

**SPORTS COACHING AS AN ECOLOGY OF IDEAS**

by

**GENE MULLER**

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**SUPERVISOR: PROF D. P. FOURIE**

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## SUMMARY

In this study an ecosystemic approach to sports coaching is forwarded. This approach is illustrated using the analogy of an ecology of ideas. Ideas informing the life span of a coach within an elite team are explored. The researcher engaged four subjects in conversations the life span of a coach in an elite team. These conversations are viewed as co-constructions of realities. The coach abides within a team for a limited time. He or she enters an existing ecology of ideas, which can contribute to, or detract from, the efficacy of the coach in a team. This ecology of ideas evolves as old meanings shift and new meanings emerge. These meanings are explored in this dissertation. An awareness of the ecology of ideas within a team can inform the coach to perturb the ecology of ideas in a direction that is mutually qualified as successful.

## KEY WORDS

Sports coaching; teams; systems thinking; cybernetics; ecosystemic epistemology; ecology of ideas; structure determinism; observing system; social construction; mutual qualification; co-construction; perturbation; narrative metaphor; reframing; hermeneutics; thematic analysis; reflexivity.

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

Sport has evolved from a part-time, extra mural activity, to an activity that can capture the world's attention as evident during the Olympic Games. Athletes and coaches are able to compete as a profession with considerable monetary rewards. The role of the coach is regarded as central to the performance of elite athletes and teams.

Sporting success is venerated in our culture. To improve the athlete's or the team's chances of winning, all variables deemed to provide the competitive edge, are researched. This has led to a predominantly scientific approach to the world of sports. Science is considered to provide the momentum for the improvement of performance. Linear thinking permeates the world of sports. This type of thinking attempts to find out "how one occurrence leads to or causes another" (Fourie, 1998, p 6). Many coaches have inherited this analytical cause and effect thinking that is implicit in the traditional scientific method.

The scientific approach is derived from the cartesian philosophy, in which it is assumed that complex phenomena can be better understood by breaking it up into pieces to understand the whole (Capra, 1996). The flaw in this reductionistic type of thinking is that complex systems are not constituted by the sum of their components, but also by the relationships between the components. Therefore by 'cutting up' the system, this thinking, "destroys what it seeks to understand" (Cilliers, 1999, p. 2).

Traditional approaches to sports coaching are reasoned to be rooted in the newtonian epistemology of science. This linear and reductionistic view sees the coach as being able to instrumentally influence the team. The 'traditional' coach maintains his or her neutrality and objectivity and uses his or her internal resources and knowledge to influence the team.

Coaches often understand teams in terms of their comprising elements and adopt a recipe mentality, which encourages adding or subtracting an 'ingredient' to aid performance. Jackson (1995, p.5) remarks that: "Most leaders tend to view teamwork as a social engineering problem: take x group, add y motivational technique, and get z result". This thinking extends to ways in which teams prepare tactically. Aspects of an opposing team's play are broken down and analysed to find a weaker component. Teams then plan to gain an advantage by exploiting these weaker aspects.

The aim of this study is to forward an alternative approach to coaching. This approach is referred to as the ecosystemic approach. Little research has been documented in the area of coaching from an ecosystemic perspective. It emphasises the context and process surrounding the coach's impact within a team. By employing such a perspective, coaching no longer takes on the traditional newtonian perspective of a coach unilaterally impacting on a team.

The ecosystemic approach evolved from general systems theory and from diverse ideas regarding the way in which reality is constructed by the observer (Fourie, 1998). Its ideas can be placed within the broad philosophical tradition known as postmodernism (Hoffman, 1991). Ideas and methods within this study have been borrowed from many seemingly unrelated fields such as quantum mechanics, cognitive neuro-psychology, and literary criticism. When assimilated in this perspective they aim to paint a picture of a team comprising of individuals who generate meaning through their interactions within the team and from the outside world. This meaning is likened to an ecology of ideas. The analogy of an 'ecology of ideas' is forwarded to describe how meaning in a team is co-created and how it shifts and changes. Ecosystemic thinking understands human systems as an "ecology of ideas" (Fourie, 1991, p.468), complexly interwoven and consistently influencing the system to behave in certain ways. In a similar way to species in natural ecologies, ideas and meanings abound in the ecology of ideas, and compete with, and complement, other ideas. Thus, the ecology of ideas is dynamic and evolving. By perturbing the ecology of ideas, a new reality is created. Reality is viewed as a process of active co-construction.

This research was aimed at exploring the ecology of ideas within a sports team about the life span of the coach. This study aimed at illustrating the extent to which ideas circulating in a team impact on the life span of a coach in a team. Viewing the team as an ecology of ideas allows the coach and team a greater sense of agency as it emphasises moving in the direction of preferred ideas and stories which emphasise more control in the creation of their own reality.

