covid-19 pandemic:

Kind of one of the more impressive things I've noticed since I've been here is how much they care about, kind of each individual and, it's a kind of shitty situation we're going through and were stuck, you know, you kind of go to the university for class or to the library to study, so you're stuck in your house a lot of the day and there's a lot of uncertainty whether we're gonna play or not. So, at least once a week, we kind of have a little talk in the dressing room. Like is everyone doing all right? Um, it's, it's something that I've never really experienced before I was here. (A3)

For the participant, the investment the hockey program at the university made towards developing the players holistically was something they had never experienced before during competitive ice hockey. In summary, the team culture was described by the participants as one focused on the holistic development of athletes for life both within and outside of sport.

Open, Honest, and Shared Communication

The results of the study indicate that the team engaged in open, honest, and shared communication as a process for managing conflict constructively. Open communication was described by the participants as engaging in perspective sharing, both one's own perspective and

being open to listening to the perspective of others. This was described by the coaching staff when discussing how the team engages in conflict:

Communication. Yeah, we could talk about, Okay, listen, this is how I see it from this side. And they would say, Well, this is how I see it from that side. That's what I hoped they'd say, we really do have good communication with our players... communication is the important part. And then the communication, it means one, there has to be communication, but two, there has to be a receiving of the communication. (C2)

Building off the idea of two-way communication, athlete number one described communication as being at the “forefront of everything” when it comes to managing conflict:

So, I believe just honestly, open communication, talking like not with your buddy but someone you're trying to learn from, is the best way to handle conflict with a coach and player...communication is at the forefront of everything. (A1)

This suggests that the team participated in communication that sought to learn from one another during conflict. Some of the participants described this type of communication as seeking to understand the perspective of the other in conflict: “And I think a lot of the time, it's just a lot of the time, it's just honestly trying to understand what the other person is kind of thinking and where they were going with that” (A4). For this athlete, it was important to try and understand what was happening for the other participant in conflict. To achieve this, the team described setting the conditions for open communication with one athlete stating:

And seems, like a lot of times communication is one of the keys to resolving anything. It's being able to get things out in the open...Sometimes, there's conflicts along the way and you got to be able to, I think, be able to be open and talk about those things. Because it goes a long way in solving the problem. (A2)

In other words, expressing the issues openly allows for the necessary perspective sharing to take place during conflict. Further, open communication was described as key to managing almost all conflict, with one athlete stating, “There is always a way around conflict, you just need to hear the other or listen to the other side of the story” (A1). Therefore, the participants expressed a belief that all conflict could be managed constructively among the team if members were willing to engage in perspective sharing. Importantly, when members engaged in open communication it was stressed that those involved in conflict needed to have the courage to be honest when sharing their perspective.

Honest communication was described by the participants as having the courage to state one’s own perspective honestly. Most of the participants considered honest communication during conflict as being a difficult thing for hockey players to do but necessary for constructive conflict management, with one athlete stating:

Yeah, but once guys actually figured each other out, you have to actually take the time. There's all these team-building exercises and all that but you actually have to take the time to sit down with someone and actually have a conversation about, which is hard, about how you're feeling. (A4)

In other words, the participant found it difficult but necessary to describe honestly what the conflict meant to them. The same participant described the courage it took to engage in honest communication when describing how they managed a specific interpersonal conflict on the team:

It just took actually having the courage to sit down and actually talk about what the problem was between the two of us to kind of figure it out and work through it. And now like, like I said, like, we understand each other fine, and we can have these little arguments. (A4)

Therefore, the participants considered it critical to overcome their desire to avoid conflict by having the courage to face vulnerability. Once the athletes found the courage to engage in communication it was viewed as important that they express themselves honestly despite how it might be perceived. For example, one athlete stated the following when describing helping team members through conflict:

Some people might take it wrong way. I know, some guys on my team might take it the wrong way. But if they do take it the wrong way, we just say, you know, we're just trying to make you better. (A1)

In other words, honest communication that may seem threatening to the parties involved was still perceived as constructive when the players expressed their desire to make each other better. Finally, in addition to communication being open and honest, the participants described the requirement for communication to be shared during conflict.

Shared communication was described by the participants as ensuring that all those impacted by the conflict were part of the communication management process. For example, the coaching staff described managing athlete-coach conflict as a multistage process involving the participants:

So, we, let's say it's a round table, and there's four coaches. It could be either the four coaches and player or maybe just the coaches or maybe the conflict can take different stages. So, conflict could be like a coach's discuss. This is a new avenue, we're going to take with this player and then implement it, and then the player can come back and say, Okay, well, this issue is now one that I would like to bring up with you guys. (C2)

In many instances, the process was described by the participants as including the entire team as conflict among the team was often perceived as impacting everyone. For example, when

describing the leadership group managing conflict between players on the team, one athlete stated:

Hey, this is enough...the leaders in the team. We can watch it because we see the room split. And I think he's got to have a real conversation, right? And say, you know what, as much as this might be between you guys, this is affecting all of us in the room every day. (A2)

Another athlete described managing conflict as a group when describing a specific conflict experience where interpersonal conflict became intragroup conflict:

The three of them could have just resolved it and let it go. But also, everyone is kind of not on edge, but not quite sure what is going on. So, I think by addressing the whole team, it kind of brings everyone together a little more, you get a little more trust. (A3)

In other words, engaging in shared communication during conflict management was considered important as conflict was perceived to impact everyone on the team. In fact, the same athlete expressed that managing conflict through collective communication practices was beneficial for learning from conflict: "I think its something that could be addressed collectively because obviously, other people on the team can learn from the situation also" (A3). Therefore, given conflict between members of the team was viewed as something that impacted the entire team, shared communication among the entire team was often viewed as necessary for constructive conflict management.

The participants described engaging in open, honest, and shared communication as an effective constructive conflict process among their team. When conflict among the team was approached through this type of communication, the participants described perceived benefits from a performance, personal growth, and leadership development perspective.

Performance Outcomes of Constructive Conflict

When conflict among the team was managed constructively through open, honest, and shared communication the team described experiencing perceived performance benefits. Specifically, the participants described gaining a greater sense of team connection and stronger bonds while also experiencing an increase in confidence. First, the participants described an increase in team connections and bonds when conflict was managed constructively among the team:

I think once we sort it out by ourselves, it's even better, it just makes the group even tighter, because, you know, we are making and holding stuff that no one else knows. And it has that bond, that brings us closer together... and you can understand where someone's coming from, in a certain situation, it helps them feel more connected to the team connected to their linemates, and it just translate to better plays and more wins for our team. (A1)

Conversely, many of the participants described conflict that was avoided or not managed constructively as resulting in team division:

I feel like when you have confrontations, like that drag on, you're gonna split the dressing room. Because your loyalties are going to come out on who you're loyal to on that side...you have guys who are better friends with one guy than the other guy, so they're gonna be on his side where the other half the room is gonna be on the other side. (A2)

In other words, conflict had the potential to create divisions among the team if it was not managed constructively. Yet, when conflict was dealt with constructively, the participants described experiencing a greater level of connection with each other both on and off the ice:

Like, I don't know, I like to think of it that it's like conflict, like, just creates stronger

bonds, I think like if you can overcome the conflicts, I think, you know, it makes you stronger, like your best players are always competitive, and they want you to be better.

