

**Hierarchical Leadership, Ableism and Avoidance: Coach and Administrator**

**Conflict in the Canadian Para Sport System**

by

Samantha Heron

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Conflict Analysis and Management

Royal Roads University  
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Walinga  
August 2022



Samantha Heron, 2022

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Samantha Heron's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled **Hierarchical Leadership, Ableism and Avoidance: Coach and Administrator Conflict in the Canadian Para Sport System** and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Conflict Analysis and Management

Dr. Jennifer Walinga [signature on file]

Peter Lawless [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

Dr. Jennifer Walinga [signature on file]

**Creative Commons Statement**



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 Canada License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>.

Some material in this work is not being made available under the terms of this licence:

- Third-Party material that is being used under fair dealing or with permission.
- Any photographs where individuals are easily identifiable.

**Abstract**

The para sport system across Canada is relatively new in relation to the Canadian sport system that serves able bodied participants. Given the relative newness of the system, combined with the inherent ableism<sup>1</sup> and lack of understanding that accompanies disability, all stakeholders, but particularly the athletes, coaches and administrators within the para system, experience substantive and affective conflict that impacts positive progress in the development of the para sport system. This study, using Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict to understand the layers of conflict within the system, and work of Fletcher (2004), Bilal et al. (2019), and Brown (2014) to understand the differences between feminine, post heroic, shared leadership, and masculine, heroic leadership structures, examines the conflict experienced by coaches and administrators in the para sport system

Through participatory action research, coaches and administrators in the Canadian sport system participated in semi structured interviews and a focus group to explore both the conflict they experienced and their ability to respond to it. Ultimately, the study identifies a lack of psychological safety caused by the power dynamics that exist within hierarchical leadership structures as the main contributors to a state of threat and fear for coaches and administrators. Perceived threat and fear, combined with a conflict skillset that is largely centered on avoidance, leaves coaches and administrators with low capacity to advocate for positive adjustments to the para sport system. Future recommendations are to explore the opportunities that exists in shared leadership structures, as well as educational opportunities to impact the conflict skillset of coaches and administrators across the sport system.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ableism is defined as discrimination in favour of able-bodied people

An outcome of this project was to create understanding of effective conflict competencies needed by coaches and sport administrators as they navigate the sport system. This research combined with future research contributes to refinements of the Canadian sport development system

**Table of Contents**

***Introduction** .....5*  
***Research Questions and Purpose Statement**.....24*  
***Results** .....33*  
***Discussion** .....63*  
***Conclusion**.....79*  
***References**.....85*  
***Appendix A**.....91*  
***Appendix B**.....94*

**Introduction**

**Hierarchical Leadership, Ableism and Avoidance: Coach and Administrator Conflict in the Canadian Para Sport System**

Sport systems in Canada experience conflict due to competing values between funding models that prioritize or reward podium success and sport development initiatives – this conflict often inhibits smooth systems functioning and increases conflict for all stakeholders involved. Specifically of interest is how conflict is created and transformed at the issues specific, relational and sub-system level by national sport organization leadership, funding models and Sport for Life development initiatives in para sport systems, as experienced by coaches and sport administrators.

One of the influencers of the Canadian Sport System, Own the Podium (OTP), values an uncompromising approach to achieving excellence on the podium (Own the Podium, n.d.). Own the Podium provides technical expertise to the federal government and sport organizations as they make decisions regarding sport and thus has large influence over sport systems in Canada. In contrast, Sport for Life has an approach that encourages development of sport skills without emphasizing high performance as the sole pathway (Sport for Life, n.d.); in essence Sport for Life offers a holistic development model that evaluates success based on the achievement of development markers instead of performance. Driving the implementation of these models is the leadership of the respective and associated organizations. Balancing the objectives of these two systems are the middle manager personnel: coaches and sport administrators (ex: recruiters, directors, managers). For coaches and sport administrators, the cognitive dissonance that occurs from teaching a sport at a high level and the ability to parlay that into a lifelong experience is adversely affected by the overwhelming investment of funds, expertise, time and energy into performance programming that often misses the whole athlete development agenda. Too often, coaches and sport administrators are only able to focus on performance outcomes and miss the ability to holistically develop systems, athletes and the sport community.

Through the lens of Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict, this study examines the conflict experienced by coaches and sport administrators to discover where conflict exists at the system, sub-system, relational and issues specific level. Ultimately this study uncovers how conflict occurs for coaches and sport administrators and what competencies are employed to manage the dissonance between competing models, deliverables, and values. Development coaches often have to meet quotas that misalign with supporting athletes through proper development channels; examining how coaches navigate this and uncovering how conflict occurs

in these spaces was central to the study. Various sport models, policies and practices are considered including the Canadian Sport Policy (Sport Information Resource Centre, n.d.), the Sport for Life Long Term Athlete Development Model, and the Own the Podium funding recommendations.

The Insight Approach (Price, 2017; Picard 2016a; Picard 2016b) was utilized in the data collection process to uncover and process the perceived threats and fears, the values and beliefs under threat, the conflict that emerges, and the conflict competencies applied by the coaches and sport administrators. The Insight Approach views conflict as conscious or subconscious indicators that values are threatened, and automatic conflict behaviours are responses to the perceived threat. In the Insight Approach, by drawing awareness to the conflict and minimizing the threat response through curious questioning, individuals are able to better understand how and why the conflict occurs and identify new solutions for minimizing threat and transforming conflict (Picard 2016a). Insight into perceived threats and fears serves to highlight precise points of conflict between contradictory practices, policies or structures in order to reveal opportunities for resolution or reconciliation, and recommendations for smoother systems functioning. Similarly, the results identify in what spaces strong conflict competencies exist to recommendations for the development of more effective conflict competencies and leadership behaviours.

The research took a constructionist approach – “all claims to knowledge, truth, or insight are founded within communities of meaning making” (Gergen, 2001). The constructionist approach means that knowledge and reality is constructed by the community that surrounds the topic being studied and does not exist in absolutes. Using a constructionist approach was crucial to the study because it honored the subjective experiences of the participants, researcher and

stakeholders involved and impacted by the para sport system. Similarly, the constructionist approach allowed for the nuanced experiences of the participants to be explored instead of remaining confined to quantitative data and a singular way of knowing. The Nested Theory of Conflict (Dugan, 1996) was applied to code the data according to: issues-specific, relational, sub-system, and system qualities and the Insight Approach was used to code the data according to fears, perceived threats, values, and goals. Conflict behaviours and competencies as outlined by Mayer (2012, 2015) were used to identify behaviours of coaches and sport administrators. Key literature by Fletcher (2004), Bilal et al. (2019) and Steen and Shinkai (2020) outlined feminine and post-heroic leadership conceptual frameworks, exposing themes on maladaptive and adaptive organizational design, leadership practices and conflict competencies. The research used participatory action research to collaborate with participants in the para sport community and enabled participants to explore and utilize new conflict competencies throughout the duration of the study (MacDonald, 2012). General qualitative analysis method was used to analyze which concepts/themes occur for coaches and sport administrators and allowed for exploratory information to be included (Yazid, 2015). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of coaches and sport administrators involved in para sports in Canada. Data was recorded, transcribed and subjected to content analysis to discover both set and emergent themes.

The overall purpose of the study was to inform future research in capacity building for the Canadian para sport system. Capacity building refers to the ability for increases in the quantity and quality of sport participation along all levels of the Athlete Development Pathway for athletes with disabilities. The desired outcomes of this project were first and foremost to build knowledge of conflict experiences and conflict competencies utilized by coaches and sport



administrators in the para sport system. Underneath this outcome is a better understanding of the discourse between the para sport organizations, Canadian Sport for Life Model, and the major funding partners. An outcome of this project was to create understanding of effective conflict competencies needed by coaches and sport administrators as they navigate the sport system. This research combined with future research contributes to refinements of the Canadian sport development system.

***Through the lens of the Nested Theory of Conflict, how do hierarchical leadership, patriarchy, and power imbalance interact with disability sport systems?***

Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict provides a strong foundation to identify where conflict stems from within the para sport system in order to effectively understand what type of conflict coaches and sport administrators experience. The feminist approach in the Nested Theory of Conflict includes four levels of conflict that clarify how the different components of the system interact with each other (Dugan, 1996). These levels are consistently influencing each other. Encompassing all other levels is the system level – the system level includes societal norms, behaviours and structures that impact the sub-system, relational and issues-specific conflict that arises. The marginalization, lack of inclusivity and accessibility experienced by minorities, and in the para sport context, persons with a disability, is a societal issue that is seen across many sectors (Brittain et al., 2019). A society tailored towards the privileged (historically able, male and Caucasian) trickles down to the relational and issues-specific layers within the Nested Theory of Conflict, where the privileged behaviours and norms come into conflict with the marginalized group's need for growth, autonomy and agency (Dugan, 1996).

In this study, the sub-system is the Canadian para sport system which includes the Federal Government, Canadian Paralympic Committee, and technical advisors– primarily Own the Podium and various national sport organizations. At the sub-system level, structures and systems within these organizations mirror the societal norms of the “system” and create dissonance between the needs of the athletes and other various stakeholders who access the para

sport system (Brittain et al., 2019). Further, the decision-making authority at the sub-system level is given to those empowered by the system level, which usually excludes minorities (Bogart & Dunn, 2019).

The relational level and issues specific level of the Nested Theory of Conflict is often the space coaches and sport administrators experience conflict (Denison et al., 2021). It is within these spaces that coaches and sport administrators navigate issues-specific challenges through advocacy with stakeholders at various levels of the system, often including leaders or changemakers within the sub-system. The issues – specific space, which is unique, acute and seemingly minor is often the space that exposes conflict that stems from hierarchical, patriarchal behaviour linked to the sub-system and system layers. Dugan (1996) is clear that addressing the issues at hand is often insufficient in addressing the conflict, as these minor conflicts are a symptom of conflict in the sub-system and system. Essentially, issues specific can be thought of as the pebble that causes ripples in the pond – it is the locating point for greater conflict. However, issues-specific and relational conflict holds much power in exposing greater system inequities, and at the same time create space for small nudges to impact the sub-system and system (Dugan, 1996; Brittain et al., 2019; Berger & Lorenz, 2015).

Leadership at the sub-system level has influence on the conflict at the relational and issues-specific levels. Clearly, hierarchical leadership structure at the sub-system level and competitive, maladaptive conflict competencies linked to hierarchical leadership limit growth in para sports. Uni-directional leadership, where a few key personnel at the “top” of an organization, creates conflict at the relational level when linked to the Nested Theory of Conflict (Brown, 2014; Dugan, 1996). This type of leadership often limits communication, idea sharing and agency among all members.

Similar to many sectors such as government, military and long-standing corporations, sport has top down, hierarchical leadership models that limit opportunities for collaboration and growth. Especially in the para sport world, where there is a lack of representation of persons with

a disability within the leadership, this hierarchical leadership style creates a further void between the individuals who access the system and those who influence the system from the top (Braye et al., 2013). Leadership attributes, especially in times of conflict, are often defined as heroic or masculine leadership traits and create competitive, constricted pathways for knowledge sharing while limiting opportunities for contribution by all members of the system (Denison et al., 2017; Fletcher, 2004).

At the relational and issues-specific level of the Nested Theory of Conflict, it is important to understand how shared, feminine styles of leadership and the associated conflict competencies challenge the hierarchical model and leadership styles that govern the para sport system. Interestingly, post-heroic leadership traits, also often defined as feminine and shared leadership, are gaining momentum across other sectors (Denison et al., 2017).

According to Brown (2014), Steen & Shinkai (2020) and Bilal et al. (2019), the conflict competencies associated with shared, post-heroic leadership allow for greater contribution by all stakeholders, as well as enable agency among members of the group as responsibility is shared. In Bilal's (2019) study on using shared leadership to increase agency in faculty members at universities across Pakistan, they found that increasing psychological safety of faculty members by employing a shared leadership style significantly increased the agency and effectiveness of faculty members. There is a connection between shared, feminine styles of leadership and leadership traits with better functioning by all members within the system.

High self-awareness and emotional intelligence are also linked to post-heroic leadership and seen as inherently feminine (Morrison, 2008). These attributes can impact how different stakeholders with influence at different layers of the system interact with each other, yet these values are often not utilized at the leadership level. Exploring how hierarchical leadership interacts with the para sport system, and how shared leadership is inhibited is key to understanding where conflict exists for stakeholders.

***Para sport systems, and competing sport models: what are the competing sport models and how do they interact?***

At the sub-system level, para sport magnifies conflict that stakeholders, organizations and sport models experience at most stages on an athlete development journey. Due to para sports recent inception as well as multiple iterations through the evolution of the Paralympic games, para sport systems lack a robust foundation and clear system (Arbour-Nicitopoulpus et al., 2017; Legg & Steadward, 2011). As organizations attempt to fund and support para sports, mixed messages and an over prioritization of high performance has hindered strong development pathways (Brittain et al., 2019; Legg & Steadward, 2011). The major funding partners often come at odds with the recommended development pathway as appropriate development timelines and imminent podium performance do not mix well (Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Rocha & Turner, 2008).

The Paralympic sport system has not had a coherent pathway since it originated and compared to their Olympic counterpart, still is in relative infancy. Legg and Steadward's (2011) analysis outlines the challenges para sport systems have had with managing the complexity of sport and disability since the first formal Paralympic Games in 1960. As a system associated with a minority group, athletes with a disability and those who engage para sport have experienced all the classic tropes that are associated with a minority experience – inspiration porn, tokenism, and patronizing behaviour are common behaviours parachuted onto the para athlete experience by the non para community (Braye, 2013). Conversely, para sports have also changed societies' view of the abilities of persons with a disability – a dissonance exists for much of society when an athlete with an impairment, who is typically seen as weak, can perform equal or greater feats than a non para athlete (Legg & Steadward, 2011; Braye, 2013).

A robust understanding of para athletes and para sport is a conflict point for policy makers and leaders as often the leadership of sport organizations overlay the able-bodied system onto the para sport system, while the disability community advocates for a nuanced and disability specific lens to be applied to para sports (Haslett et al., 2019; Gold & Gold, 2007). As inclusion and accessibility become a priority at the system level, coaches and sport

administrators in para sport systems must navigate the disability lens while operating in integrated spaces that largely cater to able bodied practices.

The sport models and organizations mentioned above that exist at the sub-system level and create a para sport system are the Federal government, Canadian Paralympic Committee, Own the Podium (focused strictly on high performance outcomes), and the Sport for Life Development model, which is a model that outlines the recommended mental, physical, social and technical development pathway for athletes on a sport for life pathway. These sub-system organizations act as governance and as an umbrella for stakeholders of the para sport system to operate within. The multiple iterations of the para sport system combined with insecurities surrounding funding allocation contributes to the lack of a coherent system for para sports to exist within (Arbour-Nicitopoulpus et al., 2017). Similarly, the dissonance between the high-performance funding models and sport development models demonstrates a lack of consistency in values; often conflict arises between the competing schools of thought (Legg & Steadward, 2011).

Sport for Life's values are often at odds with the values and objectives of funding partners. Sport for Life is a non-profit government organization that was developed in 2014 to facilitate physical literacy and quality sport across Canada (Sport for life, n.d.). Sport for Life represents the research, values and models that encourage healthy sport and physical activity participation for individuals and communities within Canada. Sport for Life intersects with regional, provincial and national programming in an attempt to align development models with sport programming from grassroots to performance (Sport for Life, n.d.). It is often at this provincial and national level where conflict occurs as funding partners vie for metrics and performances to justify the expenditures.

Own the Podium is the technical advisor to the Federal government, Canadian Olympic Committee and Canadian Paralympic Committee. Own the Podium is under contract with Sport Canada and the Canadian Paralympic and Olympic Committees to recommend how funding is

distributed and what metrics need to be achieved to secure funding. Most of these metrics are related to podium performances (Own the Podium, n.d.). While this in itself is not a bad thing, it often creates pressure for athletes to advance too quickly through the system in order to achieve quick success, without taking the time to work on the fundamental sport skills as outlined in Sport for Life. This competing objective with the Sport for Life model places coaches and sport administrators in a challenging position as they aim to support their athlete's immediate desires while ensuring athlete development is robust and safe (Sport for Life, n.d.). It is yet to be fully identified how these models impact the behaviours and particularly the conflict behaviours of leadership, coaches, and sport administrators who interact with all of these systems.