The ecosystemic approach's critique of the traditional view of coaching is grounded in the post-modern position which Cilliers (1999) defines as "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (p. 14). Newtonian epistemology involves the search for universal truths, hence the importance that the scientific approach places on reliability and validity of the inquiry method. The alternative to the discovery of the meta-narrative is learning to cope with many stories that are determined locally, not globally and not legitimated externally. Therefore, different institutions and different contexts produce different narratives, which are not reducible to each other. Janse Van Rensburg (2000) points out that the single common denominator underlying postmodernism is the notion that nothing ever stays the same and that reality is in a constant state of flux. Truth, therefore, is a product of the community in which it is created and legitimised (Gergen, 1985).

In proposing an alternative approach to coaching, it is still sensible to take cognisance of the paradigm that most sports are rooted in. This provides a challenge for the coach to be creative and to work within the limitations of a landscape of traditional coaching, while at the time working within a metaphor of an ecology of ideas. The usefulness of this view is that there are many possibilities for impacting as a coach.

The ecosystemic approach grew because of the questioned limitations of traditional schools of thought. The following chapter illustrates the move from the traditional scientific epistemology to an alternative epistemology, which forms the basis for understanding in the ecosystemic approach to sports coaching.

## CHAPTER 2

**COACHING EPISTEMOLOGY**

"...there is a knife moving here. A very deadly one; an intellectual scalpel so swift and so sharp that you sometimes don't see it moving. You get the illusion that all those parts are just there and are being named as they exist. But they can be named quite differently and organised quite differently depending on how the knife moves. It is important to see this knife for what it is and not to be fooled into thinking that motorcycles or anything else are the way they are just because the knife happened to cut it up that way. It is important to concentrate on the knife itself" (Persig, 1974, p.81).

Epistemology is more basic than any theory and is concerned with the rules of operation that govern cognition. It attempts to specify "how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think, and decide" (Bateson, 1979, p.228). Janse van Rensburg (2000) defines epistemology as "the method of gaining and arranging information" (p.2). Epistemology has different meanings in different study areas. In the field of biology, it is concerned with the biological roots of cognition. In the human sciences, epistemology is the study of how people or systems of people know things and how they think they know things (Keeney, 1983). The relevance of epistemology is that it is concerned with how people construct their thinking.

**Moving away from the 'traditional' scientific epistemology**

Within the human sciences, there has been resistance to the application of a scientific epistemology to the study of human behaviour. This emerged from the view that the traditional scientific epistemology is "atomistic, reductionistic, and anticontextual, and follows an analytic logic concerned with combinations of discrete elements" (Keeney, 1983, p.14).

Central to the traditional scientific epistemology is the work of Descartes and Newton (Capra, 1982). Descartes created a method of analytical thinking, which consists of breaking up complex phenomena into pieces to understand the whole from the properties of its parts. Newton then formulated his vision of the world as a perfect machine governed by exact mathematical laws. This Cartesian-Newtonian idea survived and formed the foundation of the natural sciences (Capra, 1982). Fourie (1998) notes that this shared way of thinking is most often referred to as the "Newtonian epistemology of science"(p.11). He asserts that this way of thinking rests on three pillars:

1. **Reductionism or atomism:** This pillar assumes that an object or phenomenon is easier to understand if it is reduced to its component elements. By understanding the basic elements, the observer can then recombine the parts to understand the whole.
2. **Linear causality:** This pillar asserts that elements can be connected to each other through a process of cause and effect. Hoffman (1981) notes that complex phenomena are seen as consisting of long causal trains.
3. **Neutral objectivity:** It is assumed that it is possible for an observer to find the truth provided he or she is objective in his or her observation and does not influence the phenomenon under observation.

Gergen (1994) points out that in comparison to the natural sciences, human sciences are relatively immature although older than the natural sciences. The strength of the traditional view of science is dependent on the stability of the relationships of events in nature. The greater the degree of stability in such patterns, the higher the capacity for control and prediction. One of the aims of traditional science therefore, is to reduce chaos by identifying classes of events that bear relationship to one another (Gergen 1994). Natural science has enjoyed success locating principles with high empirical content, while the human sciences have struggled to establish stable and predictable results. Fourie (1998) contends that in an attempt to establish itself as a scientific discipline, the social sciences embraced newtonian thinking.