Whenever there's conflict, I think once it's resolved it just makes everybody better. (A4)

When the team did experience an increase in perceived connection with each other from managing conflict constructively they expressed the belief that this directly impacted how they performed on the ice. For example, one athlete stated:

You can kind of see it in the group that's here, that kind of everyone has each other's back and it's very reassuring and there's for sure a correlation between that and how you perform on the ice in practice and in games. (A3)

Therefore, managing conflict constructively helped the team feel more connected to each other which the participants perceived as positively impacting how they performed.

Secondly, when conflict was managed constructively it was perceived as increasing the confidence of those involved which increased the athlete's confidence on the ice. For example, one athlete described how managing conflict constructively helped create stronger group connections which helped foster the confidence of the group:

It boils down to confidence. I think, okay, you have a big group. You become confident, right? Whenever you play with confidence, that's when your at your best...I think the team in the room allows growth for confidence. And once you reach that peak of confidence, that's when everybody is going. (A4)

From a team perspective, the coaching staff described the benefit of the team constructively managing "smaller" conflicts among the team so that the learning and growth from those conflicts could be applied to situations where the team faced greater levels of adversity.

I guess you want the small battles to give you the foundations for the bigger battles.

Small wins would be, let's say, two personalities, let's say didn't get well in that one game or something. And they are, they are at odds. When they've learned to, hey, you know what? You go first. Tell me what you're thinking. I'll go next and they resolve that. Then the next battle happens, and they resolve it quicker and easier, and it gets smoother. (C2)

For the team, it was important that they learn from small conflicts so that they could apply what they learned to larger conflicts. From an individual perspective, players described losing confidence when conflict was not approached destructively, with one athlete describing the impact of destructive conflict between coach-athlete:

And I've had coaches that deal with conflict in a different way where they just scream at you. And they just say you can't do this and just make you scared to make another mistake. I believe when coaches deal with it like that, and with players, it just puts them more into their shell. And you know, they stop acting like themselves and they don't make plays and lose confidence. (A1)

For the athlete, when they experienced destructive conflict, they lost confidence and became fearful of making mistakes. On the other hand, when conflict was managed constructively resulting in greater team connections, the participants described experiencing an increase in confidence despite the possibility of making mistakes:

I think the biggest thing through Major Junior throughout, kind of my hockey career is confidence. And when you have a group of guys beside you that are with you, and you know they're with you, it kind of when you do make a mistake, which mistakes are gonna happen, you kind of feel less down on yourself, and you kind of are able to pick yourself back up a lot easier. (A4)

Importantly, conflict provided an opportunity for those on the team to increase their confidence levels which they perceived as impacting how they performed athletically.

From a performance perspective, constructive conflict management increased team connections and fostered athlete confidence levels which contributed positively to the perceived performance of the team. Additionally, managing conflict through open, honest, and shared communication also influenced and fostered the personal growth of the athletes.

Personal Growth Outcomes of Constructive Conflict

When the participants on the team managed conflict through open, honest, and shared communication, they expressed experiencing personal growth by gaining the ability to be deliberate in conflict while also experiencing a perceived increase in selflessness. First, by engaging in conflict constructively the participants described gaining the ability to be deliberate in conflict through consciously thinking about the conflict:

What I learned as a person is that in situations that are heated or situations that have two issues coming together, conflicting, you can't think with emotion right away, you have to step back and maybe listen to what they're saying and process it instead of barking right back and then the conflict just keeps on happening. (A2)

In other words, the participant described gaining the ability to deeply consider what was happening for them and for the other during the conflict scenario. One of the athletes described learning how to be deliberate in conflict by engaging in a form of curiosity:

I think for me as a person it has helped me to, you know, think without emotions, think deeply more about what is happening. You know, is there a problem? Deep-rooted under this? Like, is he dealing with something else? (A1)

In this case, the athlete gained the ability to consider their conflict situations through deliberate

questioning. Another athlete also spoke of being deliberate in conflict by being curious about what was happening for themselves in the conflict situation: “The biggest thing is to think about, why are you angry? What's going on? Why? Why is something making you angry and then figuring out a way afterwards” (A4). Therefore, the athletes expressed learning how to be deliberate during conflict by managing their emotions, being conscious of their behaviours, and taking the time to engage in self-reflection. Additionally, the coaches also expressed gaining the ability to be deliberate in conflict when stating:

You just you react and then yeah, and now you have to learn the being conscious about certain things. So, it's like, oh, here's an approach. I'm gonna think about this one. And oh, this is kind of similar. (C2)

Therefore, the participants described how engaging in conflict constructively fostered the personal growth of the members of the team by teaching them how to be deliberate in conflict through consciousness and curiosity.

Secondly, being deliberate in conflict by consciously reflecting on their own perceptions and the perceptions of others helped the participants be selfless in their relationships by considering the perspective of the other before themselves. For example, one athlete described how learning to be deliberate in conflict helped them consider the other person during conflicts:

But when a problem does come up, the biggest thing is actually suck it up, suck up your ego, and just actually have a conversation with whoever you're having difficulties with because you have your point of view, right? And you see the person that way. And it's hard to change that unless you hear from them what they're thinking. (A4)

In other words, the participant described gaining the ability to think about the other in the conflict scenario before themselves. One participant described how players could apply learning

to be selfless in conflict in the future to help resolve conflicts:

Let's say, two personalities, let's say didn't gel well in that one game or something. And they're, they're at odds. When they've learned to, hey, you know what? You go first. Tell me what you're thinking. I'll go next. They resolve that. (C2)

Another athlete described how they believed they had gained the ability to apply selflessness to all aspects of their life through their experiences in hockey:

I think that allows me to make like decisions inside and outside of hockey and in the real world. That, is, like selfless...[say] my boss asked me, along with my five other colleagues to go and finish the fence. Right away. I'm going to go do it. Whereas other people that haven't been a part of that, maybe they don't want that, like maybe I don't want to do it right away. (A5)

In other words, by learning to consider others during conflict on the team the athlete described taking a more selfless approach to other areas of their life. From a team perspective, one participant described selflessness as fundamental to how members of the team engaged in relationship for the betterment of the team.

But with the team, you have to think of the bigger picture, which is the team. And sometimes someone, you know, like, I'll use the analogy of the penguins, you know, some of the penguins when it gets cold, you know, some of them have to go on the outside sometimes to protect the wind. And they rotate and then it's going to be okay, other penguins have to go to the outside. But that's the team mentality. It is not always everyone gets the warm spot in the middle. (C2)

In summary, the participants described learning how to be selfless in conflict from their experiences on the team as being applicable to how they approached all areas of their life.

Managing conflict constructively through open, honest, and shared communication contributed to the athlete's personal growth by teaching them how to be deliberate and selfless in their approach to conflict. Further, given the emphasis on shared leadership among the team, the participants described being better equipped to lead by example through their constructive conflict experiences on the team.