***What is the result of maladaptive conflict behaviour when the system structure is in conflict?***

Within Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict, the different layers interact in a bi-directional and non-linear manner; each layer influences the other. The system and sub-system conflicts that exists for minorities, such as marginalization, ableism and power imbalance influence and often conflate conflict experienced in relational and issues-specific conflicts (Bogart & Dunn, 2019). In both the para sport context and sport world in general, there is an over-valuing of competition instead of collaboration. For example, while the Canadian Paralympic Committee has tried to encourage athlete transfer between sports based on where an athlete's skills or ability to classify may be the most beneficial, coaches and sport administrators have not been able to compromise on letting athletes transition for fear of losing out on metrics that compromise funding, even though the athlete may be a better fit in another sport (Canadian Paralympic Committee Athlete Transfer Taskforce, 2021). Further to this, there is an urgency to name athletes to sport lists and progress them through the sport pathway in order to continue receiving funding – in some instances, para athletes' first experiences at competition of a new sport has been at the international or world cup level. Clearly, the desire to catapult athletes to high performance spaces combined with an overall lack of depth within the para sport system compromises proper development programming.

This competitive approach aligns with masculine attributes such as being assertive and power oriented; these attributes are valued in our greater societal systems (Mayer, 2015). According to Mayer (2015) competition is also aligned with a defense strategy – defense is protectionist and limits opportunities to be curious. This behaviour arises in sport systems (sub-systems) between stakeholders as information is withheld and there is a lack of trust and transparency between stakeholders (Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Roberts et al., 2020). This conflict behaviour allows leaders to retain power, but ultimately erodes partnerships that could lead to stronger resources and pathways.

Conversely, cooperative conflict strategies are assertive and collaborative (Mayer, 2012). The key highlight is that while both positions are assertive, the collaborative option, which is often undervalued because it does not align with protecting one's position, lends itself to win/win outcomes. There are very few examples of true collaborative efforts or leadership within sport or within our larger societal systems, partly due to our valuing of competitive win-loss outcomes and a defensiveness to hold on to whichever resources or way of operating currently exist. All sports are consistently competing for a pathway to funding, without being curious on how organizations could successfully align to achieve long term growth (Kikulis, 2013). According to Mayer (2015), it is clear the challenge with cooperative conflict practices is the requirement for stakeholders to share power and adjust to a narrative that does not contain a win/loss scenario. Rarely are these post-heroic collaborative approaches seen, as they are so far from the recognizable norm of current conflict behaviour, they become challenging to articulate, let alone promote and value. Instead, all stakeholders remain stuck in a cycle of maladaptive conflict behaviour.

When participants in sport experience maladaptive conflict behaviour, they lose the valuable opportunity to transform and grow from conflict. Mayer (2012) outlines common conflict behaviours we consider maladaptive and links them to poor system functioning. When the system or leadership engage these maladaptive conflict behaviours, participants are stagnated

as they avoid conflict using behaviours such as passive avoidance, avoidance through hopelessness, and avoidance by folding (Mayer, 2012). A common example of these conflict behaviours is outlined by Norman (2010) in the decline of women in sport leadership roles. The under-valuing of feminine and shared leadership attributes leads to isolation (passive avoidance; avoidance by folding) and an inability to challenge the systemic norms, with women and their associated attributes leaving leadership positions (avoidance by folding). Furthermore, Brittain et al.'s (2019) research in para sports shows avoidance behaviours also link to athletes with a disability and their coaches' inability to advocate for a system that would best support athletes with disabilities.

Roberts et al.'s (2020) study on factors related to non-accidental violence in sport expose how avoidant behaviours contribute to higher incidences of non-accidental violence in sport as the avoidant conflict competencies allow dominant values within sport to continue unchallenged. Roberts et al.'s (2020) review of 43 investigations into physical, psychological and sexual abuse of athletes found maladaptive avoidance strategies connect to common negative coaching behaviours that result in withdrawal and isolation by athletes, coaches and the leadership. Further, the dominant values associated with competitive and assertive (also defined as masculine) leadership are associated with power imbalances which lead to poor athlete and coach well-being as they experience psychological and/or physical abuse. Actors within the system who are not well versed in adaptive conflict competencies are at a loss to challenge the dominant values. One of the clear results of the study was that organizational (sub-system) tolerance is linked to a conformity to the dominant values within sport (Roberts et al., 2020). Clearly, coaches and sport administrators employ these behaviours as they feel helpless to meet the demands of the competing systems, they are involved in.

***What are constructive conflict competencies and why are they important?***

Mayer (2015) argues that to manage the complexities of conflict, a path that balances the paradox between the extremes in conflict is key to conflict transformation. The systems that sport managers and athletes participate in require management of multiple objectives,



stakeholders, and organizational layers. Key extremes that apply to sport are paradoxes regarding competition and cooperation, neutrality and advocacy, emotions and logic, as well as community and autonomy (Mayer, 2015). In para sport, competition for athletes that classify exist in a very small pool, yet robust cooperation on how athlete transfer could work is an identified objective of the Canadian Paralympic Committee (Canadian Paralympic Committee, 2021). Regarding neutrality and advocacy, as para athletes are often molded to fit into an able bodied pathway, coaches and sport administrators need to practice advocacy to ensure ableist ideals are minimized and a para specific pathway exists – yet in integrated sport systems, coaches often practice neutrality in order to reduce an isolated experience for the para sport system (Braye, 2013; Legg & Steadward, 2011). Coaches and sport administrators navigate these paradoxes in the para sport context often and, since there is no consistent structure or value set, have to navigate these paradoxes with little guidance or template. Skilled conflict managers are able to address the complexity and navigate the fine line required to interweave these extremes in conflict, which create a path forward (Mayer, 2015). In the para sport context, skilled conflict managers manage, acknowledge and address the challenges of ‘doing para’ in an ableist system, without undermining support from the leadership and funding partners. This requires an ability to manage the complexity associated with constructive conflict and enable the participants within the system to explore new solutions and engage in positive outcomes. Exposing and highlighting skills to manage the complexity of constructive conflict will be key to clarifying which skills are useful in advancing the para sport system and transforming versus stagnating conflict.

In Morrison’s (2008) research on nurses, the relationship between emotional intelligence and systemic conflict handling styles is examined. Morrison theorizes that long-term success and growth in the nursing field requires emotional intelligence to manage the individual and systemic conflicts (Morrison, 2008). Key clusters of emotional intelligence associated with better conflict management skills, as identified by Morrison, include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Morrison, 2008). There are comparisons between the

high-stake environments of nursing and sport, and these similarities lend to the need for similar conflict competencies regarding emotional intelligence. Coaches and sport administrators in sport who are able to employ strong self-awareness and emotional intelligence abilities will be able to address and expose the hidden values driving decision making in the sub system and remain calm when facing the often demoralizing and minimizing behaviour associated with hierarchical leadership (Rocher & Turner, 2008). Understanding how and when coaches and sport administrators employ these skills is fundamental to improving all coaches and sport administrators conflict competencies.

Key themes that relate to the description and research of conflict competencies in group settings are shared by multiple researchers. Mayer (2015) and Morrison (2008) identify empathy, shared objectives, and awareness as common undertones required to manage the complexity of conflict in large group settings (Mayer, 2015 & Morrison, 2008). Bunker and Coleman (2014) promote the ability to navigate interpersonal relationships, expanding beyond the individual ego-centric view of the conflict, and reducing hierarchy through communication and collaboration as tenets of group conflict management. All of these competencies require the ability to understand stakeholder views and use systems thinking to achieve growth. Clarifying how these competencies allow for coaches and sport administrators to navigate complex conflict will be useful for simplifying which skills are required at the relational and sub-system level.

***What leadership attributes promote constructive conflict competencies?***

Post-heroic, shared, and feminine styles of leadership all employ attributes associated with constructive conflict competencies. Bilal et al.'s (2019) qualitative empirical study examining post-heroic leadership at educational institutions in Pakistan shows that increasing agency leads to better conflict management. Agency is associated with the construct of psychological safety. Bilal et al. (2019) states: "taking charge involves [the] interpersonal risk of taking initiative for performance improvement," indicating that the trust created by post- heroic leadership leads to the ability for actors to exert their own power within their workplace,

regardless of position within the workplace. This trust stems from empathy, social awareness, and a promotion of interpersonal relationships.

Similarly, shared leadership that promotes diverse perspectives and an ability to empathize and manage multiple stakeholders leads to better conflict management. In the study of shared leadership on corporate boards, Brown (2014) indicates boards that function with a post-heroic style experience smoother operations and better decision-making processes in conflict situations. The attributes associated with this leadership style enable growth and have positive outcomes in regard to individual and group functioning (Brown, 2014). While these skills are fundamental to smooth functioning in a team sport environment, they are often underrecognized in the sport system since the metrics do not include indicators for growth. In addition, in the disability sport world, advocacy as a conflict competency is a strength as advocacy is essential to promoting the needs and objectives of any marginalized group. Advocacy can be seen as adversarial and unreasonable, but when employed with an emotional intelligence and cooperative mindset, can generate momentum (Mayer, 2012; Morrison 2008). Feminine leadership skills such as strong communication through conflict are linked positively with advocacy and enable the desired outcome of the advocacy initiatives, which contrasts adversarial advocacy that isolates stakeholders from each other due to the discomfort created by maladaptive conflict competencies. Sport ultimately exists to enable growth and human development, so strong leadership focused on development is key.

***If leadership styles that employ constructive conflict competencies are effective, why are they not utilized more by coaches and sport administrators?***

Unfortunately, sport is behind other sectors in the valuing of feminine, post-heroic leadership styles (Braye 2013) While the “power of the great man” no longer holds in most sectors, the heroic lens that is often applied to sport limits progress in capacity building (Paolilla, 1981). Sports scarcity for resources and sole valuing of performance on the world stage means many leaders operate and internalize the threatened, hierarchical approach (Braye 2013; Kikulis 2013). The threatened space lends itself to the valuing of combative approaches, especially in

conflict scenarios. For coaches and sport administrators who opt out of this threatened space, their interpersonal skills are often viewed as lacking the toughness and competitiveness to succeed (Paolilla, 1981).

While the benefits of constructive conflict competencies, and the leadership styles that use them, are recognized in other realms, sport is currently still modeling hierarchical leadership styles, resulting in maladaptive conflict competencies. The conflict competencies that are associated with feminine descriptors are unconsciously viewed as lesser (Walinga & McKendry, 2014). The analysis by Walinga and McKendry (2014) specifically exposes challenges that occur when “feminine” language and attributes are present in the business world. Essentially, sex and gender attributed to language including empathy, facilitative listening, growth, and sharing create a paradox between advancing the leadership style and battling the implicit bias associated with these competencies.

Work by Fletcher (2004) outlines the paradox between post-heroic leadership and more traditional leadership styles. Fletcher (2004) argues regardless of what we know cognitively, the implicit bias associated with gender and power undermine the attempt that shared, post-heroic, leadership aims to transform. Specifically, the style of leadership does not focus on the human as an individual, but rather as people who are defined by their relationships and effects on the system (Fletcher, 2004). The nature of the ‘invisible’ leadership style associated with post-heroic leadership means that we cannot empirically accept or see the benefits of this leadership style. However, this leadership style utilizes constructive conflict strategies by increasing the engagement of all members, using empathy, and encouraging social awareness of the system.

Specifically, in a para sport world, or space where athletes with a disability operate, the qualities of female leadership are crucial. Analysis by Eagly (2007) and analysis specific to sport by Norman (2010) outline how feminine leadership qualities embrace emotions, share optimism and generate excitement. In a disability world, where so often individuals are inundated with the narrative that they should not belong or cannot be competitive athletes, this alternative leadership

style can be empowering (Eagly, 2007; Haslett, 2020). The collaboration required in disability support to understand the disparate needs of the athletes and the ability to remain curious about new perspectives is transformative for athletes. Transformative leadership is directly linked to feminine leadership attributes, yet notoriously under-celebrated (Eagly, 2007; Walinga & McKendry 2014). The under-celebration is due to the masculine dominant roles that we have come to trust in sport and perpetuate a masculine advantage. While the feminine leadership style may be seen as more effective to outsiders, within the sport spaces it is consistently undervalued because of the masculine type of leadership we attribute to competent leadership.

Similarly, the collaborative, cooperative style of leadership requires a transparency that is very uncomfortable to the current leadership models sport systems are influenced by. Mayer (2012) states that cooperation is riskier because it requires a level of transparency that most leaders are conditioned to avoid. Brown (2014), and Walinga and McKendry (2014) highlight that masculine leadership means perpetuating an image of expertise and an “I am the ultimate authority / bearer of knowledge.” To express transparency in sport leadership can compromise the valued position of the leader and reduce the image of the leader holding all power (Brown, 2014). This aligns with a competitive conflict approach, where the defense ‘move’ is to hold knowledge, instead of share knowledge (Mayer, 2012). In a disability sport world, this is an incredibly challenging approach since leadership needs to be able to communicate with both athletes and the greater sport community in order to gain momentum due to para sports recent emergence. Lastly, unfortunately much of the leadership operates through a ‘persons of privilege’ lens where it can cause immense discomfort to acknowledge the advantage these persons have (Bunker & Coleman, 2014). The de-valuing of a community approach coupled with the privilege position that most leaders operate from minimize opportunities to connect, empower and face conflict head on in the disability sport community. The avoidance due to threat by leadership, possibly of exposing hidden values such as ableism, compromise coaches and sport administrators’ ability to collaborate with all layers for fear of exposure.

***What is the relationship between organizational effectiveness & conflict competencies?***

The dissonance between the competing sport and funding models at the sub-system level create conflict for those who operate within the sub-system. The relational and issues specific experiences of coaches and sport administrators, and all stakeholders, can be linked to the inability of the sub-system to address the competing values and subsequent conflicts that arise.

There is a relationship between the funding models, organizational effectiveness and behaviours of the coaches and sport administrators in regard to system functioning. Rocha and Turner's (2008) study exposed how coaches and sport administrators' conflict competencies impact all layers of the organization, from the athlete experience to the overall system functioning. The study exposed the contradicting views on what organizational effectiveness was – on one hand, managers did not view input-monetary resources as a key indicator of smooth organizational funding, partly because resources are secured by the Canadian government and therefore are outside the scope of the coaches and sport administrators' position (Rocha & Turner, 2008). While often, organizational goals centre on securing financial resources, usually through performance outcomes, coaches and sport administrators are balancing social performance, athletic performance, ethics and outcomes such as graduation rates or healthy athlete transition (Rocha & Turner, 2008). Clearly, coaches and sport administrators value financial and athletic performances less and instead focus on ethics or social performance (Rocha & Turner, 2008). Interestingly, this valuing could be linked to sport development models as these models largely inform the coach education system, which many coaches and sport administrators are exposed to. The competing values place coaches and sport administrators in positions of conflict as they often cannot achieve their performance deliverables when prioritizing or equalizing the social and ethical priorities.

With multiple deliverables, including performance, ethical, and social, organizations constantly experience push and pull to achieve these outcomes and require individuals to be able to manage the complexity. Putler and Wolfe (1999) examine collegiate athletic departments prioritization of deliverables. Their study demonstrates that conflicting and competing emphases

can have both positive and negative effects. The issues specific and relational conflict that arises is often as a result of the competing values experienced between the organization (financial success, performance) and the coaches and sport administrators (social performance, ethics). As this system conflict is exposed, effective or ineffective conflict competency skill building plays a role in system execution (Putler & Wolfe, 1999). Adaptive conflict skills will find opportunities to collaborate and align all deliverables, whereas organizations and the individuals within them with maladaptive conflict competencies will become overwhelmed by the competition between competing deliverables and values. As such, it becomes critical to examine the mechanisms that prevent these strategies from being deployed effectively. Research to identify and codify the type of conflict experienced and conflict competencies used to manage this conflict is necessary. The para sport system will benefit from clear conflict competencies to utilize when facing common barriers in the para sport system.

***How can the Insight Approach be used to explore coaches and sport administrator's behaviour?***

Jamie Price (2017) and Megan Price (2019) have developed the Insight Approach to explain how our consciousness acts when encountering conflict situations. The Insight Approach stems from the belief that when in conflict, we operate in a truncated, threatened space that mirrors our fight, flight and freeze responses (Jull, 2017; Price, 2017; Price 2019). Price (2017) and Price (2015) offer instead that the skills employed by the Insight Approach allow individuals to move from a truncated space to a space of curiosity where individuals raise awareness of their patterns of consciousness as well as enter new creative ways of exploring conflict to enable better conflict transformation.

There are two major components of the Insight Approach. The first is the Insight Loop. The Insight Loop is our pattern of consciousness that is responsible for verifying what we know, what we value and how we decide to act (Jull, 2017; Price, 2017). Price (2017) detail that in conflict, our experience in the loop often occurs in a truncated, constricted space as we experience threat. The act of valuing identifies to us something crucial is at stake. So often, the

response to our item of significance being threatened is to fight, flight, freeze or fawn (Jull, 2017). These common, yet ineffective conflict behaviours lead to entrenched and escalated conflict (Price, 2019). The first purpose of the Insight Approach is to draw awareness to our pattern of thinking and recognize the truncated, threatened space one is operating from.