In recent times, the behavioural sciences have undergone intensive philosophical questioning. Much of this was stimulated by Kuhn's (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Gergen, 1994). Kuhn (1970) argues that the abandonment of a theoretical paradigm does not necessarily depend on the accumulation of negative evidence. He points out that anomalies arise which do not as much contradict the prevailing paradigm as they raise questions that the initial paradigm is unprepared to answer. By focussing on these anomalies, a new paradigm may be generated. This may not signify a negation of the old paradigm, but alters the scientist's view of the field of study, and of the questions that may be asked. The movement from one paradigm to another is akin to a "gestalt shift in perception" (Gergen, 1994, p.9). Thus, the world is seen differently but not necessarily more accurately. In advocating the shift away from the natural science view, Gergen (1994) suggests a reformulation in the nature and potential of the social sciences:

"...if the traditional aim of the sciences, that of establishing a fundamental repository of objective knowledge, can be replaced with objectives that take account of the impermanence in pattern, the efficacy of the endeavour may be vastly improved"(p.4).

Capra (1996) argues that new concepts in physics have brought about a shift in the epistemology of science and consequently a shift in our worldview. He states that this change was driven by an awareness that traditional science's basic concepts, language, and way of thinking were inadequate to describe atomic phenomena. He refers to this change as a "paradigm shift in physics as an integral part of a much larger cultural transformation; from a mechanistic worldview of Descartes and Newton to a holistic, ecological view" (p.5).

Capra (1996; Capra & Steindl-Rast, 1992) believes that the receding paradigm has dominated western thought for hundreds of years and became entrenched in our ideas and values: the view of the world as a mechanical system composed of elementary building blocks; the view of the human body as a machine; the view of life in society as a competitive struggle for existence; and the belief in unlimited material progress achieved through economic and technological growth.

These ideas mirror the work of earlier theorists who proposed a shift in thinking from a newtonian epistemology to a more ecological epistemology. Among the proponents of this alternative epistemology were Bateson (1972, 1979), Maturana and Varela (1980), Von Foerster (1984), Keeney (1983) and Von Glasersfeld (1984).

This alternative epistemology was introduced as a more appropriate way of thinking about human behaviour. This epistemology has been referred to as 'non-linear epistemology', 'systemic epistemology', 'cybernetic epistemology', and 'ecosystemic epistemology' (Fourie 1998). For the sake of clarity and consistency, this epistemology will be referred to here as the ecosystemic epistemology.

### **Traditional coaching epistemology**

This dissertation asserts that the endeavour of coaching is rooted in the traditional scientific epistemology. The basis for this assumption is that the traditional approach to coaching is based on the newtonian principles of reductionism, linear causality, and neutral objectivity.

As the prominence of sports grew in society so the scientific influence into sports proliferated. Most of the early research into sports coaching was aimed at the process of coaching instruction (Sherman, Crassini, Maschette, & Sands, 1997). This focus on instruction continues today and definitions relating the process of coaching to a process of instruction abound. Fairs (1987) sees coaching as a method of helping individual athletes and teams meet specific needs and problems during and in preparation for competition. Sherman et al. (1997) highlight the process of instruction by referring to the characteristics of the coaching context. This

includes a coach with expertise to conduct instruction, at least one receptive learner, a particular sport, a set of procedures used by the coach, and a working relationship between the coach and the learner.

Coaches have traditionally developed their ability to instruct from experiences such as methods used by their own former coaches, attending coaching courses, or reading coaching literature (Sherman et al., 1997). The literature regarding effective coaching is steeped in the role of the expert and suggestions on correct roles and procedures for coaches. Fairs (1987) designated a series of steps that coaches are recommended to follow in the process of coaching. His model requires that the coach assesses learning situations, apply coaching principles, and evaluate actions to determine their effectiveness. His steps include a) data collection, b) diagnosis, c) prescribed plan of action, d) implementation, and e) evaluation. This model was viewed as systematic, and organised the methodology of coaching (Fairs, 1987). These steps are very similar to those used in positivistic research designs.

This view can be thought of as the traditional view of the coaching process and is illustrated by the following diagram:

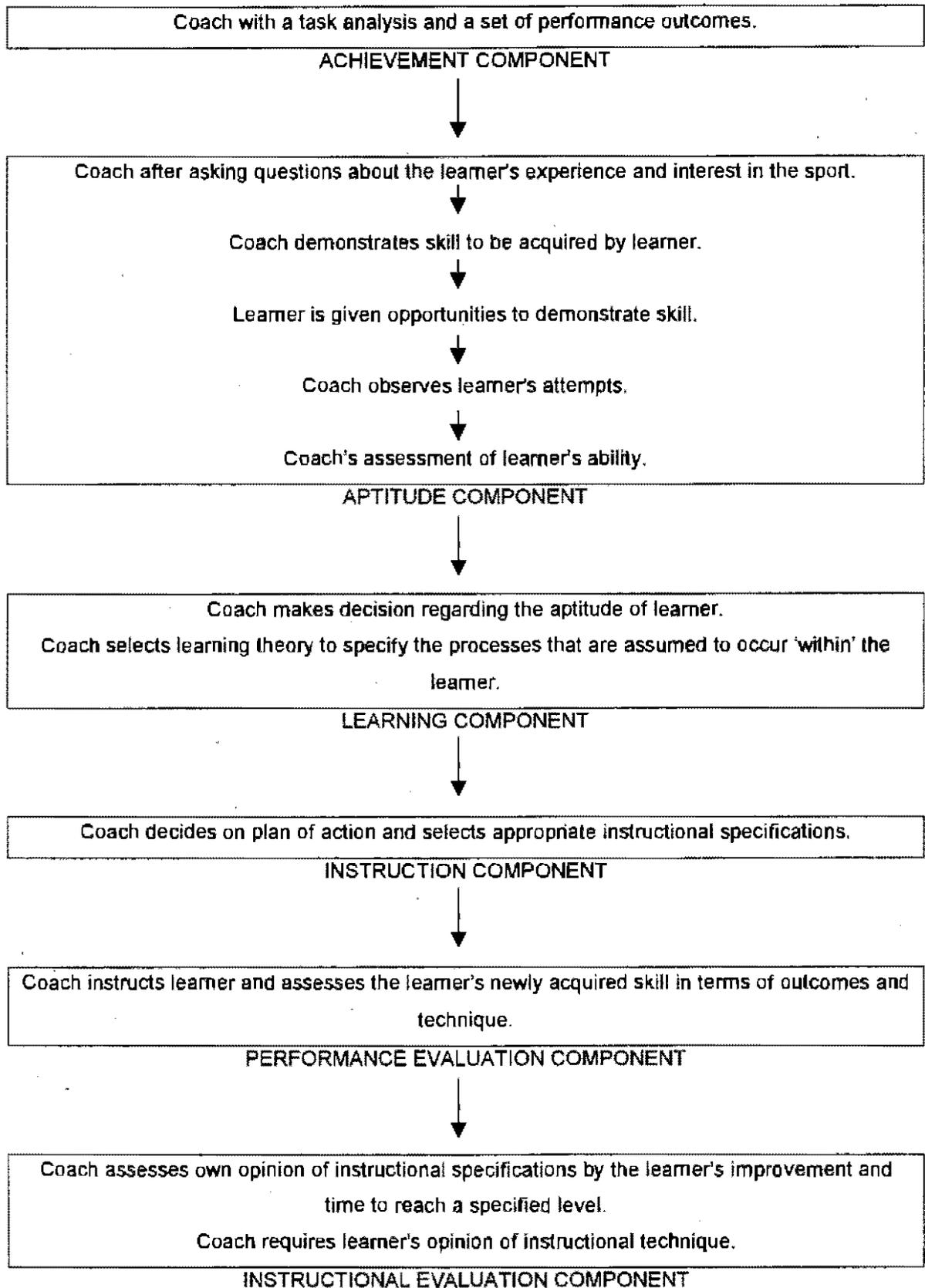


Figure 1.1 Diagrammatic representation of traditional coaching process.

The preceding diagram highlights the role of the coach as based in the instruction process and sets the coach apart by his or her knowledge and mastery of the process of coaching. This traditional approach to coaching reflects the newtonian epistemology.

Methods within the traditional scientific paradigm are often reviewed and debated, but the epistemology, the fundamental assumptions underlying thinking in sport is rarely examined. There can be no doubt that the traditional scientific approach has contributed to the understanding of teams and sporting performance. What this dissertation proposes is not an alternative way of doing, as science has contributed significantly in this way, but rather an alternative way of thinking about coaching and teams.

### **The 'new' scientific epistemology**

In contrast to an epistemology which is atomistic, reductionistic and anticontextual, the 'new' epistemology emphasises ecology, relationships, and whole systems and is attuned to interrelation, complexity and context (Keeney, 1983).

The new paradigm involves seeing the world as an integrated whole, rather than as a collection of parts. Capra and Steindl-Rast (1992) use the term 'ecological' to explain the perception of how an element is embedded in its natural and social environment. One of the ways in which this ecological paradigm is characterised is that in essence it asks deeper questions. This implies searching for answers while being sensitive to possibilities of interconnectedness and inter-relatedness. Capra (1996) proposes that the universe be seen as a dynamic web of interrelated events. None of the properties of any part of the web is fundamental; they all follow from the properties of the other parts, and the overall consistency of the interrelations determines the structure of the entire web.

In line with a move to an ecological paradigm, Capra (1996) advocates a shift in thinking and values from a self-assertive position to an integrative position. This is represented in the following table:

Table 2.1 'Old' and 'new' paradigm thinking and values.