Leadership Development Outcomes of Constructive Conflict

From a leadership development perspective, managing conflict constructively as part of the team helped the athletes be effective leaders by teaching them how to lead by example during conflict. For example, one athlete described the ability to display leadership by managing their own conflict through engagement and not avoiding the conflict:

Yeah, and just, you know, leading is just lead by example, you know. Coming to work every day, or doing your homework or going to class, like, just leading by example, I think, really displays a lot of leadership...[and] leading by example is, I think, in conflict is not letting the conflict sit there and settle for three or four days. (A1)

In other words, by engaging in conflict constructively they believed they had contributed as a leader by setting the example for others to emulate during their own conflict. Another athlete described leading by example during conflict as contributing to a positive team culture by showing others how to constructively engage in conflict:

And I think the biggest thing is, for me being an older guy, especially for new guys coming in because you build a culture right, so we have guys now like me and [name removed], we can have a back and forth and then have a conversation afterwards and be completely fine. (A4)

For the participant, they believed they had gained the ability to set the example as a leader for less senior players on the team by showing them that they could constructively manage conflict through communication. Additionally, participants expressed an ability to be more mature by managing their emotions when they were upset instead of setting a bad example for others to emulate:

I guess I've probably matured in the way that I'm not as raw. You know what I mean, it's okay to step back. And, you know, let things naturally sort themselves out [instead of] going in, you know, getting upset getting worked up, because then everyone else around you is going to be like that. (A2)

Another athlete expressed that they had learned specific leadership skills, like how to be a better listener or to be more sympathetic to others, that were necessary for leading by example during conflict:

What I learned about leadership is you got to be a great listener, be sympathetic, and be hard at the same time in certain situations. You gotta like, you almost got to know how to read people and know how people react to certain things and the way you tell them. (A1)

In other words, the athlete believed they understood how to lead by example during their own conflicts by having engaged in past conflict constructively. Ultimately, the participants believed that by engaging in their own conflicts constructively they were able to set the example as leaders for others on the team to emulate.

The participants also described leadership in terms of being shared among the group with an emphasis on mentorship which is important to consider when discussing how leaders set the example during conflict. For example, the coaching staff described how leadership skills used during conflict are passed down among the players:

Well, to me, they can pass that down to teammates, and they can, you know, they're better leaders, because they've lived it and gone through it. And I can tell the person that I was in the same boat that you were in. And I dealt with it. And this is how I dealt with it. (C1)

The importance of mentorship among the team, where leadership is shared and passed down among the members, was further emphasized by the coaching staff when stating:

Well, it's kind of like, the coaches start as leaders, and then there's the like, the leaders, and then there's the players...So even when you have a leadership group, that leadership group might have, let's say, a top leader, and then some, a few lower sub-leaders. And then those leaders can then take over the next year as the top leaders and they down to, and you're hopefully, the good part with a really good thing about university hockey is that it really is a lot of stuff gets passed down. (C2)

In other words, leadership was shared among different groups within the team and how to be an effective leader was passed down to other members of the team. One athlete described the leadership group on the team as comprising of roughly eight people:

We usually have a group of about eight guys, per year, that kind of when stuff like this comes up, we get together, you know, we might go for a beer, and just say, hey, you know, if this is affecting our hockey team, as we currently stand, we have to address it in some way...[and] I think it's great to have different perspectives and personalities involved in your leadership. (A2)

The description of a leadership group comprising of eight people highlights the importance the team placed on practicing shared leadership among the team.

Given leadership was described as shared among the team, it was considered important for the leaders to set the example during conflict by engaging in it constructively and providing

an example for others to emulate. Therefore, managing conflict constructively contributed to the leadership development of the participants as they learned how to lead by example during conflict and became effective mentors for others.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

The results of the study demonstrate how open, honest, and shared communication as a constructive conflict management process used among a male university ice hockey team may foster the perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development among the team. Therefore, in meeting the specific objective of the study, the results reveal that open, honest, and shared communication is a constructive conflict management strategy among a competitive ice hockey team, as engagement in this strategy during conflict was described as contributing to the development and performance of the athletes. Further, the results emphasize that engaging in conflict constructively occurred within a team culture that valued the holistic development of the athletes. In other words, the study indicates a systemic approach to constructive conflict management among a competitive male university ice hockey team.

The results of the study can be viewed within the *Competitive Ice Hockey Constructive Conflict Model* found at figure 3. This model was created by the researcher to help convey the relationships between the themes found in the results section (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The model is not intended to propose a new theory from the results but rather is intended to simply display the relationships found in the results. It is hoped the model helps when discussing the results of the study by providing a visual representation of the findings.

The first section of this chapter will discuss the results of the study by returning to the literature and explaining how constructive conflict processes may benefit a competitive university ice hockey team. Next, the chapter will discuss the importance of conflict capacity

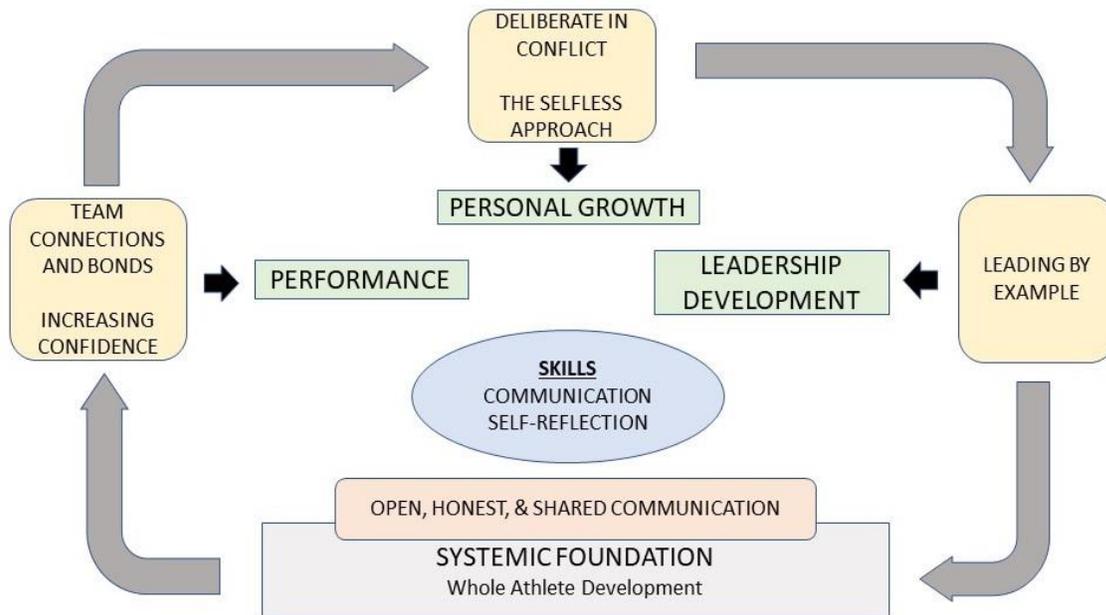


Figure 3. Competitive Ice Hockey Constructive Conflict Model

building among competitive ice hockey teams by specifically outlining the conflict skills required of competitive hockey athletes. Finally, the chapter will shift focus to briefly discussing the counter-arguments found in the current research literature which suggest that conflict is never constructive among sports teams and questions the involvement of coaching staff in conflict management. In summary, this chapter focuses on explaining the results of the study and making recommendations for other competitive ice hockey teams based on the example of the study.

Systemic Foundation

The results of the study indicate that managing conflict constructively for the participating team occurred within a culture focused on whole athlete development. Since culture and conflict are intricately linked and are unable to be separated this is important to understand when considering how the team managed conflict (LeBaron, 2003). By gaining this cultural fluency of the team, it is reasonable to propose that the focus on the holistic development of

athletes within the organization's culture contributed to them approaching conflict constructively (LeBaron, 2014). The relationship between the team's culture and how the team managed conflict is consistent with Schien's (2017) emphasis on understanding the culture of an organization to better understand why and how members of the organization behave and interact with each other. Therefore, the results indicate that competitive ice hockey teams should consider their culture when analysing how they manage conflict.