The second component of the Insight Approach is through curious questioning, re-evaluating what we know, how we value it and come up with alternative options for how we may move forward (Price, 2017). While not historically applied to sport, according to Price (2017) use of the Insight Approach by individuals has led to stronger conflict competencies, including hierarchical fields like policing. Price outlines how once the Insight Approach is employed and the threat is minimized – each party re-evaluates what the threat is, and individuals are able to recognize conflict and operate in a less constricted and more helpful pattern. By a series of questioning in the Insight Approach, individuals become less certain about what they know is for certain, and instead enter a space of curiosity where critical thinking can be employed, and defensiveness is minimized.

In the sport context, it will be important to explore what is causing the threatened space and bring attention to the coaches and sport administrators loop of consciousness to understand what is significant, what decisions have been made and how valuing occurs. Further, it will be important to highlight in what context the threatened space is most prevalent. Using this pattern of questioning can help identify the true, often hidden values of the conflict as well as elicit positive opportunities moving forward.

### **Research Questions and Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this participatory action research was to explore conflict competencies deployed by coaches and sport administrators in para sports that enable or inhibit capacity building in para sports. Specifically, this study focused on what conflicts and conflict competencies emerge for coaches and sport administrators in the para sport system as they navigate the sport development models and funding models in Canada. The goal of the study was



to highlight what competencies could best support coaches and sport administrators to navigate systemic conflicts in sport. Due to the nature of participatory action research and through a constructionist approach with a disability inquiry in mind, participants engaged with the researcher through semi-structured interviews, allowing for set and emergent themes related to conflict, conflict competencies, and organizational capacity building to be explored (Berger & Lorenz, 2015). The study focused on participants' experiences and decision making over the last five years as well as perceived conflict and ability to manage conflict in the system moving forward.

### **Research Question**

#### ***Research Sub – Questions***

How do coaches and sport administrators negotiate the threat and fear created by the inherent conflict existing in the para sport system as they negotiate influences from the various sport systems?

1. What relational and sub-system conflicts do para coaches and sport administrators experience?
2. What specific values, priorities and goals are in conflict within the para sport system in Canada?
3. What strategies do coaches and sport administrators involved in Canadian para sports employ to mitigate, alleviate or transcend systemic conflicts?
4. What constructive conflict competencies can coaches and sport administrators involved in Canadian para sports utilize?

### **Desired Outcomes and Methodology**

#### ***Study design***

This study used participatory action research (PAR) as its intention is knowledge development of conflict experiences and conflict competencies of coaches and sport administrators in para sport that can be utilized by participants in the para sport world (Macdonald, 2012). PAR was chosen as the methodology for study design because the para sport world intersects with a minority, marginalized community. Enabling the participants to have a strong voice and ability to enact change aligns favourably with PAR. PAR allowed the

individuals' experience to be revealed and enabled actionable, informed decision making to occur (Caeilli et al, 2003; MacDonald, 2012; Yazid, 2015).

Further, the insights generated by the participants and the opportunity to re-frame and utilize the insights through PAR were beneficial to both the participants and the researcher for understanding how conflict competencies are and can be employed in the para sport space. PAR also speaks to the role of the researcher and participants as collaborators in data collection and analysis (MacDonald, 2012; Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Yazid, 2015). By utilizing PAR as the design, and including qualitative research methods in the collection analysis, the researcher allowed for flexibility and reflexivity in the data collection process. Further, the purpose of this study was to make meaning and understand experiences on a little known and studied topic in sport and particularly para sport through a general qualitative data collection process (Caeilli et al, 2003). Thus, this research was intended to be interpretive as its aims are to describe, understand and adapt the conflict experiences in para sports. (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Yazid, 2015).

The Nested Theory of Conflict was used as a theoretical foundation to both frame and draw out findings. The application of the Nested Theory aligns well with PAR and qualitative research. Merriam and Grenier (2019) are clear that qualitative research and a constructionist approach employs the perceived reality of the social contexts that shape the conflict, similar to system influences as outlined by the Nested Theory of Conflict. The study sample included individuals who encounter conflict at all levels (issues-specific, relational, sub-system and system).

Semi-structured interviews elicited stories from the interviewees in order to create a sense of safety, and better understanding how their process of valuing emerges (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). As Cooper and Endacott (2007) identify, storytelling allows emotions and experiences to be shared safely, as they are interwoven into how the story is experienced. The discussion was flexible enough to shift with the direction the participants choose, which is

important in PAR as the topic is a little studied topic and needs to be able to encapsulate the experiences of the participants and capture how the participants worked with the researcher throughout the study. The experience and diversity among the participants generated understanding of the different beliefs, systems and norms that contribute to the conflict experience (Yazid, 2015; MacDonald, 2012).

The study had a general information gathering phase, followed by semi-structured interviews. Following the first phase of data collection and analysis, participants were invited to reflect and explore conflict competencies within their workspace and then re-convened with a focus group for a second data collection opportunity; in this focus group participants were able to discuss themes that emerged and responses to conflict as identified at each stage of the collection process.

### ***Participants***

The study participants were coaches and administrators involved with para sport through various national sports organizations, as well as leaders at the sub-system level of the para sport system. Coaches and sport administrators are individuals who interact with athletes, as well as organization leads. Participants were coaches and/or administrators who have a responsibility to both support the athletes and report to a system and leaders who hold authority. Sport administrators may not directly interact with athletes on a daily basis, but they have some authority, decision making ability, or ability to directly impact the athletes' development experience.

Participants may or may not have currently been working or interacting with the para sport system in Canada, but participants met the requirement of having worked in or with the para sport system in Canada within the last 5 years. It was recognized that coaches and sport administrators are often both leaders and followers within their spaces and their experiences reflected this. Participants had a varied and often extensive history in para sport. The diverse experiences of participants across a wide range of sports were impactful for capturing a broad

picture of the para sport experience at this time. In total, 15 participants took part in the first component of the study. 11 participants identified as female; four participants identified as male.

Three participants had been involved in para sport for more than 30 years. Six participants had been involved for over ten years. Six participants had been involved for less than ten years. Across the years in the system, seven of the participants only worked with one para sport, and the remaining eight had multi-sport experience.

Some of the participants had experience as athletes or para-athletes themselves, spanning across all levels of sport. Some of the participants identified as a person with a disability. The participants who were previous or current para-athletes typically had multi-sport experience in para sport at the provincial or national level. As is typical, they eventually specialized in one sport.

Two participants held doctorate degrees in the social sciences. Ten participants were involved in para sport at the grassroots level, with some working in grassroots, provincial and national levels. The remaining five participants worked in the provincial to national space, with two solely focusing on the national space.

Throughout the interview process, participants were very open regarding their sport experiences as athletes, administrators and coaches. Many of the participants knew or knew of each other and made reference to each other when working in the sport system. It is recognized that the network is very inter-connected and that while the sport system expands across Canada, it is still a relatively small system where most participants know each other.

Due to the nature of integration of many para sports, participants were also involved in able bodied sports as well and found it relevant to share, link or connect their para experiences to the able-bodied experience. Similarly, many athletes often find ways to remain or become

integrated in sport once they finish their careers as competitive athletes. (Arbour-Nicitopoulpus, 2017). Thus, some participants had experiences as able bodied or para athletes themselves and chose to integrate those experiences into the research. From the initial semi-structured interviews, eight participants attended the focus group session. Three of the participants were male identifying and five of the participants were female identifying. All participants consented to having their identity known by the other participants and recognized that their confidentiality would not be maintained through the second aspect of the interview process. All participants were over the age of 18 and consented to participating in the research.

### ***Recruitment***

The researcher used various methods of communication to connect with study participants. All information on participants was tracked using excel programming to keep records of name, interest in participation, contact information and any disability accommodations that needed to be considered. Participants were recruited through workplace interactions and direct work contacts of the researcher, the Canadian Paralympic Committee Athlete Commission, social media connections such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and finally the unofficial para sport network in Canada.

The research included snowball sampling as a method for gathering participants in this study. Nonprobability snowball sampling was the most effective method for accessing participants (Naderifar et al., 2017). The first samples were identified through workplace interactions, social media and para sport networks as outlined above. Through these initial contacts, the researcher was able to ask participants to link potential participants to the study. Sampling continued until the researcher was able to achieve data saturation and capture a wide range of perspectives with no new identified insights coming forward (Naderifar et al., 2017; Tayler, 2015). It was acknowledged that there was a risk of bias in this method of sampling due

to homogenous attitudes between participants as a result of snowball sampling (Naderifar et al., 2017). However, the researcher attempted to mitigate this by designing interview questions that explored or identified the bias as well as acknowledged that the purpose is not to generalize the results but to gain deeper knowledge on the topic.

### ***Data and Method of Data Gathering***

The study began with semi-structured interviews and followed with a focus group with the participants to discuss their experience in the sport system and of conflict behaviours they engaged or experienced (Dane, 2018). Following the structured interview questions, the researcher used questions aligned with the Insight Approach (Price, 2019) to elicit further information from participants and gain deeper understanding of their experiences. The Insight Approach asked specific questions on how participants came to know, value, assign significance and make decisions based on their experience in conflict. For example, as fears were uncovered, specific questions were asked on how participants came to “know” what they perceived as a threat, was actually a threat. Following this, participants were asked to discern what was significant to them and how the significance of a conflict determined their response to threat.

The primary purpose of the interviews was to understand how the participants experienced conflict, skill building, and development of the whole athlete during their time working with them (Dane, 2018). Further to this, the participants were encouraged to center disability in their dialogue to uncover assumptions and normative practices that align with an ableist world (Lester & Nusbaum, 2017). In line with PAR, interviewees were asked to comment on what conflict competencies they believe will influence the system and were encouraged to utilize these approaches in their workspaces. Interviews were one hour in length. Interviews were recorded using a video recording software, Zoom. The structure of the interview began with basic information about the interview and study. Next, further introduction from the descriptive

information was gathered and the researcher took the opportunity to share her position, values and purpose of the study. Following this stage, the interview began with opening questions such as descriptions about the participants involvement in sport that focused on their story through the different systems to uncover how conflict existed and was experienced. The purpose of this stage was to establish “goodness” by reflecting on the relationship between the participant and the researcher (Tobin, 2004).

The final phase of the study involved a focus group in line with Participatory Action Research (Yazid, 2015, MacDonald 2015). Participants were invited to the focus group after at least one month elapsed between the last interviewee and the focus group start date. However, there was one instance where less than a month elapsed between interview and the focus group, due to participant availability. In the focus group, participants reflected on conflict they experienced as well as spoke to conflict competencies they utilized. The purpose of this was to allow the expertise and experience of the participants to generate recommendations for what conflict competencies are used in the para sport system. The focus group was an opportunity for collaboration to occur through the research process as well as enabled the voice of the participants to have an impact on research that could influence the systems they worked within (MacDonald, 2015).

Following the interview and focus group, participants had the opportunity to review their interview and retract, change or refine any of their responses, as part of the member checking process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This occurred immediately following the interview and before the report is published. Not only did this align with the consent and participation guidelines, but this also acted as a result checking practice to see if the participants agree the

report reflects their experience. Once participants reviewed their information, the researcher transcribed the interviews for data analysis.

Participants' identities have not been shared or published in the research (Dane, 2018). The researcher coded all names, institutions, competitions or other identifying factors in the research report. See Appendix A for Interview Guide. See Appendix B for survey description and consent forms.

### ***Data Analysis Overview***

The data was examined using content analysis. Following the transcription process, content analysis identified predetermined and emergent codes, and then sifted the coded data for themes and word patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). The researcher created a codebook that included categories stemming from the Nested Theory of Conflict and the Insight Approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). The codes were under four main categories, organized into higher order categories as both big picture and nuanced information was uncovered (Boeije, 2010). The first code was conflict as it occurred at the different layers within the Nested Theory of Conflict: issues-specific, relational, sub-system and system. The second code was value incongruities based on the Insight Approach separated into how participants experienced valuing, significance and response behaviours. Conflict behaviours, attributes, and strategies were the third set of codes and categories stemmed from Mayer's (2012) outline of cooperation vs collaboration, emotions vs logic, and maladaptive conflict behaviours (ex: passive avoidance). Lastly, data was sorted based on how it aligned with shared, feminine leadership versus heroic, masculine leadership. From the major codes, the researcher sifted through the categorized data to identify emergent patterns and themes relating to conflict competency as well as organizational health and capacity factors such as power, inclusion, diversity, communication and shared leadership (Megheirkouni 2018).



***Knowledge Mobilization Plan***

The information in this research was used to create a thesis project. The information will be shared with the participants as the results will identify constructive conflict competencies for participants to utilize in their workspaces. Opportunities for the research to build the basis of workshops or taskforces with the participants on conflict competencies in para sport will be explored. Results can also form the basis of presentations within the sport general and para sport community and be shared at conferences, in coach education material, and at sport summits such as SPIN. Through dissemination, research will also reach the funding partners associated with the sport community in Canada. The research and thesis can be summarized and shared to sport journals, Canadian Paralympic Committee, disability sport organizations in Canada, and sport organizations at the national and provincial level in Canada. Further, this research will be shared and have influence on the work of the researcher as her role involves collaborating with coaches and sport administrators involved in para sports in Canada.

**Results**

The codes in the research project were broken down into the major sections including Dugan's (1999) Nested Theory of Conflict and value incongruities based on the Insight Approach separated into how participants experience valuing, significance and response behaviours. Conflict behaviours, attributes, and strategies were the third set of codes and categories stemmed from Mayer's outline of cooperation vs collaboration, emotions vs logic, and maladaptive conflict behaviours (ex: passive avoidance). Lastly, data was sorted based on how it aligns with shared, feminine leadership versus heroic, masculine leadership, and response behaviours. Based on the semi-structured interviews, emergent codes included diversity and inclusion; communication, shared leadership and future recommendations, development pathway and funding.

**Nested Theory of Conflict*****Issues Specific***

Lack of skillset amongst coaches, administrators and personnel working with para athletes across the community, provincial and national para sport system was identified as an issues-specific conflict. In particular, it was identified that often conflict arises when the para athlete needs to learn the appropriate skillset to progress through levels of available competition. Often the grassroots instructors, who are often teachers, general sport coaches, or volunteers do not have the knowledge on how the various impairments interact and impact the athletes' physical, emotional or mental experience:

“A coach needs to understand the impairment and how that impacts our athletes physically, emotionally and mentally. They need to know how the athlete is going to move [in specific sport] and how their impairment is going to affect the known movement patterns, and yet our expertise is currently [only existing] at the National Sport Organization (NSO) level.”

Participants identified that the necessary skillset to teach fundamental movement patterns existed only at the national level. Further, parameters for meeting the definition of necessary skillset meant a certain level of coach education, and participants identified that often the current education and skill development for coaches available did not meet the standard required to develop para athletes at any point of access in the system. This creates gaps in skill development because the appropriate skillset rarely exists within the entry point to the sport or at the earlier stages of the development pathway. Further, lack of education opportunities and development opportunities for coaches targeting the earliest stages of the development pathway contributed to this conflict. While the ability to address this with the appropriate persons is seen to be a relational conflict, the actual gap in education and skill development was largely seen as an

issues specific conflict as it was not linked to affective conflict between stakeholders, but instead in substantive conflict where the necessary resources (education) were not available.

The next most common issues specific conflict was confusion and frustration with the ad hoc approach to classification as often it led to confusion for para athletes and the respective administrators. Upon examining the different explanations of the classification system by participants, as well as specific feedback from participants it was obvious there is no clear and consistent mechanism in how athletes were classified. The classification process varies from sport to sport, and from province to province.

Further to the confusion of how to access the system is the resulting allocation of resources that is situationally dependent on classification. There are obvious inconsistencies from sport to sport, organization to organization or location to location. Coaches recognized that this confusing approach to classification impacted para-athlete's access to the sport because dependent on the classification process, they may only engage the sport up until they come up against inconsistent or unclear classification processes. Further, the inconsistent requirement to have classification impacted future resource allocation. and investment in the para athlete. This meant that often in order to receive classification the athlete needed to hit a specific performance metric. This was described as a cyclical process that often does not allow an athlete to acquire the necessary coaching and resources to achieve a performance that would "unlock" more resources that come via an official classification:

"I think what I end up having to do is work through a lot of hurt emotions of people not feeling like they're supported below the talent identification level. I do believe that we should be supporting athletes more. [However] there's a lot of different people to support in a lot of different ways. I think that as a system, we have more opportunities within

Canada for classifications, and competition, that would reduce some of those barriers because before someone gets internationally classified, they have to cover their whole expenses to go down. And so, [United States] would be the closest location for someone to be eligible for international competition or even to be eligible to get a ranking. But we don't cover any of those costs until they've reached a certain performance standard. And so, it's like well how can I reach this performance standard if I don't have access to this and then you're not supporting me to go get this International Classification that I think happens in a lot of other sports too. And that International Classification opportunity I think it's probably one of the biggest limitations, where if we provided funding, maybe that would help.”