Thinking		Values	
OLD PARADIGM	NEW PARADIGM	OLD PARADIGM	NEW PARADIGM
Self assertive	Integrative	Self assertive	Integrative
Rational	Intuitive	Expansion	Conservation
Analysis	Synthesis	Competition	Co-operation
Reductionism	Holism	Quantity	Quality
Linear	Non-linear	Domination	Partnership

### The emergence of systems thinking

"Thus systems thinking involves a shift from objective to 'epistemic' science; to a framework in which epistemology – 'the method of questioning' – becomes an integral part of scientific theories" (Capra, 1996, p.40).

Fourie (1998) contends that the emergence of systems thinking was instrumental in the shift away from the traditional scientific epistemology. Systems theory challenged the cartesian belief that in every complex system the behaviour of the whole can be understood from the properties of its parts. Systems theory seeks to reverse the relationship between the parts and the whole. It proposes that the properties of the parts can be understood from the organisation of the whole. Systems thinking is contextual, which is the opposite of reductionistic and analytical thinking (Capra 1996).

Fourie (1998, p.13) highlights some of the central notions of general system theory:

- Systems are made up of smaller systems and are part of larger supra-systems. A sports team is a system consisting of individual subsystems. At the same time, this team is part of a larger community of sports people.
- Systems, subsystems, and supra-systems are divided by invisible boundaries. Information flows across these boundaries and in human systems these boundaries are regarded as pliable.
- Systems maintain a dynamic balance due to the process known as homeostasis. Homeostasis has a regulating function that keeps the behaviour within a system within certain limits.

- Information about the system's output can be channelled back into the system. This is known as feedback. Feedback that maintains the system's behaviour is known as negative feedback, while feedback that promotes change is known as positive feedback.
- Systems are governed by the principle of equifinality. This principle refers to the notion that the system's state of functioning can be achieved in different ways. Similar states of functioning can result from different initial states of functioning and similar initial states of functioning can result in different states of functioning.

The systems view has impacted on the way in which scientists think about nature and epistemology. The following table highlights criteria of thinking within the systems view that contributed to an epistemology that challenges the newtonian epistemology (Capra, 1982; 1996; Capra & Steindl-Rast, 1992).

Table 2.2. Criteria of thinking with the old and new paradigms

**View of nature:**

SHIFTS FROM THE PART TO THE WHOLE:	
<u>Old paradigm:</u> In any complex system, the dynamics of the whole could be understood from the properties of the parts.	<u>New paradigm:</u> The relationship between the parts and the whole is reversed. The properties of the parts can only be understood from the dynamics of the whole.
SHIFT FROM STRUCTURE TO PROCESS:	
<u>Old paradigm:</u> It was thought that there were fundamental structures, forces, and mechanisms through which parts interacted, thus giving rise to processes.	<u>New paradigm:</u> Every structure is seen as the manifestation of an underlying process. The entire web of relationships is intrinsically dynamic.

**Epistemology:**

SHIFT FROM OBJECTIVE SCIENCE TO "EPISTEMIC SCIENCE":	
<u>Old paradigm:</u> Scientific descriptions were believed to be objective, i.e. independent of the observer and the process of knowledge.	<u>New paradigm:</u> Epistemology is to be included explicitly in the description of natural phenomena.
SHIFT FROM BUILDING TO NETWORK AS METAPHOR OF KNOWLEDGE:	
<u>Old paradigm:</u> The metaphor of knowledge as building fundamental laws, fundamental principles, basic building blocks, etc.	<u>New paradigm:</u> The old paradigm metaphor is being replaced by the metaphor of the network. As reality is perceived as a network of relationships, our descriptions, too, form an interconnected network representing the observed phenomena. There are no hierarchies.
SHIFT FROM TRUTH TO APPROXIMATE DESCRIPTIONS:	
<u>Old paradigm:</u> Scientific knowledge could achieve absolute and final certainty.	<u>New paradigm:</u> It is recognised that all concepts, theories, and findings are limited and approximate. Science can never provide a complete and definitive understanding of reality. Scientists do not deal with truth; they deal with limited and approximate descriptions of reality.

## Awareness of own epistemology

The core of epistemology is the act of drawing distinctions in order to observe. Bateson (1972) commented on the interrelated and recursive nature of drawing distinctions and observation - People draw distinctions in order to observe and then draw distinctions in order to describe their observations. This process continues through to the way in which we interact with the world around us. Our distinctions, perceptions, observations, and constructions inform our actions (Keeney 1983). Often we are not aware of the inter-relatedness of our actions and our epistemology. Bateson (1979) warned that not being aware of one's own epistemology could be risky, as it reveals an epistemology that does not include a conscious awareness of itself.