The findings of the study emphasize the importance of instilling a culture focused on developing athletes holistically. This is consistent with other sport literature which suggests that the systemic foundation of a sports team must promote human and social development (Walinga et al., 2019) both in their espoused beliefs and their basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2017). By doing so, sports teams set the conditions for the team to achieve its greatest level of performance, as was suggested by Burliegh (2015). It is important to note that the results indicate that adopting a whole athlete development approach among competitive ice hockey teams contributed to positive athlete development. The emphasis placed on whole-person development coincides with other high-performance team settings, such as military teams, which propose with set policies that to achieve the greatest level of professional development of people organizations must first focus on their personal development (CA, 2015). Therefore, competitive ice hockey teams should seek to learn from other organizations that focus on human development for optimal performance outcomes to benefit from a cross-pollination of development practices. Most importantly, it is recommended that competitive ice hockey teams conduct a deep analysis of their own team culture to consider the implementation of a whole athlete development approach as it may contribute to an increase in constructive conflict management.

Open, Honest, and Shared Communication

The results of the study revealed that within a team culture of whole athlete development, the team managed conflict constructively through open, honest, and shared communication. In other words, conflict management processes among the team which resulted in perceived constructive outcomes were those which focused on dialogic communication. Many of the participants described simply sitting down and having a conversation about the conflict as a constructive conflict process. Conversely, and when considering Rahim's (2015) conflict-handling styles, avoidance was considered the easiest way to approach conflict but also the most destructive. Therefore, the team that participated in the study made a deliberate effort to engage in conflict through open, honest, and shared communication to ensure that conflict did not result in destructive outcomes. When considering constructive conflict theory, it can be determined that these open, honest, and shared communication processes fall within the facilitated (or un-facilitated) dialogue scope of the conflict management spectrum (Schirch & Camp, 2007).

Engagement in communication processes that promote dialogue to manage conflict constructively is consistent with the limited research already completed on conflict management strategies in sport. For example, and as discussed in the literature review, Holt et al. (2012) suggested that team structured dialogue as a tool for constructively managing conflict among sports teams should be implemented. The current study also aligns with the findings of Pain and Harwood (2009) who stressed the importance of sports teams communicating openly and honestly. Therefore, the results of this study are consistent with other sport conflict research which stresses the importance of communication practices among sports teams (Holt et al., 2012; Pain & Harwood, 2009; Laois & Alexopolous, 2014; Mellalieu, 2013).

Given the focus on open, honest, and shared communication as a constructive conflict process for the participating team in this study, it can be stated that competitive ice hockey teams may benefit from implementing conflict management strategies that focus on increasing dialogic communication to manage team conflict constructively. A few examples of dialogic communication conflict management strategies include team-structured dialogue (Holt et al., 2012), personal-disclosure mutual sharing (Holt & Dunn, 2006), relational mapping (Radford & Neke, 2000), and facilitated dialogue (Schirch & Campt, 2007). Additionally, it is recommended that members of competitive ice hockey teams receive conflict capacity building in communication skills so that they may engage in conflict constructively through open, honest, and shared communication.

Performance, Personal Growth, and Leadership Development

When conflict was managed constructively through open, honest, and shared communication, the participating team in this study indicated it contributed to fostering their perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development. First, from a performance perspective, constructive conflict contributed to greater levels of team cohesion, strengthening connections among the members of the team which translated to how the team perceived their performance on the ice. This is consistent with other research literature on team cohesion among sports teams which suggests that team cohesion contributes to the performance of the team (Carron et al., 1997; Yukelson, 1997). These connections become most obvious when teams fail to constructively manage conflict, often through avoidance, as the conflict then leads to division among the team with interpersonal conflict transforming into intragroup conflict. Therefore, as was expressed by the participants of this study, when conflict is engaged in constructively, greater team connections are built instead of division occurring among the team, helping foster a

great level of team cohesion (Carron et al., 1997) that contributes to a perceived benefit in performance.

Additionally, engaging in constructive conflict processes among the participating team helped increase the confidence levels of the members by giving them confidence in their abilities to handle adversity which translated to the amount of confidence they felt on the ice. Conversely, when conflict was not managed constructively the athletes expressed feeling a decrease in their self-confidence. These results are consistent with the findings of Wachsmuth et al. (2018), who noted that “athletes mentioned frequent doubts regarding sport-specific skills, but also their athletic and personal identity, especially when coaches engaged in overly competitive conflict management strategies” (p. 381). Even when the confidence gained was through managing conflicts that occurred off the ice, the athletes described applying that confidence to their hockey life. Therefore, it can be stated that constructive conflict among competitive ice hockey teams may foster the performance of the team by increasing team connections and confidence while also contributing to the personal growth of the athletes.

Constructive conflict management among competitive ice hockey teams may foster the personal growth of the athletes by teaching them how to be deliberate in conflict through consciousness and curiosity which contributes to them being selfless in their relationships. When the athletes on the participating team engaged in open, honest, and shared communication during conflict they gained the ability to consciously consider their own perspective through self-reflection and became curious about the perspective of others. Doing so led to the athletes taking a “step back” during conflict scenarios, consciously considering their conflict behaviour and whether it was appropriate for the situation. Their personal growth out of conflict is consistent

with previous research on athletes and adversity which suggested that adversity positively influences athlete's perceptions of self and relationships with others (Tamminen et al., 2013).

From a team perspective, gaining the ability to be deliberate in conflict contributed to the team learning lessons from their conflict experiences that might be applied when the team faced collective adversity during competition. Ultimately, the ability to be less reactionary in conflict through conscious decision-making and perspective sharing contributed to an increase of selflessness, where the athletes were more willing to be vulnerable in their communication by considering the perspective of others before their own. This selfless approach became transparent in aspects of the athlete's life both within and outside of sport. Further, their personal growth through constructive conflict fed back into the system by contributing to their ability to lead by example on the team.

As the athletes experienced personal growth when engaging in conflict constructively, they also experienced a perceived benefit to their leadership development by gaining the ability to lead by example during conflict. As discussed in the results section, leadership on competitive ice hockey teams is mostly exercised through a "lead by example" approach where mentorship occurs through actions. Therefore, when leaders approach their own conflict constructively through open, honest, and shared communication it directly influences others on the team by providing an example of how to effectively manage conflict. This is consistent with the study completed by Gelfrand et al. (2012) which suggested that the conflict culture of an organization is set by the leaders within that specific organization by how they approach their own conflict. In the case of the participating team of this study, the leaders set the conflict culture of the team by managing their own conflict through open, honest, and shared communication.

Further, the results of the study indicated that leadership was largely shared among a

competitive ice hockey team and that all players take up leadership roles as they progress in their careers on that specific team. This coincides with the current research on leadership in sport that suggests that leadership among sports teams is shared among the athletes with many different formal and informal leadership roles (Fransen et al., 2014; Duguay et al., 2016; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). Therefore, when leaders lead by example in their own conflict, they contribute to the mentorship of those on the team who will eventually fill their leadership role and will likely emulate those conflict behaviours. The emphasis on shared leadership and leading by example during conflict suggests that all members of competitive ice hockey teams may benefit from gaining conflict management skills as part of their leadership development (Voelker et al. 2011). Doing so would contribute to leaders creating a feedback loop into the system where the leadership on the team continually manages conflict constructively through open, honest, and shared communication.