The issue of classification becomes an ad-hoc, chicken versus egg scenario that often creates frustration for all stakeholders in the process. The issue of classification is also a nuance to para sport that does not exist in the able-bodied sport system.

On top of confusing nuances to the para sport system, administrators and coaches identified that often external partners or partners within the integrated sport system rarely understood the specific challenges that occurred solely in para sport. For example, transposing regular recruitment systems onto the para system rarely worked given the small athlete pool, since only 25% of the population identified as having any kind of disability (Morris et al, 2018), and an even smaller pool engages in sport and recreation in an adaptive setting. This lack of ability to exist in a system that fits the target pool results in poor resource allocation and creates confusion for athletes and coaches as they try to access resources within a system and network that doesn't understand their specific needs.

### ***Relational Conflict***

Relational conflict in the para sport system occurred between perceived levels of power or expertise. Given that one of the largest identified conflicts was a lack of skillset or expertise at the club level, often individuals with expertise are in situations where they are upskilling the clubs and programs. As one participant who is responsible for community development stated, “we say the club should be doing X, Y or Z but the [provincial or national sport organizations] never have conversations with the clubs to let them know that they are assigning that accountability or resources, and everybody is just pointing fingers at everybody else.” In these situations, participants knew they struggled to create rapport and an open dialogue as there was the perception that clubs were not open or willing to engage in para sport. There is an irritation by those responsible for para development that clubs are not openly engaging in learning how to best serve adaptive sport.

Conflict also often occurred between perceived levels of power within the administration of each organization. Participants often feel not listened to or respected by their peers who are higher up within the organization hierarchy. In the rare instances where participants are engaged appropriately, they have an indisputable expertise and previous relationship that bordered on friendship with their higher ups:

“What helped me in my position are my relationships with all those who have power above me. I could have conflict with them, but I started those relationships in a different light so I was able have more friendship type where we’re just having conversations and it’s morphed into this working relationship which I think has some power to it. And it helps avoid some conflicts because people know my background, they know where I’m coming from and they know I’m not trying to be a jerk.”

Very few participants had the characteristics that would meet the definition for “indisputable expertise” which meant that often their experiences and perspectives were not sufficient for appropriately challenging higher ups. As mentioned in the issues specific conflict, gaining this expertise is hard to get since there is not a clearly identifiable or recognized skillset that can garner the appropriate respect. This lack of respect or ability to collaborate contributes to frustration between layers of leadership within the organization, resulting in relationship breakdown and relational conflict.

### ***Sub-System Conflict***

The largest sub system conflict was between the expectations of adhering to the long-term athlete development pathway, including implementing programming that reflects the proper stage of development for the athlete, and the need to meet performance deliverables to secure ongoing funding. Funding is associated with the imposed high-performance metrics by national sport organizations, Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Committees, Own the Podium, and Sport Canada. The funding is largely allocated towards training time, appropriate coach salary, competition, integrated support services such as nutrition and mental performance consultants. However rarely do the funds become allocated for services required at the earlier stages of the long-term athlete development pathway. While in principle, funding these high-performance services is logical, in reality, there is not enough demand or capacity in the performance athlete pool fund the earlier stages of the pathway, thus inhibiting proper progression to the spaces that are funded. Coaches and administrators admit to bending the performance markers for the athletes to access the aforementioned performance funding, which means athletes are propelled onto a pathway sooner than would make sense per the development pathway:

“We should not be able to take an athlete and in 29 months, put them on a Paralympic team. Because, again, this is where we come in conflict with the long-term athlete development pathway. The LTAD tells us, eight to 12 years to get an athlete to the international level. Para sports, on average, do it in five, and that average includes some people who did it in one.”

Instead, in order to secure funding, athletes have to reach a stage that warrants the necessary resources in a faster timeline than they are able to progress through the objectives of each stage of the LTAD:

“I've seen a lot of people be persuaded into a system they weren't ready for because we are so tied into the funding after the 2010 games that there are a lot of expectations on sports to be, you know, on the podium and to put more athletes on to these teams. The ripple effect I saw was expectations on a lot of organizations, including disability sport organizations, that became tasked with all of a sudden, playing in the high-performance sector to try and put athletes onto a pathway that would lead them to the national team.”

However, achieving these performance versus development metrics ensures the funding, and therefore, access to the sport, continues. This created conflict for administrators and a conflict with the sub-system level because they are inappropriately advancing athletes in order to rationalize maintaining funding.

Further, the misallocation of funds and resources led to confusion between the club level organizations, provincial sport organizations and national sport organizations. Research participants reported the expectation for the athlete to develop along a performance pathway, but acknowledge the athlete is still only identified at the local or provincial level. They feel

challenged in assigning or assuming accountability, especially when they feel their services or mandate do not align with the performance expectations of the national sport programs.

Further, athletes become acutely aware of the metrics they need to achieve to ensure access to their sport continues, however when the provincial sport organization or local sport organization was challenged to provide the resource, the athlete often becomes frustrated with the slow access to equipment, coaching, or programming. This contributes to the chicken and egg scenario where in order for the athlete to progress they require resources, yet their only option to be good is to self-fund or be “snuck” into the performance system. The participants reported a large proportion of athletes simply leave a sport or move to a sport that provides resources, equipment and programming at the appropriate level, therefore diminishing the athlete pool and retention in various sports.

### ***System Conflict***

Lastly, system conflict exists largely within the integrated sport models due to both a lack of understanding of the para sport sphere, and the resulting lack of investment into the necessary para specific practices across Canadian society. Lack of investment, education, and awareness exist across all levels, from municipalities and clubs, to provincial and national sport organizations: “disability is the only one that we're not necessarily born into but any single one of us could fit into that group in the future, and yet we're still not invested in making changes towards our potential future self.” Research participants often attributed the low investment to a lack of inclusivity and accessibility across Canadian society in general.

This is first seen in our systems that all individuals access – the school system, medical system and community spaces. Often, schools were reported to not have the appropriate education and infrastructure to appropriately support and include youth with a disability:



“Even children with impairments are not included to the same degree as a mainstream child. They sit on the sidelines more often than not, they're not invited to play at recess, or they have the social constructs that say oh you're different. At every level when we talk physical literacy, athletes with an impairment are at a disadvantage, and the messaging is: this is not inclusive.”

At the very base of the sport system, where sport and physical activity is explicitly linked to play, yet is still exclusive, all stakeholders, including participants, lost opportunities to learn best practices for inclusive programming.

Similarly, participants shared the medical system lends to confusing messaging due to push and pull between “do no harm” which is commonly associated with persons with a disability who are often perceived as fragile, and the demanding nature of performance sport that dominates our sport rhetoric. This contradictory messaging confuses stakeholders and impacts their decision making and held opinions regarding para sport.

### **Price's Loop of Consciousness**

Participants were asked to identify how they valued, found significance and made decisions based on their valuing and thinking. It was challenging to illicit answers in this section in a manner that fully aligned with methods from the published literature on the Loop of Consciousness.

#### ***Valuing***

This code was challenging to identify in the coding process. Price's definition of valuing is when a behaviour or situation illicit a response or a threat, which indicates value. Many participants were not able to identify their own process of valuing, but were able to identify anxiety, fear and avoidance as major responses to events and perceived behaviours of their peers:

“People are irrational because some of these fears are like, from where I sit you are the last person who has to worry about this, and yet they hold on to that in everything they do. You have to build relationships, so that, even with this individual I can work my way into their inner circle in slowly.”

There is link to a feeling of frustration with peers and colleagues' anxiety and fear regarding change in the para sport system. Threat showed up when participants reported not being heard or listened to:

“You learn pretty quickly that you can talk until you're blue in the face. But if no one values, they don't care or listen. They're not going to implement anything or work towards anything because they don't have the time. They don't have the resources and they're not investing in it.”

Participants valued being heard, and therefore respected in their expertise. The common rhetoric of not having their perspectives or recommendations included indicates that they value being seen as a contributing member, but rarely feel seen or included as such.

### ***Significance***

Participants identified that the value response of fear and anxiousness is strongly linked to a fear of funding. Funding, and ensuring that the appropriate resources continue to be allocated to the organizations were commonly linked to funding fears: “Everybody is motivated by where their funding comes from.” Being able to provide resources and financially support their positions, or the programs they are responsible for was key to the participants. The lack of feeling valued in what they have to offer, combined with a fear of losing funding is significant in the sense that it diminishes their perceived ability to impact the system.

Further, the anxiety and avoidance identified in valuing is often linked to feeling undervalued, where many participants report that they don't believe many external stakeholders

value the para sport system, or persons with a disability in general. This lack of valuing and relationship to funding is significant in the experience of threat, anxiety and fear identified in valuing.

***Response Behaviours***

Response behaviours varied by time in the system. It was commonly noted that participants who were newer to the system or had not been entrenched in the para sport system reported a greater openness to collaboration and “willingness to have conversations.” The responses associated with newer, less experienced members of the para sport system often aligned with not taking certain decisions personally. Instead, they viewed their work with other members as opportunities to evolve and move forward.

Many participants who had spent more time in the para sport system, namely 10 – 15 years, reported a comfort and confidence with speaking out and challenging their counterparts as a response behaviour. They reported valuing direct and straightforward conversations with both the athletes they worked with and their colleagues:

“Knowledge and experience in understanding the system has allowed me to feel more confident and speaking out and calling people in to conversations. I'm also very outspoken and so I guess I usually call people out, but I don't think that that is necessarily something that's easy for everyone. Having said that, again, I made sure that I was getting the support and the backup of the people above me in the organization. The few participants who used advocacy and direct dialogue commonly identified having support from equal or higher colleagues within the sport system. They recognize that support from high performance, the CEO, or the high-performance director is necessary to be heard and respected in decision making. Some participants recognized that in previous

roles they have not had this support and it impacted their ability to generate buy in with the community members they serve.”

Another common response behaviour was to place emphasis on relationship building and fostering opportunities for open dialogue. The purpose behind this is to create opportunities for open dialogue where diverse views on the para sport system as a whole can be included:

“What I've been to have been trying to do is make people talk to each other a little bit more. So that was the whole inspiration and motivation in creating [project] is to try and make sure that everybody feels that they have a space within our pathways. It requires a lot of bridging of relationships and understanding where everybody fits and understanding that and kind of changing the narrative of who's responsible for what.”

Since it has been recognized that there is so much overlap between the different system processes, and often an overlap or delivery of many stages of the athlete development pathway, fostering relationships is viewed as a way to create common understanding and better collaboration as a response to conflict with delivery metrics.

While relationship building is a positive and common response to conflict, avoidance was an equally common and prominent response within the para sport system. Avoidance was seen in a lack of desire to move up professionally in the system:

“We're always so worried about our little piece of the pot you don't want to be the squeaking wheel, or one that rattles the bus door and that's one of the reasons why I never move up into our executive direction position, and I have no interest in that administrative side and bureaucracy, and just trying to constantly be knocking on the door, and making sure that it's not as bad as it used to be. There is an opinion that participating in higher up positions within the organization will not be a positive or

impactful experience, and also that voicing dissonance or change is not a safe or productive option. Instead, participants feel secure, and more impactful, within their current position and avoid the necessary conflict to instigate change by avoiding career adjustments.”

Participants reported feeling like they could have a larger impact in their current role, which is partly attributed to the fact that many ‘types’ of athlete exist in the grassroots and provincial level spaces. Operating in the provincial and national level spaces led participants to feel confined in working with the type of athlete they felt they needed to support to achieve a metric, causing them to feel restricted by the performance metrics that don’t fit the make-up of the athlete pool who they wanted to support in order to grow their sport.

Similarly, avoidance stemmed from fear of voicing concerns around funding:

“Funding every year is very precarious, and we're getting grants from different places, and everybody is trying to massage their way into their boxes and fit into the reporting whether it's via sport and fitting into the rubrics and all the deliverables. We are just out always nervous about that and there's never that comfortable feeling of okay, this is what we can do for the next 10 years. Because we don't know, and it really lends to poor planning. If you ask me, you're always threatened and all you can think about is the next year, and if I'm going to get my funding next year.”

Funding was a common frustration within the sport system, and in particular the metrics associated with the funding that each organization receives. The stress regarding funding and the ability to challenge how the funding is allocated caused coaches and administrators to stretch what they felt was best to do with their allocation of resources. Avoidance was the common conflict response as the opposite, engagement, was seen to cause too much disruption, especially

in a system where time is short and many individuals feel overwhelmed by responsibility.

Regarding funding, participants also expressed dissatisfaction with how short term the funding planning appeared to be instead of adopting a long-term strategy to look at the system design.

### **Mayer's Conflict Behaviours**

#### ***Cooperation vs Competition***

Given that there are usually low numbers of para sport participants, which was largely attributed to the demographic identifying as having a disability being fairly small in Canada, competition existed between members organizations for participants. Especially when an athlete is talented, and easily classifiable, the competition escalates. As one participant stated, “[the] para sport community is so small that we tend to be very clingy. So, the second an athlete walks in your door the claws come out, they sink in and this becomes your sport. It’s very proprietary, and almost predatory, yet athletes aren't getting the opportunities to build physical literacy.” The requirement to recruit and support many athletes, along with the small athlete pool means that organizations become territorial with the athletes they support, which limits opportunities for collaboration. However, participants recognized that often the competition for athletes is fruitless, as the style of recruitment means recruiting athletes back and forth between organizations instead of developing new and more athletes.

There was a large desire to collaborate between organizations and find opportunities to share responsibilities. Participants recognized that there are many shared deliverables that could be accomplished together, without compromising access to athletes. Many participants reported sharing resources and events in collaboration with other organizations, with some sports co-hosting multi-sport try it events or camps. This largely occurred between sports organizations

that had athletes with similar classification types, or between clubs and provincial / national sport organizations as they all wanted to provide services to a small pool of athletes. In comparison to contexts where there was high competition for athletes, organizations were more willing to collaborate when they recognized that their deliverables were by and large the same and did not require an athlete to identify with a sole organization, thus sharing responsibility created efficiencies.

Further, there was a recognition that collaboration was a necessity in organizations that covered a wide demographic or geographic area:

“We recognize that the PSO can't be everywhere. We need other people to run those programs, and so sometimes I think that means lowering your standards in terms of who's running them. But, providing with them with the education and continuing to upscale them so that in five years they're the person that you want in that program but accepting that for the first couple of years, they're learning. And so that might mean going to municipality and saying you, as a municipality should be serving everyone in your community through your recreation centre. Are you doing that? Because we're hearing from people in your community that you're not. Then we offer an idea and a way we could help you.”

There was clearly a desire to upskill organizations in order for them to support collaboration and program delivery. Participants were comfortable upskilling and educating partners within the system, knowing that in their efforts they were contributing to a coherent structure. As highlighted in the code, discomfort in acknowledging or navigating a perceived lack of skillset was challenging for administrators.

### ***Emotions vs Logic***

The use of emotion was largely seen as a positive, and much needed skill among participants. Many participants strongly identified with using compassion and empathy as they worked with athletes and partners. It was recognized that working in this space involves intense emotions, as many athletes have experienced trauma, and the system is less accessible than the able-bodied system given classification requirements and the high cost of specialized equipment. Participants identified strong skill in balancing emotions with clear, direct information on how to navigate the pathway:

“My philosophy is making sure someone has a positive experience when they try sport and as they move on through the pathway. And then, linking it back to what it takes to go to the Paralympics. And so, I use a lot of compassion, but honesty as well. I've never shied away from pointing to someone what the standards are to make it to the Paralympic Games. And acknowledging that yes, it isn't fair, it is expensive and there is a lot of costs associated, and here are just some of the ways that I can or can't support you along the way.”

Administrators recognize acknowledging and honouring athletes' emotions and being prepared for challenging and difficult emotions was key to navigating the system.

However, it was also reported that participants felt their fellow administrators or 'higher ups' within the organization operated without emotions, to the detriment of the athletes and the system. Often, this is attributed to maintaining a position:

“I do truly think that people who are pure administrators have to be calculated. I'm saying they'll do everything that's right up to something that might cost them their job. And that's pretty understandable logic. But that means that they will make decisions that aren't actually in the best interest of sport in general or the athletes and question, because they



might lose their job. So they're putting paying their own bill or feeding their own families, ahead of other people which is fair. I think coaches have a different perspective because unless you're the head coach of the national team, nobody gets paid in [sport], nobody gets paid half decent salary at all. I mean, most of us don't get paid.”