The work of Maturana and Varela (1980) suggests that there may not be as strong a correlation between the 'inner' world and the outer world as we have in the past believed. They posit that the world as each of us knows it is entirely constructed by ourselves. Keeney (1983) adopts a less radical constructivist approach maintaining that any position or idea is only a partial embodiment of the whole we can never really grasp. Often these partial models are sorted into either/or dualities in which only one side of a distinction is held to be more or less truthful. From this standpoint, different orientations arise from the drawing of distinctions. Keeney (1983) argues that many of the distinctions people differ on, are the two sides of a complementary relationship.

These distinctions are rife in the world of sports coaching. They often take the form of differences regarding the art and science of coaching, theory and practice, the importance of technique in relation to tactics, and adherence to a certain style of play above another. One course is chosen to the exclusion of another and this is promoted as the correct way of progressing.

There are many strong opinions and disagreements about which method or view is the correct one in the world of sports coaching. It would be relevant to say that any disagreement is a disagreement over how a sequence of events is punctuated. If you were able to 'reshuffle' the punctuated segments, it is likely that the result will be an alternative description, and an alternative frame of reference. This idea would be seen as challenging to many social scientists that have assumptions about 'objectivity'. From this position, we can see that a disagreement is the result of one person rejecting the way in which another punctuates a context. Bateson (1979) took this process even further when he stated that it is important to remember that others may categorise their experience in totally different ways to the observer. Therefore, part of epistemology requires that one have an epistemology about others' epistemology. This translates to the fact that you need to have an epistemology about how people punctuate life.

An awareness of this nature can be beneficial to a coach. It can aid in the way in which the coach views the players; as people who punctuate the world in very different ways to him or herself. They may both punctuate the context of the coaching relationship, but may have different views of the power distributions, or the roles associated with each position. As regards the analytical part of coaching, an epistemology that recognises the fact that higher levels of abstraction may be produced may be useful in the description of a certain context, e.g. when analysing the way an opponent plays. Thus, the coaching context is very complex in terms of the interplay of epistemologies.

## Conclusion

This chapter emphasised the importance of epistemology as relating to the distinctions that an observer draws. It proposed an alternative epistemology that forms that basis for the ecosystemic approach to coaching. Central to the alternative epistemology is an awareness of interrelations, ecology, and wholeness. In a move away from the newtonian epistemology, Fourie (1998) notes that "general systems theory could be seen as a stepping stone. While it broke away from reductionism, it still implied an outside, objective observer and linear causality through its emphasis on interaction and power. An ecosystemic approach, with its emphasis on autonomy of systems, constitutes a further step in moving away from a newtonian epistemology" (p.19). This is examined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

**FOUNDATIONS OF THE ECOSYSTEMIC VIEW OF SPORTS  
COACHING**

Central to the discussion on the foundations of an ecosystemic view of sports coaching are the concepts of cybernetics, structure determinism, the observing system, the social constructivist view, and the notion of system complexity. These concepts are not sequential. They do not necessarily flow from one another, but are interrelated and interdependent.

**The cybernetic view and the move to a 'second-order' view**

The cybernetic view is based on systems theory. When applied to humans, it saw behaviour as not exclusively residing in the person but also as a characteristic of the systems to which the person belonged. In the field of therapy, symptoms were seen as functional and this view implied that individual treatment might not only be ineffective, but could actually contribute to making the situation worse. Thus emphasis was placed on the observation of patterns and not on the individual.

The term cybernetics is derived from a Greek word which means 'steersman' (Keeney, 1983). Cybernetics evolved as a set of concepts to study self-regulating mechanisms and was primarily concerned with the principle of feedback. Keeney (1983) states that all regulation and learning in a system involves feedback. Contexts of learning and change are concerned with altering or establishing feedback. He provides the example of a thermostatically controlled heater to illustrate the concept of feedback in a system. When changing temperature exceeds the boundaries of a calibrated thermostat, the heater will be triggered to turn on or off, thus controlling the temperature. The heater therefore monitors its own performance and is self-correcting. In a team, this may be illustrated by the example of a difference of opinion between a coach and a player. This difference may escalate to a point where the performance of the team is affected, leading to action being taken to address the problem.

Implicit in the study of self-regulating systems was the presence of the observer who made the descriptions. The observer was not included in descriptions of the observed, and was considered an outsider who could control the observed system.

Cybernetics lends itself to the realm of coaching, as the concept of change is so central in cybernetics and in coaching. Teams are in a perpetual cycle of adaptation and change and

team members are cast into this cycle needing to overcome the changing internal and external team environment. From within this view the team is seen as existing in a dynamic homeostasis.