In summary, the results as displayed in figure 3 demonstrate how competitive ice hockey teams may implement constructive conflict management processes which positively contribute to the perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development within the team. First, the systemic foundation of a team culture which promotes whole athlete development is established. The team then engages in conflict management which focuses on open, honest, and shared communication. Engaging in these constructive conflict processes contributes positively to the team connections both on and off the ice and translates to increased levels of confidence. From a personal perspective, members begin to deliberately engage in conflict and experience growth in areas such as self-reflection and consciousness, resulting in selfless approaches in conflict. From their personal growth, and given leadership is shared and passed on among a hockey team, members of the team effectively lead by example through the constructive

engagement of conflict in their own lives which mentors the other members of the team, resulting in a strengthening of the systemic foundation set among the team. When considering the results of this study and its implementation within competitive ice hockey teams it becomes apparent that some form of conflict capacity building may be beneficial in promoting constructive conflict processes.

Conflict Capacity Building

The results of the study indicate a requirement for competitive ice hockey teams to focus some effort on building the conflict capacity of the members of the team. Specifically, athletes and staff on the team would benefit from skills-building in communication and self-reflection. Building these skills among a competitive ice hockey team would help ensure members are prepared to engage in conflict management which fosters the constructive outcomes discussed in this study.

First, members of competitive ice hockey teams should be provided the opportunity to build their communication skills to increase their ability to engage in open, honest, and shared communication. The requirement for communication skills training among sports team is consistent with former research on conflict and leadership in sport which suggests that members of sports teams require communication skills building in conjunction with conflict management training to ensure constructive outcomes of conflict (Voelker et al., 2011; & Holt et al., 2012). Further, given leadership is largely shared among competitive ice hockey teams and passed down through mentorship within the team, all members of the team would benefit from receiving communication skills building. As was revealed during the study, engaging in conflict through open, honest, and shared communication was considered a difficult thing for competitive ice hockey athletes so they would benefit from skills training which focuses on helping them

communicate through dialogue easier. For example, classic communication skills found in mediation training such as reflective listening and productive questioning skills may be beneficial for members of competitive ice hockey teams (Bishop et al., 2015). As another example, conflict communication skills taught as part of the insight method for conflict management, which teaches a process focused on noticing the perspective or conflict behaviour of others, verifying that noticed perspective or conflict behaviour, and engaging in curious questioning to understand more deeply what is happening to others in conflict, may help members of competitive ice hockey teams engage in conflict constructively (Picard, 2017). In summary, it is recommended that competitive ice hockey teams build their conflict capacity through communication skills training.

Secondly, members of competitive ice hockey teams would benefit from building their capacity to engage in self-reflection by increasing their reflective practice skills. As presented in this thesis, members of competitive ice hockey teams benefit from conflict when they are conscious of their perspective and the perspective of others through forms of self-reflection and curiosity. Therefore, members of competitive ice hockey teams would benefit from increasing their reflective practice skills which entails both “reflection in action” and “reflection on action” (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). A concept originally described by Donald Schon, reflective practice is a process that allows individuals and groups the ability to make sense of their experiences by examining them within their context (as cited in Thompson & Thompson, 2008). Those who engage in reflective practice continually engage in the process of reflecting in action and reflecting on action to learn from their experiences (Bishop et al., 2015). Given the results of the study outlined the importance of being deliberate in conflict through consciousness and curiosity, members of competitive ice hockey teams should be given opportunities to build their

own capacity to engage in reflective practice. By doing so, they would gain the reflective skills necessary to encourage constructive outcomes from conflict which positively contribute to their performance and development.

The results of the study indicate a requirement to build the conflict capacity of all members on competitive ice hockey teams. Specifically, members of competitive ice hockey teams would benefit from building their communication and reflection skills to constructively manage conflict. Although some previous research on conflict in sport may disagree, the results of this study indicate that by building the conflict capacity skills of those on competitive ice hockey teams, the athletes may experience positive benefits to their development and performance.

Addressing Counter-Arguments

Before concluding this report, it is important to briefly address the counter-arguments to the results of this research that have been found in previous literature on conflict in sport. First, some previous research on conflict in sport has suggested that conflict is never constructive for sports teams (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Secondly, other research has questioned the role of the coach during conflict management and whether they should be involved at all. The final portion of this discussion section will briefly address both these counter-arguments.

Some of the previous research on conflict in sport has refuted the notion that positive outcomes are possible as a result of conflict among sports teams. In their study of athletes' perceptions of conflict in sport, Paradis et al. (2014) determined that there were no perceived positive outcomes derived from social conflict. These findings were consistent with the meta-analysis of research on the effects of conflict among sports teams completed by De Dreu and Weingart (2003), which found that both task conflict and social conflict were negatively

associated with team performance. However, these studies did not take into consideration which conflict management strategies were employed which is what determines whether conflict outcomes are destructive or constructive. Thus, this study focused on what constructive conflict management processes were used in relation to the potential benefits of conflict among competitive ice hockey teams. Therefore, it is important to understand that the theory of constructive conflict is linked to how conflict is managed when connecting the theory to sport psychology and assessing the impact of conflict on sports teams.

In addition, previous research on conflict in sport has been divided on the coach's role and involvement in conflict management among sports teams. For example, Holt et al. (2012) suggested that coach involvement in conflict management strategies can lead to further breakdowns in communication as athletes become reluctant to share their opinions and concerns. On the other hand, Turman (2003) suggested that coaches should use numerous motivational strategies centered around communication to improve team cohesion. Laois and Tzetzis (2004) agreed with Turman in their study of conflict management styles for coaches which suggested that coaches play an important role in managing conflict among teams. The results of this study are consistent with both sides of the debate in that the evidence suggests that athletes on competitive ice hockey teams should be capable of managing conflicts on the team without coach interventions. However, the evidence equally suggests that the coaching staff set the example for how to manage conflict on the team and play a critical role in setting the team culture. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that coaches play a critical role in conflict management among competitive ice hockey teams even when they are not directly involved in a specific conflict scenario on the team. Thus, it is imperative that coaching staff, like all members of the team, are involved in ensuring that the team approaches conflict constructively.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study demonstrates that open, honest, and shared communication as a constructive conflict process within a competitive male university ice hockey team fosters the perceived performance, personal growth, and leadership development of the team. Therefore, the case presents an example of what conflict management strategies competitive ice hockey teams may employ to positively influence the performance and development of the athletes both within and outside of sport. However, despite these findings, it is important to outline the limitations of the research and the implications for future research.

Limitations

Although the study provides an in-depth understanding of how a university hockey team experiences conflict and what constructive conflict processes may be used to foster leadership development, personal growth, and performance, there were some limitations to the study. Given the research was conducted by examining a single case, generalization of the results to other sports or contexts was not obtained (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, as indicated earlier, the study aimed to provide an in-depth, context-dependent example (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Therefore, the lack of generalization was mitigated through the methodology chosen as the study provides a valuable in-depth example that can be used for more comprehensive research in the future.

Additionally, given the study occurred during the global Covid-19 pandemic, the project was unable to incorporate multiple sources of data collection and all interviews were limited to virtual means only. The Covid-19 pandemic was first realized in Canada in March 2020 and immediately following the outbreak qualitative research was restricted to virtual means only, limiting the ability of the researcher to conduct research at the physical location of the team (Royal Roads University, 2020). At the time of writing this report, the pandemic continues in

Canada with 875,559 total cases having been confirmed (Government of Canada, 2020). Not only has the pandemic limited the ability of researchers to conduct qualitative research, but it has also severely impacted the ability of sports organizations to compete during the 2020-2021 competition season. In fact, the team that participated in this study had their entire 2020-2021 season cancelled shortly after conducting interviews in the September and October timeframe. The cancellation of the season also impacted the study given that not as many of the players were available for interviews as many of the team's players did not physically report to the team. Therefore, the original aim of the study to interview 15 participants and conduct a follow-up focus group was not achievable due to the impacts of Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic also impacted the recruitment of the participating team as physical recruitment was unattainable and therefore recruitment relied on a single point of contact for voluntary participants. The point of contact for recruitment in this study was the head coach of the team as outlined in the methods chapter of this report. Therefore, the coaching staff was aware of which players had volunteered to participate. This limitation was mitigated by ensuring that the presented data did not contain specific, identifiable, conflict scenarios to protect the individual participant's anonymity.