The threat and fear of maintaining funding or positions led counterparts to disregard the emotions of the athletes, and even other administrators in decision making. The logical approach is seen as being incredibly direct, and often uncompromising in situations where emotions are high or require the use of compassion. Participants reported this led to frustration, discomfort and avoidance by athletes, coaches and administrators alike.

### **Maladaptive Conflict Behaviours**

Avoidance and aversion to risk taking was identified as a common conflict behaviour. Participants identified that often system development became stagnant, and the system lacked the ability to change as para sport evolves:

“I think it's taken a long time for [decision makers] to get there but sadly the thing that's shown them this is our decline in international performance, and in Canada. We have this really bad habit where something works and it works so well that we just all jump on it. Then we do this one thing, and then we do really well. And then other nations find out about that one thing, and then they start doing it, and then we stop being top of the heap, because we're still doing the same thing. We tend to be reactive instead of proactive and ‘what's the next thing.’ So that hurts us. You just have to look at our results from Tokyo.”

It is recognized that when para sport found something new that led to success, the leadership committed to it long past the point that it led to success and continued to apply it beyond when the framework was of no utility at all.

This was also seen in earlier results as participants identified that listening to counterparts was not often welcome and there was an aversion to welcoming new perspectives or ways of doing. This aversion to new ways of operating is also viewed and linked to an aversion in decision making. In order to avoid making a mistake, many systems do not promote agency in decision making: “there's a certain inertia that happens in organizations. That if I was to describe it simplistically if I don't make a decision. I can't make a wrong decision. So consequently, some of these things, which may seem little bit weird, become monumental.” The inability to make decisions in of itself is an avoidance behaviour. Participants recognized that no decision making in the long term is harmful, yet in the short term is less threatening than engaging colleagues and persons with decision making power.

In instances where engaging stakeholders in the system was necessary, participants felt that escalating conflict was often the only way to achieve their objectives. Participants often identified a need for escalation as the only means that would allow for change: “we're flogging people to raise their awareness. That's not the best but it's the one that seems to work.” Shaming or engaging in conflictual, uncompromising conflict was often the only way participants could engage their stakeholders. Participants even identified using methods such as human rights complaints as a way to break up a stagnated system. There were few instances where intermediary methods were identified.

### **Feminine vs Masculine Leadership**

#### ***Feminine***

Feminine leadership behaviours are not behaviours only practiced by female-identifying participants but are instead linked to behavioural traits that are seen as inherently feminine. Clear in this research was an interest in sharing decision making where possible, active listening, feedback seeking, and low desire for recognition or to be viewed as the sole leader. Listening and

learning from athletes and counterparts was seen as both key to relationship building and skill building: “I have the expertise that gets me in the door, but that I'm also willing to listen to those that are currently in it, and I think that helps me to avoid some conflicts because it's really hard to argue with this is the way this person just experienced it.” Research participants stated that athletes and colleagues in positions that are perceived to be “lower” than them were viewed as having valid and critical expertise which was necessary to learning.

Listening and creating space for other perspectives is seen as a shared, feminine leadership trait. Further, it was used as a relationship building mechanism: “I asked for feedback a lot, I would engage with the athletes and I created mutual respect and trust. I could say hey, where did I screw up, where did this go wrong?” There was low ego in those who exhibited feminine leadership traits and a higher value placed on relationships with members from all levels of the system. Feminine leadership traits are largely linked to collaboration and a desire to truly engage with participants who they are responsible for: “I think that you have to be thrown into the trenches a little bit and you have to be on the ground, and you have to meet the people that you're working with to really grasp what it means to take care of athletes; it's really hard to argue with this is the way this person just experienced it.” Clearly, respecting the lived experience of participants by listening and then providing responses based on their experiences was service oriented and centered on shared decision making between stakeholders.

The ability to listen and incorporate experiences of participants was also seen as having low desire for ego and status, which was a feminine trait present in shared leadership. Participants identified that leading from behind was often their philosophy and allowed more members to be engaged and to trust the decision making of the coaches and administrators. Shared accountability was described often as a priority for those who were using feminine

leadership styles and participants felt it was important that their accountability to the athletes and stakeholders they serve was seen as high.

Lastly, given that collaboration and listening were high priority skills for those employing feminine leadership, inviting curiosity was a common response. Inviting curiosity, versus directing, was an often-employed skill:

“I invite others to build a solution, and to make space for those voices. And so, my approach is to bring curiosity to it. To ensure people feel heard is number one, to bring curiosity to it, and to invite people to build a solution together, which is not possible to do if you don't have curiosity to know what are the pieces that I'm playing with. And it's been very challenging because there have been people coaching the para program.”

Utilizing a curious approach was identified as a way to build trust and invite new and differing perspectives. Participants felt this approach allowed more experiences to be included and ensured more athletes and stakeholders had a positive experience when engaging in the system. Participants recognized that using the curious approach required fewer rigid ways of operating and an openness to structural adjustments.

### ***Masculine***

The most commonly mentioned masculine trait was directness. Directness was described as ‘to the point and blunt’ communication between stakeholders and athletes. Administrators and coaches identified that especially when speaking to athletes, direct and clear conversations surrounding expectations was critical. In working with colleagues, firm dialogue with uncompromising language was referenced often. Linking to the escalation identified in maladaptive conflict behaviours, participants identified using uncompromising dialogue and behaviours with stakeholders: “...regarding funding, they said you either follow the model we're telling you or you go on your own. So, we said we'll go on our own.” This behaviour is seen as

masculine because it does not easily link to collaboration or a merging of opinions and options. Instead, participants had to draw the line and were not in a position to share decision making or work together moving forward.

Participants easily identified the direct, uncompromising dialogue as masculine and recognized that un-collaborative behaviour was the expected and respected norm. Using a different approach was often recognized as feminine and foreign:

“It's a masculine response to conflict, going to tell you how it is, going to tell you what we're going to do, but if I tell you shouldn't be thinking about that, you don't think that you're wrong. And I don't know if a gender has been assigned to it, but I'm the only woman in this conversation right now at this level, and I'm bringing questions and a de-escalation model which is probably perceived as weak or as feminine and probably not valued in the same way.”

In these spaces, participants feel their feminine traits are foreign and underappreciated.

Participants often reported high confidence, or a ‘last resort’ scenario when they employed their shared, feminine skills. Participants identified that many of the individuals they reported to were male and were accustomed to masculine models of leadership, which was largely common across the sport system as a whole.

Lastly, discomfort with and avoidance of emotion appeared as a masculine leadership trait. Participants recognized it ‘hurt their values,’ yet still felt obligated to move forward with this set of behaviours and decision making. Participants recognized that they experienced discomfort with some of the actions they had to take, such as selling the PSO and NSO pathway to athletes in order for them to access resources. In certain situations, participants avoided challenging conversations: “I couldn't be in the room when we cut him because I didn't need to

be a blubbing idiot in the room.” A fear of expressing emotions and empathy is a masculine leadership trait that links to a fear of expressing weakness. Often this behaviour occurred when participants felt an overwhelming responsibility and simultaneously low opportunity to explore options to address the structure and situation. Since participants felt they could do little to influence the system to benefit the athletes, they felt hamstrung and struggled to reconcile the value conflict.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

### ***Diversity***

Interestingly and surprisingly, diversity, a pre-determined code, was not found or mentioned in the research. It is important to recognize that a lack of diversity being discussed by participants is important in of itself.

### ***Inclusion***

Inclusion as a concept was largely considered a basic attribute of the para sport system, and most participants had a desire to foster an inclusive space with room for all impairments, organizations and sport pathways. However, many participants identified that the Paralympic model is in actuality, an exclusive system: “Paralympics are not inclusion. It's very much exclusive.” Classification and high cost of sport participation were identified as the most common barriers to inclusivity. Given that a certain impairment or demonstration of athletic skill is largely required to access resources, para sport was not seen as an overly inclusive sport system. Further, in the general sport and physical activity systems (school, recreation centres, sport teams) the lack of inclusivity is common: “there are less opportunities for athletes or individuals with impairments in sport in general.” The lack of opportunity combined with strict requirements to access resources limits opportunities for true inclusion. Participants identified

the exclusiveness of the Paralympic movement as paradoxical with what many of them want to achieve in their respective organizations.

### **Communication**

Communication was one of the most strongly identified positive conflict behaviours among participants. Communication is valued two-fold; first as a requirement to addressing the challenging nuance of para sport and the exclusivity of the system. Second, communication was reported to be highly valued across coaches and administrators as a means to leveling the power dynamic and ensuring athletes are included in decision making. Communication was seen to be a tool to incorporate the lived experience and expertise of athletes in the system: “I would have never known any of this context if we hadn't met in person and had an open conversation. And so, it was a real eye-opening experience because I was able to validate her experience, because we're trying to shift away from these are athletes to people first.” Participants recognized transparent conversations with athletes were required to help navigate a confusing and complex system. Further, communication was seen as a sign of respect to the athletes accessing the system. Participants reported that often athletes are treated with a patronizing approach that often does not listen to the athletes as they advocate on how their own development experience through sport should be. Athletes' advocate for the equipment they need to perform the sport safely and effectively and are often told that their expressed needs are inappropriate without having a conversation. In situations where coaches and administrators consulted with athletes, athletes felt they could trust and fully engage with the process. In situations where athletes were not authentically consulted, they felt disrespected, which created a lack of trust or willingness to engage further.

While the value placed on communication was high, and utilized in certain contexts, there was also a recognition that communication, especially between differing levels of power, was under-utilized or the stakeholders in the system were not investing in communication enough. Above all resources, the ability to communicate was seen to be a tool that should be used to streamline the system: “I actually think the biggest place to invest right now is not in [equipment]. It's not [equipment], it's not a coaches training event, it's in the communication plan. To the best of my knowledge this hasn't been done.” Many individuals link strong communication to trust and relationship building yet recognize many leaders do not know how to or choose not to invest in building the appropriate communication channels and skillset.

However, there were instances where this communication is utilized. Often, clubs and provincial organizations, or similar disability sport organizations are trying to serve the same demographic: “Sometimes with grants you as the club and PSO or sport organizations might be competing for the same grant. But oftentimes just communicating with each other you figure out who is best able to utilize and has the best chance of receiving it. And sometimes you can form a partnership.” Open communication between disability sport organizations in competition for similar funding allowed organizations to collaborate and partner. These communication skills also linked to shared achievement between organizations.

### **Shared Leadership**

For many of the administrators and coaches in the para sport system, it was clear that shared leadership was generally a requirement to success in the spaces they had direct control over. Generally, participants reported a lack of education or on-boarding as they began their roles and so acting in close, all-knowing manner, would have restricted progress:



“In shared leadership, [I was] really relying on those around me that had been there longer. And so it's interesting that you you've picked that up or you point that out because in my experience in this hierarchical the executive director, CEO, and down to the positions that I've held don't know that stuff and so I've never relied on them to tell me how I needed to show up in a para sport world. I've relied on those that have been working either in disability support organizations or that been working around disability sports for a long time, are really going way lower and talking to the participants. I created really good respectful relationships with athletes and talk to them at on a pure level and that's allowed me to show up in leadership spaces better, because I can talk to them and understand what their experience has been, and also know that not everybody has the same experience... giving the athletes the respect as they probably know their space the best and speak to it the best. That's another piece that really fits into shared leadership, because it's, it's hard to kind of get that expertise when people don't have the title.”

Participants felt the spaces they operate in require a levelling of the power dynamic to authentically engage athletes and stakeholders; otherwise, athletes feel patronized and disenfranchised when their perspectives are not included.

Further, utilizing shared leadership was a mechanism for knowledge building that doesn't otherwise exist in a system where there is little education on para sport. Many participants identified that they had no formal education in para sport, and those that did often were educated from a physiology or health standpoint, and not on organization dynamics or development, thus relying on feedback and information from those already entrenched in the system to understand how to operate within the system.

**Future Recommendations**

There were two major funding recommendations that aspired through the coding process. The first was to re-allocate funds in the para sport system to create robust support at the grassroots and earlier development pathway stages. The second was to create meaningful integration and support at the grassroots level between organizations and across disabilities.

Many participants identified that they are often up skilling clubs, organizations and coaches at the grassroots level who find themselves supporting para programming without robust knowledge and expertise. Investing in education and meaningful, well-resourced positions at the grassroots level was identified as an important recommendation because participants felt well-resourced positions would enable better retention.

Meaningful integration was viewed not only as integration between individuals with and without disabilities, but also as integration across disabilities. Participants recognized that especially across the grassroots level, a large portion of program participants had intellectual disabilities. However, the organizations were not in a position to support them because the funding was usually only allocated towards classifiable physical disabilities, which were usually the smallest demographic that wanted to access the available services:

“Whereas at the grassroots level adaptive [sport] is open to everyone, and the majority of the people that were in our membership were had intellectual disabilities or autism or some other form of cognitive disability. And so, they were the bulk of our membership, but we would be hosting these events that were funded to put people in on team for classification.”

One participant noted that they appreciated when they lost funding because they were able to serve a more inclusive demographic, which they felt aligned better with their purpose and vision for para sport.

Further, this meaningful integration also represented a desire by participants for more organizations, especially local community programming, to include equitable support programming for persons of all disabilities. Participants identified that this would look like programs being able to accept persons with disabilities into existing programming, while also being able to offer specific adaptive programming that provides meaningful and positive experiences. It is recognized that both of these types of programming are usually non-existent at the early levels, which forces programs with different mandates to provide support simply to allow access.

### **Development Pathway**

The major frustration with the development pathway is that while all stakeholders are largely aware of the proper pathway, often stages are fast tracked or skipped for the sake of achieving short term funding deliverables. Especially when classification is involved, the progression of an athlete through the pathway is deemed unhealthy by participants:

“The Paralympic movement is supposed to be about finding a place for everybody, that's why a classification exists, so for example [X] team, there's a place for different physical abilities on the team. But what happens is it still becomes exclusive and so it's really hard to be both of those things because of course you're still going to look for the person at the top of each classification system because the Paralympics are about high performance and winning. So, I think that has been crew trickled down, you're out the system. So now we have directives from the national sport organizations to find these kinds of super

young athletes. And I think that that then puts pressure on the PSO's and the clubs to support those individuals and to find those individuals, but there are also all these other people that need support to enter the pathway. And the reality is that just because someone has the right physical attributes, doesn't mean they're necessarily going to be the most amazing athlete. And I think we miss people, because we don't recognize, or we don't give them a chance to show their potential.”

Participants recognized that this fast tracking exists across all sport, para or otherwise, yet it is thought to be more detrimental in para sport as it discouraged athletes to continue in an already small pool.

Further, participants identified that a true para specific system does not actually exist. Participants shared that instead, too often the existing sport model was ported onto the para sport model and often did not fit the needs or desires of stakeholders in the para sport system. One participant would like to see the para sport system be created from a blank slate that exists to support the needs of the demographic it serves. Their vision is a system that values the bodies of persons with disabilities:

“Para people have able bodies as well. They just classify them as para athletes. And we've always taken this model and said okay how do we adapt that to para. We've never just taken a blank page and said, what do para athletes need. That is a shortcoming and I have not seen that we have any experts in Para sport, who have joined us to contribute to a para [sport] model. I see that we have people from classic [sport] who have then sprung over into the Para space, and then unknowingly brought biased opinions, patterns and set up models from classic rowing into para and said okay well let's just make this para as opposed to starting organically from, what do we need for para? Para athletes are in high

demand. By which I mean to say that there's a number of sports that they have available to them to choose from, many, many more opportunities available to them, then classic [athletes] that really come up through that pathway and it's so classic of parallel [sport] that each situation is unique, and the system is not set up to deal with a person with a unique situation. Maybe coming as a medalist and other sports and already an elite athlete who just needs to learn how to row. Maybe coming from a background in the military, and who really understands how to train and how to take direction and who expects a well-organized chain of command. and we have a conflict there because there a lack of understanding between equity and equality. And we keep trying to do things that are equitable, but it does not create equality.”

Clearly, there is a feeling that the current system is not implementing equitable practices or in a position to listen to recommendations for the diverse needs of the para sport system.

### **Funding**

Three distinct components were identified with funding throughout the interview process. The first was that the funding structure should be adjusted to fit the needs of the current para sport system. The second was that often the decision makers with funding are out of touch or not in alignment with the administrators who are responsible for administering the funding, and lastly, the media presence of the para sport system severely impacts how and how much funding is allocated to the para sport system.

When asked the question: “how would you re-allocate funds to better support development in the para sport system?” there was a resounding response to better fund coaches and programs at the grassroots level. Many participants felt that the salaries and funding in certain grassroots spaces should be similar to the salaries at the high-performance level. The

adjustment in funding is recommended to create incentive for the experts and those who can develop para sport skill to spend time in the grassroots arena. Further, the sentiment is that if expertise can remain in the grassroots space, the expertise will impact a broader audience, therefore impacting retention across the sport arena.