Many coaches have adopted such a 'first-order' view of teams. Coaches have been influenced by traditional and 'first-order' approaches that emphasise the ability of an alert outsider to recognise behaviour patterns within a system. The coach's own observations are then used to instrumentally impact on the system. The coach is seen, and sees him or herself as acting intentionally and instrumentally within the team.

The shift from a 'first' to a 'second-order' cybernetics represents a radical departure from the 'first-order' view and resulted from a re-appraisal of systems theory (Dell, 1982). The 'second-order' cybernetic position sees 'first-order' thinking as flawed as the act of observation influences the behaviour of the system. The realisation was that it is impossible for the observer to be objective. Therefore, 'second-order' cybernetics evolved to incorporate the position of the observer (Dallos & Urry, 1999).

Dallos and Urry (1999) note that at the most fundamental level, the shift to a 'second-order' stance was due to an emphasis on the construction of meanings. Though the observation of patterns was still seen as an important starting point, the emphasis moved to an exploration of how behaviour patterns were shaped by the meanings, beliefs, explanations, and stories held by the system's members.

Fourie (1998) notes that any description of the system would have to account for the observer as much as what it does for the members of the system. This implies that the observer is part of the system being observed. The imperative is now a higher order of observation, where the observation needs to be observed. This view suggests that it is impossible for an observer to be objective when observing living systems. The act of observation influences the behaviour of the people under observation. In addition, the observer's way of observing and his or her epistemology colour the observer's observation and description. When applied to the concept of cybernetics, a 'second-order' view saw living systems not as objects that could be programmed from the outside, but as independent entities that were self-creating.

'Second-order' cybernetics rejected the 'first-order' view of system functionalism. Behaviour within the system was not seen as predominantly serving some ulterior purpose such as maintaining homeostasis. Instead, problems were seen to arise from ways of viewing or punctuating events. Moreover, problems were not seen as having an objective status, but the very fact of seeing something as a problem could make it into one (Watzlawick et al., 1974).

The notion of fixing problems is challenged and can now be viewed as part of the problem, as applying common-sense solutions to complex problems often have the opposite effect to what is intended. Hoffman (1990) introduces the belief that this may be due to a secondary and tertiary feedback loop that the observer cannot see. This excludes the possibility of predicting behaviour. Hoffman (1985) remarks that "you don't, strictly speaking, influence people - you only influence the context, maybe the only part of which you can control is yourself" (p.393). In this way, human systems are like the weather in that it is impossible to accurately predict a weather system due to its complex nature.

Hoffman (1985) emphasises that the 'second-order' cybernetic movement is not so much a method as a stance. This paradigm does not specify any particular way of working but contributes a set of guidelines for how methods can be used in practice. She emphasised that the 'second-order' view does not sacrifice practical concerns in favour of a highly idealistic paradigm, but reminds that we also live in a newtonian world of forces acting upon things. It is probably more correct to say that a coach needs to act within both a 'second-order' and a 'first-order' cybernetics. Sometimes it is impossible for a coach to be neutral. Issues relating to the coach's function of selection and de-selection serves as an example.

### **Structure determinism**

The theory of constructivism is fundamental to the ecosystemic approach. The 'second-order' cybernetic approach evolved from the constructivist approach that emphasised the ontology of the observer, and how meaning emanates from the structure of the observer. The theory of structure determinism is central to the constructivist position.

Maturana (in Maturana & Varela, 1980) occupied himself with answering the following two questions: 'what is the organisation of the living?' and 'what takes place in the phenomenon of perception?' Capra (1996) comments that due to Maturana's brilliance he was able to find a common answer to both. Maturana realised that the key to both of these problems lay in understanding the 'organisation of the living'. He comments:

"My investigation of color perception led me to a discovery that was extraordinarily important for me: the nervous system operates as a closed network of interactions, in which every change in the interactive relations between certain components always results in a change of the interactive relations of the same or of other components" (in Capra, 1996, p.96).

From this discovery Maturana (in Maturana & Varela, 1980) extracted two hypotheses:

Firstly that the circular organisation of the nervous system is the basic organisation of all living systems. He postulated that living systems are organised in a closed causal circular process that allows for evolutionary change. Maturana argued that the components that specify the circular organisation must also be produced and maintained by it. Thus, living systems are self-organising. Maturana and Varela (1980) refer to the process that makes living beings autonomous systems as autopoiesis. Autopoiesis is fundamentally processes in which the function of each component is to participate in the production or transformation of other components. In living systems "the product of its operation is its own organisation" (Maturana & Varela, 1980, p.82).