However, although the Covid-19 pandemic limited the study, the results should not be considered any less valid as the experiences of the participants involved provide important insights into how competitive ice hockey teams may constructively manage conflict to positively influence the performance and development of athletes. Further, by focusing the study on the experiences of the athletes within the context of the team, grounding the study in a comprehensive literature review, and conducting qualitative data analysis deductively, the study mitigated the limitations that arose due to the circumstances mentioned above.

Future Research

Given the limitations of the study, future areas of research include expanding this study into a multi-case study where multiple sources of data collection are used to check the results against a much larger number of participants with more in-depth researched cases. Further, the study should be expanded using teams from other sports to determine if the constructive conflict processes that fostered leadership development, personal growth, and performance among the university hockey team are relevant among other sports teams. Therefore, future research should focus on validating the results of the study.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide an example of how competitive ice hockey teams may positively contribute to the perceived performance, personal growth, and development of athletes by engaging in constructive conflict processes. Further, the results indicate a requirement to engage in a systemic approach to conflict management among competitive ice hockey teams as outlined in the *Competitive Ice Hockey Constructive Conflict Model*. To re-quote Marcus (2014) for emphasis, “a system cannot change without experiencing conflict” (p. 522). How that conflict is managed is what determines whether the change will be constructive or destructive. For the competitive ice hockey team in this study, when conflict was approached through open, honest, and shared communication within a system that promotes whole athlete development, members of the team experienced positive contributions to both their performance and development.

Given the above, hockey organizations should consider how they may incorporate constructive conflict management to instill positive changes for athletes both within and outside of hockey. In doing so, hockey may be used as a positive vessel for the human and social development of people, changing lives for the better both within and outside of sport. To achieve

this, hockey organizations must focus on building the conflict capacity of those within the system by increasing their conflict skills. Doing so will contribute to a system that positively influences the athletic performance of the team and promotes the holistic development of athletes.

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Appendix A: Participant Interview Guide

Athlete Interview Guide Questions

BUILDING RAPPORT

- (1) Please describe your hockey journey so far in your career.**
 - a. What teams have you played for?

- (2) How would you describe your role on your current team?**
 - a. What is your role on the ice (performance)?
 - b. How do you see yourself within the team?

CONFLICT EXPERIENCES

- (3) How would you define conflict within a hockey team?**

- (4) What conflict have you experienced as part of the team?**
 - a. Was it the result of team tasks (performance)?
 - b. Was it the result of team relationships?
 - c. Can you provide an example?
 - d. How long did it last?

- (5) What was done to try and manage the conflict?**
 - a. What worked?
 - b. What didn't work?
 - c. How long did it take?

OUTCOMES – LEADERSHIP, PERSONAL GROWTH, PERFORMANCE

- (6) What happened as a result of the conflict and its management?**
 - a. Did it bring the team closer together?
 - b. Did it affect the team's performance?

- (7) What have you learned as a result of the conflict?**
 - a. About how managing conflict relates to performance?
 - b. About yourself?

- (8) What have you learned about leadership as a result of the conflict?**
 - a. What competencies have you gained?
 - b. How has it helped you help others on the team?

CONCLUSION

- (9) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences with conflict as part of the team, how it was managed, and what you perceived the outcomes to be?**

*Coaches/Support Staff Interview Guide Questions*BUILDING RAPPORT

(1) Please describe your journey with hockey so far in your career.

- a. What teams have you played for or worked for?
- b. What teams have you coached/supported?
- c. How long have you been coaching/working in U SPORTS?

(2) How would you describe your role on this team?

- a. What is your primary purpose/goal?
- b. How do you achieve this purpose?
- c. How would others describe your role?

CONFLICT EXPERIENCES

(3) How would you define conflict within a hockey team?

(4) What conflict have you experienced or witnessed as part of the team?

- a. Was it the result of team tasks (performance)?
- b. Was it the result of team relationships?
- c. Can you provide an example?
- d. How long did it last?

(5) What was done to try and manage the conflict?

- a. What worked?
- b. What didn't work?
- c. How long did it take?

OUTCOMES – LEADERSHIP, PERSONAL GROWTH, PERFORMANCE

(6) What happened as a result of the conflict and its management?

- a. Did it bring the team closer together?
- b. Did it affect the team's performance?
- c. How do you believe it influenced the athletes?

(7) What have you learned as a result of the conflict?

- a. About how managing conflict relates to performance?
- b. About athlete development?
- c. About conflict management strategies?

(8) What have you learned about leadership as a result of the conflict?

- a. What competencies were gained among the team?
- b. How has it helped the athletes help each other on the team?

CONCLUSION

(9) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences with conflict as part of the team, how it was managed, and what you perceived the outcomes to be?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Researcher

My name is Steven Van Muyen and I am a graduate student at Royal Roads University located in Victoria, British Columbia. This research is being conducted as part of my degree requirements for the Master of Arts in Conflict Analysis and Management program.

Invitation and Purpose

You are being invited to participate in a research project which explores conflict among a university ice hockey team. The purpose of the research will be to better understand the experience of conflict among a male university ice hockey team and how constructive conflict management processes may contribute to an athlete's leadership development, personal growth, and performance. The specific objective of the study will be to identify conflict management strategies that contribute to the development and performance of athletes both within and outside of sport. You may verify the authenticity of this project by contacting Dr. Jennifer Walinga, Program Head of Master of Arts Professional Communication, Royal Roads University.

Nature and Expected Duration of Participant Involvement

Participants who agree to be involved in all aspects of the study can expect to spend approximately one hour of their time between September and October 2020. Specifically, the research project involves participating in one 30 – 60-minute interview. Additionally, you may be asked to participate in one 45-minute focus group during the October timeframe.

Foreseeable Benefits

In the short and long term, we hope that the results of this study will inform leadership development practices in competitive ice hockey while also contributing to the adoption of constructive conflict processes within sport team dynamics. Further, participating in this research will help you and the team reflect upon current team dynamics and how conflict may be effectively managed for the purposes of positive development and performance. From this perspective, we hope the results of the study will help sports teams increase the personal growth and performance of athletes by adopting effective conflict management strategies.

Potential Risks

Any risks associated with the research are considered minimal as the research seeks to understand conflict that has already happened within the context of the team. Therefore, the possible harms implied by participation are no greater than those already encountered by the participants. The research does ask you to reflect upon your experience with conflict as part of the team. Reflecting upon these experiences with conflict may arise feelings of negativity that you may or may not have discussed with others on the team. However, any risks associated with this will be mitigated through confidentiality and ensuring that the data collected and shared remains anonymous. By doing so, the research will ensure it does not contribute to any further conflict within the team but rather focuses on the conflict that has already been experienced.

Nature of Questions to be Asked

The questions that we plan on asking you will be related to your experience with conflict as part of your role on the team, how that conflict was managed, and the outcomes that resulted from the conflict.