While many participants recognized that re-allocation of funding was a key priority, they also stated having challenges being heard or appropriately listened to by “c-suite executives” who would be in a position to impact funding. This was attributed to a fear of short-term loss in exchange for long term gain:

“We could help 200 athletes across the country and in 10 years we will be a much stronger country. But because we are so focused or like nobody ever sees past the end of the quad, or at least doesn't make any decisions, right past the end of the quad and if that's two weeks from now then you only see two weeks in the future. Participants raised the issue that the above perspective causes a disconnect between the development and performance pathways, leading to misalignment. Due to the lack of listening to funding recommendations at the c-suite level, administrators report making do with the existing system parameters and pushing athletes into the (namely high –performance) funded spaces in order for athletes to access resources. Unfortunately, this becomes an internal conflict for the administrators and coaches, and an external conflict across stakeholders within the organization's structure. Participants identified that often athletes get caught in the middle of this conflict as they are not able to fit into the high-performance space as it is often the only space that has appropriate resources to even participate regularly.”

Lastly, participants felt negatively impacted in funding by the recruitment and marketing capacity of many organizations. With respect to generating funding and attracting funders, the

media norms surrounding para sport are not adequate for attracting funders and financial support. First, participants reported a simple lack of funding for para sport because there was a low media presence that does not place para sport in the public eye in comparison to the able-bodied sport system. Further, media imagery usually only portrays one narrative of para sport, which is often very heroic. This generated an image to the public that persons with a disability fulfill a heroic narrative, which creates a disconnect from the many types of para sport spaces that are available, including the many possible spaces for where funding could exist.

### **Discussion**

#### **Self-Location in the Research – Note from the Researcher**

At the time of submitting this proposal and starting this research, I was two months into a new position as a para coach and recruiter within the Canadian sport system. As I worked through this project, I grew in my role and ultimately left in a controversial manner as I was so disappointed with how the system currently operates. Within my career in sport, my previous roles had centered on talent identification and development within the able-bodied space – the issues are the same across the system but magnified within the para sport space.

I identify as a cis-gender, white woman with an invisible cognitive disability who appears to be very physically able. I have experience in the system as an able-bodied development and high-performance athlete, volunteer, volunteer and paid coach, and administrator. Throughout my tenure, I have experienced and challenged abuse, bullying and harassment, found myself in tenuous positions as an athlete advocate and advocate for myself in a system that consistently minimized and marginalized attempts to be a part of an ethical sport system that valued the individuals within it.

Through these experiences I constantly struggled with this hidden fear that I was raising issues that were not significant enough to warrant the attention they generated, or that I was pressing issues that would compromise resources and items that others valued more than I did (for example, challenging the para sport deliverables in the manner I did, not only had consequential implications for myself and my role, but for the athletes and partners I was responsible to). I take responsibility for my actions and apologize for any stress and abrupt, negative changes to the daily training environment.

I have always understood that I have operated in a privileged position within this system as I have had and taken the choice to exercise my values and ethics. My personal purpose statement also strongly influences my decision making and actions within the sport system: “my personal purpose is to use my wisdom and ability to foster trust and interconnectedness to build the community I am a part of and generate excitement for shared leadership practices within the sport community” Through this purpose statement, one of my main values is to “be just”. To be just, to me, means: “understanding and then doing the right thing consistently, oftentimes regardless of cost.” For me, doing what I felt was just, ultimately meant that I would choose to leave a job and people that I hugely enjoyed working with because I strongly disagreed with the metrics and deliverables assigned to my role as they did not also provide opportunities for us to provide care and positive experiences for all who entered the system.

This was particularly challenging as my immersion in the environment created an acute awareness of the negative and challenging experiences many athletes with a disability have, whether it is re-learning to trust their bodies following a life changing accident to fitting into a world that minimizes them because they are either seen as superhuman heroes or broken, pitied



individuals because their body does not reflect our socialized view as an athlete (this experience is comparable to many athletes of colour, indigenous athletes, transgender athletes, and the vast spectrum of body types that are athletes while being told they are not). With the athletes and community members I worked with, I was a partner in creating an inclusive, meaningful space free of discrimination and exclusivity, and this became increasingly challenging to do.

In this research, I had the opportunity to interview many partners, mentors, colleagues and friends that I value. I recognize that research of this kind may be challenging to read because it exposes experiences, shortcomings, and spaces where we are still stuck in an underdeveloped system. It also makes criticisms of the current methods of operations, and for that I apologize because I know there was trust in participating in this research with me, and to bluntly write out about systemic avoidance does not reflect the human, day to day experiences that encompass our roles. It is my hope that all stakeholders can see how this research points out opportunities for us to reflect on our skillset and hone it to more positively impact the people we care strongly about. It must be acknowledged that the participants in this research are the ones who are responsible for human care to the athletes within the system and they manage intricacies and complexities that those who hold the most power in the system avoid or pass on to those who have to work with athletes directly. Thus, I acknowledge how challenging and capacity draining these positions can be, and how ethics and ethical practices become incredibly complex within this space.

Sport to me has always been a medium to practice a skillset and exercise our ambition, to exercise a value system that reflects my ethics and beliefs in the greater world. Sport has allowed me to meet the most important people in my life, and is a medium for me to learn, reflect and have an impact in a social system. I believe sport can be transformative and it is my hope that

this research will expose inequities that can be adjusted to allow more people to have the positive experiences I had.

**How do the layers of conflict interact, intersect and impact each other?*****Sub System Conflict as the Main Influencer***

Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict was used to codify the conflict described by the participants. Conflict was clearly separated into issues specific, relational, sub-system and system spaces. There was a clear relationship between the layers of conflict.

The sub-system can be thought of the dominant models, organizations and frameworks that make up the Canadian sport system. These models impact the overall operations within the sport system. Many of the participants were very clear that the system they operate within is either part of, or modelled after the able-bodied sport system, and this in of itself is a sub-system conflict. This system is influenced by the major funders, advisors to the funders, including the Canadian Federal Government, Own the Podium, and our national sport organizations, including the Canadian Paralympic Committee.

The major conflict identified is that the para sport system is modeled after the able bodied, dominant system and thus funded similarly. Many administrators identified that the resources allocated, education received and deliverables that they are required to meet do not fit within their context or meet the needs of the athletes with a disability who want to access the system. Arbour-Nicitopoulos et al., (2017) recognized that the para sport system, due to para sports competitive pathways' infancy, has been unable to establish which norms and systems work best for the system, and instead cycle through various models to try and fit para sport within the current Canadian context. However, it's important to recognize that the system not meeting its stakeholders' needs is not due to just to its infancy, but also due to a perceived lack

of understanding of the true requirements of resource allocation, education and ability to take risks by the key decision makers.

Participants critiqued the para specific education, stating that this causes only those directly involved with para sport on a day-to-day basis to have a disability understanding and awareness. This specific education excludes an entire set of stakeholders who continue to remain unaware of the experiences of para sport, and therefore not in a position to understand the recommendations made by the coaches and administrators who work directly with the athletes.

The lack of education, awareness and therefore valuing specifically impacts the system by allowing disjointed pathways with inconsistent resource allocation to exist. The long-term athlete development pathway has been referenced as a framework for articulating research that encourages healthy sport and physical activity participation (Sport for Life, n.d.). Even this model was recognized by coaches and administrators as being too prescriptive by age and a linear pathway of sport development, which is not usually a reasonable expectation for para athletes. Participants recognized that this model, coupled with the unreasonable high-performance expectations and deliverables required by NSO's and the funding partners are huge reasons why athlete attrition exists across the para sport system.

While it was recognized that at the high-performance level, attrition is common, when the only space available to athletes was the high-performance system because we do not invest in grassroots or competitive domestic para sport, we lose the majority of our athlete pool. Legg & Steadward (2011) recognized the lack of domestic para sport as a major gap in their analysis of the Paralympic movement in Canada, and it is clear that the confusing values still contribute to a disorganized system over a decade later.

***Issues-Specific Conflict***

Many of the issues specific sources of conflict can be rooted in the gaps created by the sub-system conflict. Most common issues specific conflict was a lack of resources and lack of funds to develop the appropriate sport knowledge early on in the long-term athlete development pathway, and this is further challenging due to the inconsistency and confusion in classifying athletes early on. Gold and Gold's (2007) analysis of the history of Paralympic Games centered on the question of whether the Paralympic Games truly contributed to access for all. They found that widely accepted yet poorly executed process of classification contributed to the exclusivity of para sport. Participants reported this largely in their day-to-day interactions where they were unsure if they could allow someone to participate on the basis of classification, knowing that classification was often hard to get done without international exposure and could largely restrict an athlete's participation.

Further, the ability to classify is seen as a way to unlock resources. Thus, coaches and administrators are often dealing with the push and pull between allowing individuals to access sport the way they want and denying resources to doing so on the basis of classification. This has a waterfall effect on capacity, equipment availability, coach availability and an investment early on, knowing that often participants will need to be sent to the provincial or national organization to access classification and the associated resources.

These issues specific conflicts are linked to the fact that the sub – system introduced metrics and norms that are widely out of touch with the needs of accessing para sport at the grassroots level. Dugan (1996) was very clear that the layers conflict exists within are incredibly interconnected. The overarching decision making done without proper education, lived experience or inclusion of the appropriate expertise clearly contributes to the daily conflict experienced by the domestic para sport system.

***Relational Conflict***

Beyond losing the athlete pool, relational conflict is generated between the various organizations and stakeholders across the system. Participants recognized there was a frequent relationship breakdown between organizations and largely attributed this to strong power dynamics where the leadership within the high-performance systems held the most power, yet were often the least educated on para sport dynamics and had no lived experience to advise on para sport. Brittain et al.'s (2019) research demonstrated the challenge that coaches, and administrators have in navigating the extra role behaviours that are required in sport today. Often, what coaches and administrators value is ensuring that athletes and members have a positive experience and feel cared for within the system, which is often at odds from the objective metrics they are assigned. Administrators who were in the “middle” positions, where they reported up but also were expected to advise down to community programs reported tension and frustration between groups.

***System Conflict***

Further adding to the complexity of the conflict is the roots this conflict has in our society – systemic, intrinsic ableism and patriarchal behaviour – combined with the only mainstream knowledge of adaptive sports being the heroism of the Paralympics, does not allow for the decision makers or stakeholders in the system to truly understand or provide for the diverse needs of athletes.

As Brittain et al. (2017) shared in their analysis of the impact on ableism in para sport, the othering process for para athletes created a space where to participate in sport and experience the same joy, struggle, daily mundane routine, or the satisfaction of learning a new skill, requires a herculean effort, when for many persons with a disability the effort is not usually in performing the sport, but is actually in simply gaining equitable access to the activity. This common

narrative has a heroic theme, and as many participants identified, contributes to the exclusivity of para sport and the challenges in creating meaningful sport systems for the majority of athletes. Instead, participants identified that the system is set up to support the athletes, whether through classification, resource allocation, or simple positive regard, that are the most 'able' of their category, and often the most likely to be successful on the international scene and easily fit within a narrow pathway.

Due to the restrictive pathway, participants expressed frustration at the lack of integration of adaptive sport and disability sport education, which can be contributed to the lack of valuing and investment for equitable access to sport. Instead we invest in the sexy, heart wrenching story that makes it easier to accept persons with a disability because they have overcome something able bodied persons are afraid of, in order to access sport like their able bodied counterparts, at the exclusion of other persons with a disability who want to access sport in their own way.

This lack of understanding is largely attributed to the inappropriate emphasis on high performance and medal counts as the only indicator of success, which exists as a problem in able bodied sport and is magnified in para sport. As Kikulis (2013) shared:

“The relevance of international sport to social, political and economic priorities on a global scale throughout the last two decades has meant that “the power struggle between nations to win medals in major international competitions has intensified. This has led to national sport organizations and governments throughout the world spending increasing sums of money on elite sport.”

While the Canadian sport system writ large values medal performance over more holistic measures of performance, the Canadian para sport system amplifies this value system. As we know through Dugan's (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict, these systemic values impact our sub-

system, relationships, and issues-specific conflicts as the various levels are largely interconnected. Therefore, the issues specific conflict we see with classification, resource allocation or lack of proper resource distribution and poor investment in skill level early on in the pathway can be attributed to a value system that exists system wide across para sport.

**Lack of Diversity – a Red Flag**

Interestingly, while the pre-determined codes included a code for diversity, through the research there was only one code linked to diversity or lack thereof. Para sport has an incredibly wide spectrum of disabilities that access the sport, yet the references to including diverse perspectives, persons or systems was largely non-existent.

One explanation can be seen through the work by Brown (2014) and Walinga & McKendry (2014), on lack of diversity in board settings and leadership settings. Both bodies of research acknowledged the lack of diversity in board spaces contributes to knowledge hoarding and created an authority on what is best for the system, versus sharing power in decision making. The identified sub-system issue with including diversity in the decision making or embracing diverse perspectives is connected to the lack of diversity in leadership spaces, such as board settings, as identified by Walinga & McKendry (2014) and Brown (2014). In this case, diversity means incorporating more persons with a disability in the decision making, as well as ensuring there is representation across race, gender, and sexuality and other categories of intersectionality. While there is nothing conclusive about why the lack of reference to diversity exists, it would be important to examine in future research.

**How do para coaches and administrators experience and respond to conflict experienced in the para sport system?**

Through the research, there were strong examples of feminine, post heroic leadership attributes being utilized, but there was also a dominant discourse reflective of masculine, hierarchical styles of leadership and associated maladaptive conflict behaviours. In the examples where female leadership was used, in order for the participants to successfully utilize feminine leadership traits they had to have an extreme amount of credibility, whether it was having a disability, a specific education in the area or a combination of both.

While this may seem like an understandable list of pre-requisites, largely the decision makers were reported to not have a meaningful para specific expertise or lived experience. In the instance where decision making authority was granted to the those with relevant expertise, they were able to impact programming from grassroots to the provincial level in a manner consistent with both their values around para sport and in line with our current knowledge of age and skill level appropriate programming. This meant restricting exposure to national team coaches and programming when athletes first entered the sport, instead partnering with grassroots and provincial level coaches, and spending time sharing knowledge that was relevant to what the grassroots and provincial programs wanted to deliver, versus imposing ideals onto the organizations who did not ask for it.

While many other research participants knew and admired the work by the participant described above, they felt implementing similar practices targeted to “meet organizations where they are at” would be an inaccessible ideal, based on their lack of power in decision making. The inability to adopt the actions the participants admire reflects avoidant behaviour as identified in Mayer’s (2012) description of avoidance by folding, a maladaptive conflict behaviour.

### ***A feminine leadership example***

In another example, three participants identified that they worked within the same organization and spoke about the appreciation of their counterpart’s shared leadership style.



These participants clearly respected the grassroots, development and performance space each other operated in and did not ‘dip in’ to each other's spaces in order to meet performance metrics. They also respected and believed that by allowing grassroots and domestic programming to flourish, they would ultimately reap the benefits in the performance space.

The three participants identified they spent significant time strategizing how to respect the boundaries of each other spaces, while still meeting their respective deliverables. They clearly identified strong communication and collaboration as key skills they employ. As Brown (2014) outlined in her description of shared leadership, empathy, facilitative listening skills, and strong, inclusive communication skills are seen to be key tenets of shared leadership.

The above participants, without prompting, identified all of these skills as key to their achievements within the organization. Their deliverables impacted all layers of programming, from grassroots to performance and it was clear that they felt strong agency over their deliverables and projects, exactly as Bilal et al. (2019) identified would happen in spaces that encouraged transparency and non-hierarchy between members. Interestingly, these participants also felt strong agency to use empathy with the athletes with whom they worked and prioritized transparent communication and relationships with the athletes. These participants were strongly opposed to the common practice of not having the challenging conversations with athletes to avoid discomfort or harm, which they viewed as a patronizing behaviour.

***In what ways were participants unable to use feminine leadership styles?***

Many participants recognized they were able to use post-heroic, feminine leadership styles with the athletes they served or with colleagues who were of equal status to them.

Unfortunately, avoidance, and avoidance by folding were the most often identified conflict

behaviours by the participants. In Putler and Wolfe's (1999) examination of collegiate athletic department, they understood that administrators and coaches are often uninterested in the deliverables mandated to them and largely prioritize the athletes and communities they serve. Their personal values and priorities lead them to valuing the social and human development aspects of sport programming. The para coaches and administrators in this research were largely aligned. They often reported hiding information and doing strong relationship management with the participants in order to avoid the inevitable conflict that would exist between the athletes' expectations and the system deliverables, instead of employing agency to adjust the system.

***In what ways is avoidance the most common conflict behaviour?***

Avoidance appeared as reluctance for participants to take positions that would further distance them from the athletes they worked with and place them into positions with more decision-making authority. A few participants recognized they would be adept at c-suite level positions and have been offered these positions within the para sport system, but felt that even in those spaces, they would not have the ability to address the major items they felt needed to change with their counterparts and would be hamstrung to impact change since they would be further removed from the athletes. This is a common example of avoidance as outlined in Mayer's (2012) conflict competencies. Participants felt that by avoiding positions with seemingly more power, they felt they would actually be better able to engage with the community and use their skillset as required.

It would be useful to explore whether rejection of power positions is a symptom of the lack of agency internalized by many within the para sport system, or the reality for anyone with a background in para sport as they access higher up roles. Contributing to the lack of confidence in gaining power is the fact that many of the persons who were offered positions in leadership roles

within the organization were female-identifying and they feared being in a leadership setting where they would be the only female and either tokenized or ostracized.

The high incidences of avoidance in the system are largely linked to the experience of a highly masculine, heroic leadership style. Interestingly, the participants were incredibly adept at highlighting which behaviours were shared, feminine leadership styles and which behaviours were masculine. As mentioned above, in psychologically safe spaces, they utilized empathy, compassion, shared decision making and placed a greater value on the input and expertise of the individuals with lived experience who were accessing the system. However, as Fletcher (2004) pointed out, we implicitly align with the masculine, hierarchical styles of leadership because our unconscious bias has normalized this style of leadership. Further, this style of leadership contradicts the spaces that make actors feel psychologically safe (Bilal et al., 2019). Participants identified not being able to use shared, post heroic leadership styles within their spaces because it did not feel valued and there was no safe way to practice and advocate for a collaborative way of leading. See Figure 1 for descriptions on how hierarchical or shared leadership impacted the experiences of conflict.

**Figure 1**

*Hierarchical to Shared Leadership Conflict Spectrum*

	<b>Hierarchical Leadership (Heroic)</b>	<b>Middle ground</b>	<b>Shared Leadership (Post-Heroic)</b>
<b>Well - being, relationships and socio-emotional components</b>	Low emotional connection and low listening leads to greater relational conflict with athletes and lower stakeholders who often leave the sport or sport system	Socio-emotional safety exists for those who have significant expertise or ability to transition to other spaces.  Low socio-emotional safety for those who	Socio-emotional: High empathy, high listening. Better feedback from athletes and consistent and honest engagement from athletes, other partners.

	<p>Psychological safety is low: poor emotional wellbeing and perceived low interest in emotional wellbeing leads to disenfranchisement and dissatisfaction of all stakeholders</p>	<p>have more at stake or are committed to particular sector.</p>	<p>Psychological safety is high: power of emotional safety and wellbeing leads to less conflict</p>
<p><b>Trust, communication, transparency</b></p>	<p>Low trust leads to closed and non-transparent communication.</p> <p>Subordinates report greater fear in communicating transparently due to losing funding or positive regard</p> <p>Poor knowledge sharing</p>	<p>Communication exists, but is often accusatory versus collaborative</p> <p>OK knowledge sharing but feels riskier</p>	<p>Higher trust of all stakeholders leads to transparent feedback from all stakeholders (including those traditionally seen as low power).</p> <p>Higher value in lived experience.</p> <p>Lower ego leads to higher confidence and comfort in feedback seeking</p>
<p><b>Power dynamics and the impact on system change</b></p>	<p>Impact of imbalanced power leads to relational conflict and stagnant system. No space created to listen to recommendations</p> <p>Subordinates have less responsibility in decision making but greater responsibility in managing relationships as outcomes of decision making occur</p> <p>Missed opportunities to be curious and understand the lived experiences of working with the stakeholders who the funding is intended to service.</p>	<p>With certain expertise, lower power stakeholders were listened to, however it took significant groundwork to gain respect.</p>	<p>Shared responsibility = higher instances of achievement of desired outcomes</p> <p>Higher reliance, value and appreciation for partner contributions. Feedback allows for appropriate adjustments to system.</p> <p>Higher shared responsibility as decisions are made without a power dynamic.</p> <p>Lower ego allows for higher collaborations (ex: many organizations do the</p>

	High ego need leads to a perception that there is low ability to hold space for a reflective practice, both introspectively and with partners.		same thing and by sharing resources without high need for credit, able to streamline more).
<b>Conflict</b>	High relational conflict seen through avoidance or exit of the system  High sub – system conflict as recommendations do not reflect the lived experience of the system that the stakeholders are trying to serve	Mid – high relational conflict. “Take it or leave it” approach  Medium sub system conflict as some recommendations are valued.	High sub-system and system conflict as operating within the major sport system and competing values  Low relational conflict  Lower issues specific conflict, or issues specific conflict is less offensive as there is an understanding that people are working towards desired change.

**What happens when participants do not feel valued?**

In line with Price’s (2017) Insight Approach and process of curious questioning, when participants were prompted to share why they felt that a collaborative, feminine style of leadership was not utilized, many linked it to their feeling of not being valued or their projects and workspaces not being valued. Price (2017) states that valuing is how we discern significance and often link to fear and threat. In many of these instances, because participants don’t feel their work is valued, they felt that often the only response behaviour available to them was to avoid.

Further, notably in the integrated sport spaces, participants linked inherent ableism and a lack of regard for the experiences of persons with a disability as a major cause to their low experience of valuing. Within these experiences, participants became further entrenched in

avoidant or masculine conflict response behaviours. Instead of communication and transparency, when participants entered situations where they had to engage usually resorted to escalation, often resulting in take it or leave it decision making processes and the need to include less flexible, more stringent and higher stakes conflict resolution processes that ultimately did not bolster trust in relationships.

Participants also spoke to having very low capacity and low desire, or exhaustion, with engaging the sport system (the sub-system). It is unknown but would be beneficial to explore what is cause and effect between low capacity to impact the system and the effect of masculine leadership on capacity. Participants identified the strain between managing resources, human care and the system deliverables which limited any real time to advocate for and impact the system. At the same time, the lack of skillset or confidence to advocate for the system ensure that the actors have very little ability to change their capacity. Further, we know that those who have agency feel more positive and motivated to engage the system around them (Bilal et al., 2019), but given the current perception of the leadership system this did not seem like a viable option.

### **In what ways did participants experience fear and threat?**

Fear was strongly linked to the low capacity in the system to provide basic resources to the athletes it is intended to serve. Many participants recognized that a huge factor in their ability to advocate for a shared leadership system that viewed para resources through a different light was access to resources. Resources can be defined as financial, but also relational.

In this context, resources and power are heavily linked. In a system where competition for resources was high, and scarcity for athletes, coaches and opportunities are seemingly low, maintaining power and thus access to resources was a priority for most coaches and administrators. The power dynamic was not what is traditionally seen between coach and athlete,

but between coaches, administrators and other actors within the system. Many participants acknowledged that their access to resources often came through maintaining positive regard with the individuals who were gatekeepers to the resources.

The fear of speaking up, out, or advocating for the system to incorporate or prioritize para specific nuances was often too much of a risk for coaches to take. As Mayer (2012) shares, in highly competitive, low cooperation environments, transparency is not an option because it places the actor in a more vulnerable position. For the research participants, this vulnerable position often means that they will lose access to funding that potentially secures their positions or the system athletes currently access. This contributed to a dynamic where coaches and administrators operate in an avoidant, threatened space and thus have low agency, confidence and security to impact the system moving forward.

### **Conclusion**

This research looked at “in what ways threat and fear exist for para coaches and administrators within the Canadian Sport System, and what conflict competencies were used to address the fear that existed across the system”. Through the lens of Dugan’s (1996) Nested Theory of Conflict, participants made clear how the issues specific, relational, sub-system and system conflicts interacted with each other. Overarching and shadowing many of the conflicts was the societal views of disability and inherent ableism that led to a lack of inclusivity, understanding and ability to embrace diverse needs and structures across opportunities for physical activity. This is reflected in how little access there is to sport programming for anyone besides able bodies at the community level, all the way up to the constant fight for appropriate resources to perform sport at the highest level, when resources are restricted by a disorganized and ad hoc classification system.

While these issues are known, unfortunately, many coaches and administrators feel helpless to address this because their psychological safety comes into question. Advocating for

system improvements to a group that is already marginalized contributes to feeling lesser, and threat is created when this advocacy adds tension to relationships with a strong power dynamic. The legitimate fear of losing resources, position or relational good standing limits the capacity of coaches and administrators to implement system structures that would make sport better. The societal norms surrounding disability, combined with the hierarchical power dynamics within sport leadership led coaches and administrators to feel small, lesser and threatened in a space that is trying to establish a foothold and coherency against the greater sport system in Canada.

Certain environments, usually with strong female identifying teams, or leaders who employ feminine, post-heroic, shared leadership traits often demonstrated the power of collaboration and a flattened leadership structure, as predicted in the hypothesis. However, these examples were often undervalued because they are only a few that exist, and the effort to implement the small nudges they have had on the sport system are often underrecognized. Further research, in the form of case studies, on these feminine, shared leadership dynamics could propose a positive example of a structure that could be implemented across the sport system.

The research by Bilal et al. (2019) on the relationship between psychological safety and agency, and Fletcher's (2004) work on post-heroic leadership were incredibly applicable to understanding the experiences of the coaches and administrators within the para sport system. The Canadian para sport system has the power to lead the way in terms of inclusivity and demonstrate the positive effect of utilizing diverse perspectives, knowledge, lived experience and expertise if the system invests in mechanisms that bolster psychological safety. These mechanisms include power sharing, versus holding power and knowledge to a select few within the system. Further, these mechanisms would celebrate the agency and ability of coaches and administrators to provide recommendations and implement practices, that through small nudges to their respective spaces, would contribute to a system that ultimately provides better service and includes more individuals.



Participants shared a vision of a system that has better education for all members, especially new coaches and administrators, in order to reduce barriers largely caused by ableism and low collaboration. Further, they were excited by a system that provides sport activity for more members instead of simply focusing on a high-performance pathway, ultimately believing that the more inclusive and accessible the sport system becomes, the greater the athlete pool, and retention of the athlete pool will be. Unfortunately, at this time the capacity for coaches and administrators to advocate for these changes rarely exist, due to a lack of capacity and psychological safety.

This research documents the current experience of a tight knit, well known community that cares deeply about the people they work with but who have rarely had the opportunity to influence the system they are responsible for delivering. Further research on the spaces that are currently working really well together would be beneficial for contributing to a template on how to structure organizations who are truly investing in para sport and the persons within that system. Further research on the skillset that coaches and administrators currently have, and improvements or development in the skillset would be useful for confirming which behaviours could have a positive impact on the para sport system. Ultimately, research on implementing or improving psychological safety in both the para sport system and the system that coaches and administrators exist within would be beneficial for furthering the findings in this research.

## **Implications**

The research exposes that the fear of simply collaborating with stakeholders in the system is rare, and instead avoidance is the most common conflict mechanism. The avoidance leads to

frustration and further dissonance with the participants and those with decision making authority, thus leading to fractured relationships, largely lacking in trust and transparency.

Acknowledging that avoidance is a common yet unhelpful tool in the repertoire of many coaches and administrators in the system is an important finding in this research. Pluralistic ignorance occurs across most members, which creates a dynamic similar to the bystander effect. The norm is to avoid, and any deviations from this behaviour are often applauded, but not supported meaningfully by the para sport community to have long term change.

### ***Future Research***

However, simply improving a conflict skillset with the coaches and administrators may not have enough of an impact on the system. Further participatory action research that looks at systems, organizations, and structures that can create space for shared decision making would be powerful. Research on the impact of prioritizing cooperation, with an emphasis on removing hierarchy and incorporating diverse expertise could create a strong foundation to see if the conflicts that currently exist in the system could be transformed. Simultaneously upskilling coaches and administrators on effective conflict competencies would be a requirement of this research to have an accountability mechanism for addressing the conflict within the system.

For this skillset to be employed, all stakeholders have to look at options for including a mechanism that supports psychological safety. It is challenging to employ constructive conflict competencies when members don't feel psychologically, or even financially safe, to advocate for appropriate changes to the system without losing their positions within the organization. Given the dissonance that the sport systems writ large experience with a lack of psychological safety, and acknowledging this lack is especially magnified in the para sport system where disability becomes a topic that is often related to trauma, exclusivity, and ableism, honoring practices that

support psychological safety is not a nice to have, but a fundamental requirement of creating space for changes within the sport system.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation in this research was the challenge in ensuring confidentiality and anonymity while interviewing a relatively small and closely linked sample. Many of the participants knew of each other and know of each other's projects, workplace dynamics and work deliverables. Similarly, many members in the broader community are aware of the individuals who are impactful and working within the para sport space. Beyond this, there are only a few sports who are purely independent (not integrated) which impacts anonymity. To share results and connect them needed to be done with discretion to preserve confidentiality.

Further, many participants regularly speak with each other and share their perspectives on the sport system. Often, this means it is hard to include new ways of thinking and there is the possibility of group think that would impact the opinions and beliefs of the members in the system. To address this, further research on stakeholders in the para sport system who hold different positions or have different deliverables would be valuable to understanding the entire experience of participants across the system. This would also be useful for generating insight to challenge the bias that participants held towards stakeholders that were outside of their direct circle.

Sample size was also a limitation in the research. The number of coaches and administrators in the para sport system is small, and it was challenging to find participants who had been involved in the para sport system long enough to speak to their experiences. Further, the relatively small sample size does impact generalizability across all provinces, communities and organizations that support para sport.

Para specific research was a limitation in this study. Nearly all research on para sport centers on the athlete experience, and largely focuses on topics related to kinesiology, physiology, or the physical experience of being a para athlete. Alternatively, the research often

had to do with the experience of being a para athlete within various sport settings. This research was useful in understanding the para athlete experience, however there was no research to date on the experience of coaches or administrators in the Canadian para sport system. Further, research that existed on coaches and sport administrators in general is largely based out of the United States and reflects the US collegiate sport systems, or sport systems intended to relate to the collegiate system and thus is challenging to apply the framework across the Canadian sport system.

In instances where para sport research has been explored in the US, it is impacted by the societal values and positive regard to veterans, which generates a larger funding pool to influence the para sport system. There are clear discrepancies in funding models, societal and sport values, as well as demographics that impact the para experience such as sheer population numbers, which would impact the number of persons with a disability, and the number of veterans in a country.