Statement About how Information will be Recorded

Interviews will be conducted virtually through the Zoom virtual conferencing tool. The interviews will initially be video/audio recorded, followed by a written transcription. Your real name will be used during the interview, but no personal identifying information will be included in the final published material. The focus group will be completed using the same methods as the interview.

How the Research Results will be Published and Stored

Information collected during this research will be published and available for public viewing. The information may be used to inform sport development programs, future research, training guidelines, conference presentations, and other knowledge-sharing platforms. Only the researcher and their supervisory committee will have access to the original interview data. Further, all recordings and transcripts will be secured and stored on the researcher's personal computers.

Confidentiality and Withdrawal

The information we collect from you will remain confidential in all aspects of your personal information. Further, your personal information will remain anonymous in all references, talks, and publications of this research. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. However, once the results of this study have been published, the data collected from you will not be able to be withdrawn from the research.

Approval

The Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board has approved this research. If you have any questions in regards to your rights as a participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics. If you have any questions about the project, I will be pleased to answer them before the commencement of the interview.

Consent

By signing this letter, you are agreeing to participate in this research project and by completing the interview you are agreeing to information collected during the interview being used for the research project. In doing so, you are not waiving any legal rights.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

By signing below, you are agreeing to have your interview responses video/audio recorded.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Categories, Codes, and Themes

Categories	Codes	Themes
Team and Conflict Management Processes	Conflict Styles, Performance Conflict, Relational Conflict, Competition, Role Conflict, Ego	Nature of Conflict
	Team Culture, Embracing Tension, Whole Athlete Development, Accountability	Systemic Foundations
	Team Dialogue, Communication, Perspective Sharing, Courage, Common Ground, Collective Process	Open, Honest, and Shared Communication
Performance	Team Cohesion, Division, Trust	Team Connections and Bonds
	Small to Large Conflicts, Confidence	Increasing Confidence
Personal Growth	Adversity, Self-Reflection, Consciousness, Curiosity	Learning to be Deliberate in Conflict
	Perception of Self and Others, Selflessness	The Selfless Approach
Leadership Development	Shared Leadership, Conflict Capacity Building, Mentorship	Leading by Example

Appendix D: Theme Quotation Table

Category 1: Team and Conflict Management Processes	
<p>Theme 1: The Nature of Conflict</p>	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Conflict that the participants experienced as part of the team was described as either performance (task) or relational (social) in nature. Performance conflict was described as resulting from a high level of competition among the individuals on the team and relational conflict was described as resulting from a threat to a player’s ego and occurring off the ice.</p> <p>A4: I think it was a lot of the time it definitely started on the ice so through battle drills and all that we kind of got, basically bone moves just like butting heads, basically. And we kind of I don't know if I was just like sour about it or what but we kind of carried it from on the ice to off the ice...And that kind of set both of us off when we get off the ice. We don't say anything about it. And then that kind of led to more problems off the ice.</p> <p>C1: There's some conflicts, but I don't feel like we have a lot of, like, real conflicts, even if it's hard, like, there's some guys that just compete so hard. And then, you know, that is a conflict for somebody who doesn't want to compete as hard as that guy. And it depends on how you're looking at it, from a coach's point of view, you love how hard your guys are competing, you know, when you just can't shut it off, because he's so competitive...That's just kind of how a hockey team is, you know, you've got different personalities and different levels of competitiveness with the players.</p> <p>A5: We have a really competitive team and I have a few guys in mind that they butt heads strictly because they are so competitive, and they literally want to be the best. They want to be the toughest. That is literally just their nature. Yeah, just awesome for a team, like you need that, but that I would see conflict on our team as like butting heads within practice going out and battling really hard.</p> <p>A1: There's always a little conflict that way, especially with our team since we are very competitive, and guys love to compete. So there's always, we always have guys that ride the line.</p> <p>A2: And then off the ice, I think a lot of times I find its ego. More than anything, it’s more of an ego clash off the ice, it is a personal clash.</p> <p>A4: I'm coming in and kind of having an ego coming in a lot of the time. When you are new. And you come in with that people are so quick to judge right? Especially when you're coming into a brand new team.</p> <p>A2: You have guys who are better friends with one guy than the other guy, so they're gonna be on his side where the other half the room is gonna be on the other side.</p>

<p>Theme 2: Systemic Foundations</p>	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: The participant's experience of conflict management as part of the team occurred within a team culture that was described by the participants as focused on developing the whole person.</p> <p>C1: My rule is we just want to get guys better, whether it's hockey players, or it's as people or students, we just want to be there, have a real strong support system for them. You know, guys, there's, you know, with the social media, there seems to be so much more out there for, our players. And what we're just trying to do is just help them and see that there's another side...Well, there's more, there's more than just hockey.</p> <p>C2: And so the whole basis of being a good coach, or let's say, a strong team, is that you really get to know the player, the individual themselves, and you put all the individuals together, and then you get a feel for the whole team.</p> <p>A2: They're unbelievable and a resource I use all the time. You know, they are always there trying to make sure that they are not as much invested in you as a hockey player as they are a person. They want you to be a good person, right? Because you know what, eventually we're all not gonna play hockey till we're 90 and being a good person goes a long way with a lot of different things...But yeah, it's just being at [the university] has helped me grow as a person, you know, as a player, I think just an all-around better person with, you know, driven goals and driven beliefs that I have and where I want to be.</p> <p>A3: Kind of one of the more impressive things I've noticed since I've been here is how much they care about, kind of each individual and, it's a kind of shitty situation we're going through and were stuck, you know, you kind of go to the university for class or to the library to study, so you're stuck in your house a lot of the day and there's a lot of uncertainty whether we're gonna play or not. So, at least once a week, we kind of have a little talk in the dressing room. Like is everyone doing all right? Um, it's, it's something that I've never really experienced before I was here.</p>
<p>Theme 3: Open, Honest, and Shared Communication</p>	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: The results of the study indicate that the team engaged in open, honest, and shared communication as a constructive conflict process. Open communication was described by the participants as engaging in perspective sharing, both one's own perspective and being open to listening to the perspective of others. Honest communication was described by the participants as having the courage to state one's own perspective honestly. Shared communication was described by the participants as ensuring that all those impacted by the conflict were part of the communication management process.</p> <p>C2: Communication. Yeah, we could talk about, Okay, listen, this is how I see it from this side. And they would say, well, this is how I see it from that side. That's what I hoped they'd say, we really do have good</p>

	<p>communication with our players... communication is the important part. And then the communication, it means one, there has to be communication, but two, there has to be a receiving of the communication.</p> <p>A1: So, I believe just honestly, open communication, talking like not with your buddy but someone you're trying to learn from, is the best way to handle conflict with a coach and player...communication is at the forefront of everything.</p> <p>A2: And seems, like a lot of times communication is one of the keys to resolving anything. It's being able to get things out in the open...Sometimes, there's conflicts along the way and you got to be able to, I think, be able to be open and talk about those things. Because it goes a long way in solving the problem.</p> <p>A4: Yeah, but once guys actually figured each other out, you have to actually take the time. There's all these team-building exercises and all that but you actually have to take the time to sit down with someone and actually have a conversation about, which is hard, about how you're feeling.</p> <p>A4: It just took actually having the courage to sit down and actually talk about what the problem was between the two of us to kind of figure it out and work through it. And now like, like I said, like, we understand each other fine, and we can have these little arguments.</p> <p>A1: Some people might take it wrong way. I know, some guys on my team might take it the wrong way. But if they do take it the wrong way, we just say, you know, we're just trying to make you better.</p> <p>C2: So we, let's say it's a round table, and there's four coaches. It could be either the four coaches and player or maybe just the coaches or maybe the conflict can take different stages. So, conflict could be like a coach's discuss. This is a new avenue, we're going to take with this player and then implement it, and then the player can come back and say, Okay, well, this issue is now one that I would like to bring up with you guys.</p> <p>A3: The three of them could have just resolved it and let it go. But also, everyone is kind of not on edge, but not quite sure what is going on. So, I think by addressing the whole team, it kind of brings everyone together more, a little more, you get a little more trust.</p> <p>A3: I think it's something that could be addressed collectively because obviously, other people on the team can learn from the situation also.</p>
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Category 2: Performance	
Theme 4: Team Connections and Bonds	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: When conflict was managed constructively through open, honest, and shared communication, the participants described experiencing a perceived benefit to performance by increasing the connections and bonds of the team.</p> <p>A1: I think once we sort it out by ourselves, it's even better, it just makes the group even tighter, because, you know, we are making and holding stuff that no one else knows. And it has that bond, that brings us closer together... and you can understand where someone's coming from, in a certain situation, it helps them feel more connected to the team connected to their linemates, and it just translates to better plays and more wins for our team.</p> <p>A5: Like, I don't know, I like to think of it that it's like conflict, like, just creates stronger bonds, I think like if you can overcome the conflicts, I think, you know, it makes you stronger, like your best players are always competitive, and they want you to be better. Whenever there's conflict, I think once it's resolved it just makes everybody better.</p> <p>A3: you can kind of see it in the group that's here, that kind of everyone has each other's back and it's very reassuring and there's for sure a correlation between that and how you perform on the ice in practice and in games.</p>
Theme 5: Increasing Confidence	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: When conflict was managed constructively the participants described an increase in confidence through the increased sense of team connection. Conversely, when conflict was perceived as being managed destructively the participants described a decrease in confidence.</p> <p>A4: It boils down to confidence. I think, okay, you have a big group, you become confident, right? Whenever you play with confidence, that's when your at your best...I think the team in the room allows growth for confidence. And once you reach that peak of confidence, that's when everybody's is going.</p> <p>A1: And I've had coaches that deal with conflict in a different way where they just scream at you. And they just say you can't do this and just make you scared to make another mistake. I believe when coaches deal with it like that, and with players, it just puts them more into their shell. And you know, they stop acting like themselves and they don't make plays and lose confidence.</p> <p>AC: I guess, you want the small battles to give you the foundations for the bigger battles. Small wins would be, let's say, two personalities, let's say didn't get well in that one game or something. And they are, they are at odds. When they've learned to, hey, you know what? You go first. Tell me what you're thinking. I'll go next and they resolve that. Then the</p>

	<p>next battle happens, and they resolve it quicker and easier, and it gets smoother.</p> <p>A4: I think the biggest thing through Major Junior throughout, kind of my hockey career is confidence. And when you have a group of guys beside you that are with you, and you know they're with you, it kind of when you do make a mistake, which mistakes are gonna happen, you kind of feel less down on yourself, and you kind of are able to pick yourself back up a lot easier.</p>
<p>Category 3: Personal Growth</p>	
<p>Theme 6: Learning to be Deliberate in Conflict</p>	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: When conflict was managed constructively through open, honest, and shared communication the participants experienced personal growth by gaining the ability to be deliberate in conflict through consciousness and curiosity.</p> <p>A2: What I learned as a person is that in situations that are heated or situations that have two issues coming together, conflicting, you can't think with emotion right away, you have to step back and maybe listen to what they're saying and process it instead of barking right back and then the conflict just keeps on happening.</p> <p>A1: I think for me as a person it has helped me to, you know, think without emotions, think deeply more about what is happening. You know, is there a problem? Deep-rooted under this? Like, is he dealing with something else?</p> <p>A4: The biggest thing is to think about, why are you angry? What's going on? Why? Why is something making you angry and then figuring out a way afterwards.</p> <p>C2: You just you react and then yeah, and now you have to learn the being conscious about certain things. So it's like, oh, here's an approach. I'm gonna think about this one. And oh, this is kind of similar.</p>
<p>Theme 7: The Selfless Approach</p>	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Being deliberate in conflict by consciously reflecting on their own perceptions and the perceptions of others helped the participants be selfless in their relationships with others both within and outside of sport.</p> <p>A4: But when a problem does come up, the biggest thing is actually suck it up, suck up your ego, and just actually have a conversation with whoever you're having difficulties with because you have your point of view, right? And you see the person that way. And it's hard to change that unless you hear from them what they're thinking.</p>

	<p>A5: I think that allows me to make like decisions inside and outside of hockey and in the real world. That, is, like selfless...[say] my boss asked me, along with my five other colleagues to go and finish the fence. Right away. I'm going to go do it. Whereas other people that haven't been a part of that, maybe they don't want that, like maybe I don't want to do it right away.</p> <p>C2: Let's say, two personalities, let's say didn't gel well in that one game or something. And they're, they're at odds. When they've learned to, hey, you know what? You go first. Tell me what you're thinking. I'll go next. They resolve that.</p> <p>C2: But with the team, you have to think of the bigger picture, which is the team. And sometimes someone, you know, like, I'll use the analogy of the penguins, you know, some of the penguins when it gets cold, you know, some of them have to go on the outside sometimes to protect the wind. And they rotate and then it's going to be okay, other penguins have to go to the outside. But that's the team mentality. It is not always everyone gets the warm spot in the middle.</p>
<p>Category 4: Leadership Development</p>	
<p>Theme 8: Leading by Example</p>	<p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION: From a leadership development perspective, managing conflict constructively as part of the team helped the athletes be effective leaders by teaching them how to lead by example during conflict. Further, leadership was largely perceived as shared among the team and passed down by leaders setting the example.</p> <p>A1: Yeah, and just, you know, leading is just lead by example, you know. Coming to work every day, or doing your homework or going to class, like, just leading by example, I think, really displays a lot of leadership...[and] leading by example is, I think, in conflict is not letting the conflict sit there and settle for three or four days.</p> <p>A4: And I think the biggest thing is, for me being an older guy, especially for new guys coming in because you build a culture right so we have guys now like me and [name removed], we can have a back and forth and then have a conversation afterwards and be completely fine.</p> <p>A2: I guess I've probably matured in the way that I'm not as raw. You know what I mean, it's okay to step back. And, you know, let things naturally sort themselves out [instead of] going in, you know, getting upset getting worked up, because then everyone else around you is going to be like that.</p> <p>A1: What I learned about leadership is you got to be a great listener, be sympathetic, and be hard at the same time, in certain situations. You gotta like, you almost got to know how to read people and know how people react to certain things and the way you tell them.</p>

	<p>C1: Well, to me, they can pass that down to teammates, and they can, you know, they're better leaders, because they've lived it and gone through it. And I can tell the person that I was in the same boat that you were in. And I dealt with it. And this is how I dealt with it.</p> <p>C2: Well, it's kind of like, the coaches start as leaders, and then there's the like, the leaders, and then there's the players...So even when you have a leadership group, that leadership group might have, let's say, a top leader, and then some, a few lower sub-leaders. And then those leaders can then take over the next year as the top leaders and they down to, and you're hopefully, the good part with a really good thing about university hockey is that it really is a lot of stuff gets passed down.</p>
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