## References

- Arbour-Nicitopoulpus, K.P., Bassett-Gunter, R.L., Logan-Sprenger, H., Sylvester, B., Camick, K., & Goss, J. (2017). Exploring factors of athletes' transition into parasport. *Sport Exercise*. <https://cdpp.ca/projects/exploring-psychosocial-factors-athletes'-transition-parasport>
- Berger, R.J., & Lorenz, L. (2015). *Disability and qualitative inquiry: Methods for rethinking an ableist world*. Ashgate.
- Bergold, J., & Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory research method: a methodological approach in motion. *Forum: Qualitative social research* 13(1). <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1801>
- Bilal, A., Fatima, T., Imran, M. (2019). Does shared leadership fosters taking charge behaviours? A post-heroic leadership perspective in the public sector higher educational institutes. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 15(3), 137-154. 10.1108/ijpl-04-2019-0016
- Boeije, H.(2010). *Analysis in qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Bogart, K.R., & Dunn, D.S. (2019) Ableism Special Issue Introduction. *Journal of Social Issues* 75(3). P650-654. DOI: 10.1111/josi/12354
- Braye, S., Dixon, K., & Gibbons, T. (2013) 'A mockery of equality': An exploratory investigation into disabled activists' views of the Paralympic Games. *Disability & Society* 28(7). DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2012.748648
- Brittain, I., Biscaia, R., & Gérard, S. (2019). Ableism as a regulator of social practice and disabled peoples' self-determination to participate in sport and physical activity. *Leisure Studies*, 39(2). Tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02614367.2019.1694569.
- Brown, C. (2014). Women on corporate boards: An exploration of shared leadership. In MacGallivrat, Guilarte, Steier & Willis (Eds.), *Social change in the modern workplace* (pp 91-116). Fielding Graduate University Press.
- Bunker, B., Coleman, S. (2014). Chapter 38: Managing group conflict through large group

- methods. In P.T. Coleman, M. Deutsch & E.C. Marcus (Eds.), *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (pp. 604-946). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Caeilli, K., Ray, L., Mill, J. (2003) 'Clear as mud': Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.  
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=5de0cd7a-719e-4996-b04f-892cc8ba88b4%40pdv-v-sessmgr03>
- Canadian Paralympic Committee Athlete Transfer Taskforce. (2021). *OTP 101 PAT Task Force Meeting*. Canadian Paralympic Committee. *CPC PAT Task Force-101\_SPORT\_CANADA EN.May 2021.pdf*.
- Cooper, S., & Endacott, R. (2007) Generic qualitative research: a design for qualitative research in emergency care? *Emergency medicine journal* 24(12). DOI:10.1136/emj.2007.050641
- Creswell, J.W., Creswell, J.D. (2018). *Research Design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches*(5<sup>th</sup>ed). SAGE.
- Dane, F. C. (2018). *Evaluating research: Methodology for people who need to read research* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Denison, J., Mills, J.P., Konoval, T. (2017) Sports' disciplinary legacy and the challenge of 'coaching differently.' *Sport, Education and Society* 22(6), 772-783. DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2015.1061986
- Denison, J., Mills, J.P., Konoval, T. (2021) Fitting in and getting fit: a post-structuralist analysis of athletes' experiences of less disciplinary coaching practices. *Sports Coaching Review*.  
<https://royalroads.on.worldcat.org/v2/search/detail/89986>
- Dugan, M. (1996). A nested theory of conflict. *Leadership journal: Women in Leadership – sharing the vision I*. [https://emu.edu/cjp/docs/Dugan\\_Maire\\_Nested-Model-Original.pdf](https://emu.edu/cjp/docs/Dugan_Maire_Nested-Model-Original.pdf)
- Eagly, A. (2007) Female leadership advantage and disadvantage: resolving the contradictions. *Psychology of Woman Quarterly* 31(1).  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2007.00326.x>

- Finlay, L (1998). "Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process and practice of reflexivity. *Pearls pith & provocation*. <https://journals-sagepub.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/doi/pdf/10.1177/104973202129120052>
- Fletcher, J. (2004). The paradox of post heroic leadership: An essay on gender, power, and transformational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(5), 647-661. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.07.004>
- Gergen, K.J. (2001) *Social construction in context*. Sage Publications.
- Gold, J.R., & Gold, M.M. (2007). Access for all: the rise of the Paralympic Games. *Perspectives in Public Health*. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1466424007077348>
- Greenhalgh, T., Jackson, C., Shaw, S., & Janamian, T. (2016). Achieving research impact through cocreation in community-based health services: Literature review and case study. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 94(2), 392-429.
- Haslett, D., Monforte, J., Inhyang, C., & Smith, B. (2020) Promoting para athlete activism: Critical insights from key stakeholders in Ireland. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. DOI: 10.1123/ssj.2019-0174
- Jull, M. (2017). Asking more than "how did that make you feel?: the Insight Approach to feeling and valuing in conflict. *Revista de mediación* 11(1). <https://revistadeediacion.com/en/atriculos/asking-more-than-how-did-that-make-you-feel-the-insight-approach-to-feeling-and-valuing-in-conflict/>
- Kikulis, L. (2013) Chapter IV. Contemporary Policy Issues in High Performance Sport. In L. Thibault & J. Harvey (Ed.), *Sport Policy in Canada [online]*. University of Ottawa Press, 2013. <http://books.openedition.org/uop/704>>.ISBN:9780776626154
- Legg, D. & Steadward, R. (2011) The Paralympic games and 60 years of change (1948-2008): unification and restructuring from a disability and medical model to sport-based competition. *Sport in Society* 14(9). [Tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17430437.2011.614767](http://Tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17430437.2011.614767)

- Lester, J.N., Nusbaum, E. (2017). "Reclaiming" disability in critical qualitative research: introduction to the special issue. *Qualitative inquiry*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417727761>
- MacDonald, C. (2012) Understanding participatory action research: a qualitative research methodology option. *Canadian Journal of Action Research* 13(2).  
<https://journals.nipissingu.ca/index.php/cjar/article/view/37>
- Mayer, B. (2012). *The dynamics of conflict: A guide to engagement and intervention*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mayer, B. (2015). *The conflict paradox: Seven dilemmas at the core of disputes*, Jossey-Bass.
- Megheirkouni M. (2018). Self-leadership strategies and career success: insight on sports Organizations. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 8(4), 393–409. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SBM-02-2018-0006>
- Merriam, S. & Grenier, R. (2019) *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*. Wiley & Sons.
- Morris, S., Fawcett, G., Brisebois, L., Hughes, J. (2018). A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadian with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017. *Canadian Survey on Disability Reports*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>
- Morrison, J. (2008). The relationship between emotional intelligence competencies and preferred conflict-handling styles. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 16(8).
- Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaei, F. (2017) *Snowball sampling: a purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research*. *Strides in Development of Medical Education*.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324590206\\_Snowball\\_Sampling\\_A\\_Purposeful\\_Method\\_of\\_Sampling\\_in\\_Qualitative\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324590206_Snowball_Sampling_A_Purposeful_Method_of_Sampling_in_Qualitative_Research)
- Norman, L. (2010). Feeling Second Best: Elite Women Coaches' experiences. *Society of Sport*



- Journal* 27(1). <https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/ssj/27/1/article-p89.xml>
- Own the Podium (n.d.) *Vision, mission, mandate, goals & values*.  
<https://www.ownthepodium.org/en-CA/Notre-organisation/Vision,-Mission,-Mandate-Goals>
- Picard, C. (2016a). *Practising insight mediation*. University of Toronto Press
- Picard, C. (2016b). The insight approach to conflict and collaborative practice. *Deepening without drowning: accessing hopes, understanding threats and breathing fresh air*.  
[www.insightapproach.ca](http://www.insightapproach.ca)
- Price, J. (2017) Method in analyzing conflict behaviour: the insight approach. *Revista de Mediación* 11(1). [Revistademediacion.com](http://Revistademediacion.com)
- Price, M. (2019). Intentional Peace: The Role of Human Consciousness in the Emergence of Peace and Conflict. In V. Redekon, G. Redekop (Eds), *Awakening: Exploring Spirituality, Emergent Creativity and Reconciliation* (pp. 267-282). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/lib/royalroads-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5974552>
- Putler, D.S., & Wolfe, R.A. (1999) Perceptions of intercollegiate athletic programs: priorities and trade-offs. *Sociology of Sport*, 16(4).  
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=bbc7467a-7a38-4184-b6e1-5076d44f0dd9%40sessionmgr102>
- Roberts, V., Sojo, V., Grant, F. (2020). Organisational factors and non-accidental violence in sport: A systematic review. *Sport Management Review*, 23(1), 8-27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2019.03.001>
- Rocha, C.M. & Turner, B.A. (2008) Organizational effectiveness of athletic departments and

- coaches extra role behaviours. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 1.  
[https://www.academia.edu/34910522/Organizational\\_Effectiveness\\_of\\_Athletic\\_Departments\\_and\\_Coaches\\_Extra\\_Role\\_Behaviors?email\\_work\\_card=reading-history](https://www.academia.edu/34910522/Organizational_Effectiveness_of_Athletic_Departments_and_Coaches_Extra_Role_Behaviors?email_work_card=reading-history)
- Tobin, G. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(4), 388-396. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03207.x>
- Sport for Life. (n.d.). *Long Term Development Stages*. <https://sportforlife.ca/long-term-development>.
- Sport Information Resource Centre (n.d.). *Canadian Sport Policies*. <https://sirc.ca/canadian-sport-policies/>
- Steen, A., & Shinkai, A. (2020). Understanding individual and gender differences in conflict resolution: A critical leadership skill. *International Journal of Women's Dermatology*, 6(1), 50-53.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/science/article/pii/S235264751930053X>
- Walinga, J. & McKendry, V. (2014) Exploring a Feminine Leadership Model Among Women Entrepreneurs. In L. Kelly (Ed.), *Entrepreneurial women: New management and leadership models* (pp. 107 – 121). ABC-CLIO, LLC.
- Yazid, Z (2015). Exploring conflict management using qualitative approach. *Gadjah Mada International Journal of Business* 17(1). DOI:10.22146/gamaijb.6150

## Appendix A

### **Hierarchical Leadership, Ableism and Avoidance: Coach and Administrator Conflict in the Canadian Para Sport System**

#### *Interview and Focus Group Guide*

I as the investigator would like to acknowledge adoption of a disability inquiry where collaboration is maximized and personal bias or impact by the investigator is minimized (Lorenz, 2015). Important to note is that the research questions take on a slight advocacy lens – they involve and could impact your community as well advocate via the orientation of the questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

You have the option to choose a setting and medium that works best for you. Interviews can be in person or using medium such as zoom or phone calls, paused at any time and re-started in another medium. Given my role as a coach and administrator in the para sport environment, in line with safe sport protocols that encourage the rule of two to be followed, you as the participant may invite a third-party observer or hold the interview in an open space.

Informed consent will be discussed and reviewed before commencing the interview and focus group. See form “Coaches and Sport Administrators Conflict Experience in the Para Sport System: Informed Consent” for further information on consent and the study parameters. I would like to remind you that during the interview you can stop at any time and request your information be removed from the study.

#### *Research Area of Focus*

Please read this short paragraph on why this research is occurring prior to commencing the interview:

Misaligned and competing values drive conflict onto the Canadian para sport system, especially for coaches and sport administrators that manage competing deliverables in the para sport space. Uncompromising approaches to achieving excellence on the podium (Own the Podium, n.d.) conflict with sequential development of sport skills that minimize emphasis on high performance as the sole pathway (Sport for Life, n.d.). The time and achievement of development markers gets compromised when sport systems have to advance on a high-performance pathway. The cognitive dissonance that occurs from learning a sport at a high level and the ability to parlay that into a lifelong experience is adversely affected by the overwhelming investment of funds, expertise, time and energy. The overarching research question is: how do coaches and sport administrators negotiate the threat and fear created by the inherent conflict existing in the para sport system as they negotiate influences from the various sport systems?

#### **Research Sub – Questions:**

1. What relational and sub-system conflicts do para coaches and sport administrators experience?
2. What specific values, priorities and goals are in conflict within the para sport system in Canada?

3. What strategies do coaches and sport administrators involved in Canadian para sports employ to mitigate, alleviate or transcend systemic conflicts?
4. What constructive conflict competencies can coaches and sport administrators involved in Canadian para sports utilize?

Materials required in the study include video or voice calling platform such as phone call, zoom, Facetime or face-to face-interviews. For recording, a recording device such as mobile device or computer recording software is required. Lastly, word processing programs and excel programs will be used for transcribing interviews and tracking descriptive information and contact information of participants.

### **Hierarchical Leadership, Ableism and Avoidance: Coach and Administrator Conflict in the Canadian Para Sport System**

#### **Interview Questions**

Background information:

1. Please tell me:
  - a. Who you are (age, gender, disability if applicable, career/job, sport career, outside interests, any other pertinent information)?
  - b. How long you have been involved in para sport?
  - c. What level have you competed at in para sport in any capacity (athlete, coach)?
2. Please reflect on the para athlete development pathway and identify strengths and weaknesses of that development model as it pertains to conflict you have experienced in the pathway.
  - a. Can you expand on the conflict?
3. Please identify limitations to access in the athlete development pathway that were only solved by accessing National Sport Organization and Provincial Sport Organization funding.
  - a. How did these limitations affect you?
  - b. What did you do in response to these illimitations?
4. Please identify any shortcuts in technical, tactical, physical and mental development that remained performance gaps for a prolonged period of time due to a lack of development time or resources.
5. Please tell me about the standards and expectations associated with funding you or athletes derive from your NSO or PSO. Do these expectations align favorably or consistently with able bodied sport?
6. Given the opportunity to address gaps in the development pathway (L2T, T2T, L2C, C2W) where would you place the greatest emphasis in closing the gap in development opportunities?
7. Describe if / when / where your personal values conflict/are compromised by your need to access resources in order to continue to develop or support development?

8. While the targeted NSO PSO funding model is a necessity for many athletes to progress, in what ways can the funds be directed to have a larger impact on para development in your sport?
9. Lastly, please share what you would change immediately if you had an abundance of resources? What would you stop immediately?

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this research and contributing in an open way.

Please feel comfortable reaching out at any time if you have anything further to add. You will have an opportunity to review the information and make any adjustments if desired.

### **Focus Group Guide**

#### **Pre-amble:**

The purpose of the focus group is to collaborate as a group of participants to share Experiences, strategies and propose action items moving forward for addressing conflict within the para sport system in our roles as coaches and administrators.

1. Please introduce yourself to the group and include your:
  - a. Name
  - b. Position
  - c. Involvement / relationship to the Para Sport System
  - d. In 1 – 2 sentences, describe the conflict you experience in the para sport system
2. Please share strategies you used to alleviate, transcend or avoid conflict following the semi-structured interview.
3. Please identify challenges you experienced as you tried to alleviate, transcend or avoid conflict following the semi-structured interview.
4. Where and with whom did you experience conflict?
5. What changes at the system, sub-system or relational level would improve or alleviate conflict in the para sport system?

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this research and contributing in an open way. Please feel comfortable reaching out at any time if you have anything further to add. You will have an opportunity to review the information and make any adjustments if desired.

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent: Coaches and Sport Administrators Conflict Experience in the Para Sport System

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Study Name: Hierarchical Leadership, Ableism and Avoidance: Coach and Administrator Conflict in the Canadian Para Sport System

*The project has received approval from the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board and that any questions can be addressed to [ethicalreview@royalroads.ca](mailto:ethicalreview@royalroads.ca).*

#### Investigator:

Samantha Heron

Email: [Samantha.a.heron@gmail.com](mailto:Samantha.a.heron@gmail.com)

Telephone: 250 896 3899

Institution: Conflict Analysis and Management Program, Royal Roads University  
2005 Sooke Road, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V9B 5Y2

#### Supervisor:

Dr. Jennifer Walinga

Email: [jennifer.walinga@RoyalRoads.ca](mailto:jennifer.walinga@RoyalRoads.ca)

Telephone: 250 883 8115

Institution: School of Communication and Culture  
Royal Roads University

2005 Sooke Road, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada V9B 5Y2

#### Introduction:

I (Samantha) am the principle investigator for this study. I am inviting you to participate in the research I am conducting as part of my master's thesis at Royal Roads University. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about this research and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. If at any time you don't understand the words or concepts, I will take time to explain them. You may ask questions at any time.

#### Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this research is to explore barriers to capacity building in sport systems, with a particular focus on para sports. Specifically, this study will focus on the relationship between funding advisors, government organizations and leaders/coaches to understand the resulting impact on conflict competencies and capacity building in para sports. Capacity building refers to the ability for increases in the quantity and quality of sport participation along all levels of the Athlete Development Pathway for athletes with disabilities. The study will focus on your conflict experiences and decision making over the last five years as well as opinions and understanding of proposed system and funding models for 2021 and beyond.

**What you will be asked to do in the research:**

As a participant, you will be asked questions in an informal interview setting and then follow up with a focus group session. You are invited to answer with as much description as you would like. The semi-structured interview and focus group will be conducted via zoom, recorded and transcribed.

**Participant Selection:**

Participants will be coaches and sport administrators involved with para sport through the national sports organizations, sport advisors, and funding partners in Canada.

**Duration:**

Most interviews will take one hour. Follow up transcription will be shared with participants for accuracy.

**Risks / Discomfort:**

Participating in this interview / focus group and discussing your experiences is not likely to illicit any personal harm or risk; however, discussing negative or challenging experiences has the potential to cause psychological distress.

Data may be stored on or accessible by servers in the United States and may be subject to examination by government or law enforcement under the Patriot Act. While this likelihood is small, I am required to let you/my participants know this possible risk.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:**

Participating in this research may provide an opportunity to contribute your voice and experience to their para sport system. Moving forward, the results could impact policy and practice to create stronger development systems for para sports and better experiences within those systems.

**Voluntary Participation, Right to Refuse or withdraw from the Study:**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There are no requirements based on your status or position within the organization to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

The investigator will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview/discussion to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with the notes or if the investigator did not understand you correctly.

You/participants' data may no longer be withdrawn from the study when you/the participants individualized data is no longer identifiable because it has been aggregated with other responses or it was collected in an anonymous format

**Confidentiality:**

Please note that your valuable ideas and opinions will appear in the report itself. However, no personal information such as your name or personally identifiable information will be used to attribute those comments to you. Your name and identifying information will not appear on any published work. Pseudonyms will be used at your choosing. When results are published or discussed, no information will be included that directly reveal your identity. Data will be stored for two years following the survey and then deleted permanently.

**COVID Consent Forms:**

During COVID, a return email indicating consent is sufficient if you/the participant does not have a scanner/printer for your/the participants signature.

**Questions about the research?**

Samantha Heron

Email: [Samantha.a.heron@gmail.com](mailto:Samantha.a.heron@gmail.com)

**Consent to participate in the semi-structured interview:**

**Name:**

**Signature:**

**Consent to participate in the focus group:**

**Name:**

**Signature:**

**I do not consent to participate in the focus group:**

**Name:**

**Signature:**