Secondly, Maturana (1980) concluded that the circular closure of the nervous system amounted to a new understanding of cognition. He postulated that the nervous system is not only self-organising but also continually self-referring. For Maturana perception and cognition do not represent an external reality, but rather specify one through the nervous system's process of circular organisation.

Cognition is traditionally regarded as the process of knowing. This is often described in terms of an organism's interaction with its environment. Maturana and Varela (1987) explain the process of cognition using the term 'structural coupling'. An autopoietic system couples to its environment structurally and its interactions with the environment trigger changes in the system. These interactions do not specify or direct them – they are only triggers.

Maturana and Varela (1987) point out that the living system not only specifies these structural changes, it also specifies which perturbations from the environment trigger them. Thus, acts of cognition are viewed as constituted by structural changes in the system. By specifying which perturbations in the environment trigger its changes, the system 'brings forth a world' through the process of living. The interactions of the system with its environment are cognitive. Thus "to live is to know" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p2).

Species that have more or less the same structure usually 'bring forth' similar worlds. Maturana and Varela (1987) contend that humans share an abstract world of language and thought through which they 'bring forth' a world together. This notion rejects the idea of information as an objective feature of an independent world.

Some perturbations do not lead to structural changes, as they are foreign to the system. Each living system has its own distinctive world according to its own distinctive structure. Central to Maturana and Varela's (1987) theory is the fact that they do not see living organisms as

reacting to their environment but rather as responding to structural changes in their autopoietic network.

Maturana and Varela's (1987) concept of structural coupling has implications for coaching teams. The process of coaching may not be as unidirectional as most coaches like to believe. Structural coupling happens when there is a "history of recurrent interactions leading to the structural congruence between two (or more) systems" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p.75). This notion challenges the idea of instructive interaction. The coach can no longer be seen as imparting knowledge to players - he or she merely provides triggers. He cannot place "little packets of information into the heads of other people, or receive such packets in turn" (Hoffman, 1985, p.385).

Maturana and Varela (1980) refer to the range of interactions that a living system has with its environment as its cognitive domain. As the complexity of the organism increases so does its cognitive domain. They point out that living organisms not only structurally couple with their environments but can also couple to itself and thus bring forth an inner world. In human systems, this inner world is linked to language, thoughts, and consciousness.

Capra (1996) questions whether human social systems can be described as autopoietic. The problem is that autopoiesis has been defined for physical systems while humans also operate in a symbolic social domain with concepts, ideas, symbols, thoughts, consciousness, and language. A sports team is a conceptual system that can be defined by certain roles and relationships that are not part of any biological system. These roles and relationships within a team depend on social convention. These roles are not objective features of the team and may vary with time and culture. They are flexible and continually renegotiated.

Varela (1979) distinguishes between allopoietic systems and autopoietic systems. Allopoietic systems can be controlled. The 'first-order' cybernetic view could be considered an allopoietic view in which the coach directs the activities of the team from the outside. The allopoietic model lends itself to concerns of power, purpose, and control in that this system can be programmed, instructed, and changed. With autopoietic systems, control from the outside is not possible. This is because instructive interaction is not possible with autopoietic systems. At best, autopoietic systems can be perturbed to see in which way the system compensates. Hoffman (1985) sums up this stance: "give it a bump and watch it jump" (p.388). She cautions against getting inappropriately stuck in one view or another and regards the value of the concept of autopoiesis as compensating for believing solely in a world that one can remain apart from and above.

Beer (in Maturana & Varela, 1980, p.12) comments:

“ It seems to me that the architects of change are making the same mistake all over the world. It is that they perceive the system at their own level of recursion to be autopoietic, which is because they identify themselves with that system and know themselves to be so; but they insist on treating the systems their system contains, and those within which their system is contained, as allopoietic”.

Maturana and Varela (1987) maintain that a social system emerges as the medium through which human autopoiesis is continually realised through recurrent conversations. Humans do this through languaging, involving language, body, and emotions by developing a history of structural coupling.

Maturana (1985) explains that constructivism “has lost the passion for changing people” (p.43). Janse van Rensburg (2000) contends that constructivism’s greatest impact on the human sciences is the conviction that each individual has his or her own construct of reality that is as legitimate as that of another individual.

When viewing the world from a constructivist position the observer sees that reality is shaped as an organism evolves to fit its environment. Constructivists view organisms as informationally closed. Thus ‘information’ is merely a trigger that perturbs the organism – it has no instructive value. The focus is on the structure of the organism and the history of interaction between organism and environment. Meaning is thus an extension of the organism.

Considering the above assertions, the role of the coach is linked bound to the process of ‘perturbing’ instead of controlling or directing.

### **The observing system**

Instead of attempting to avoid researcher bias, the ecosystemic approach emphasises the observer’s standpoint as well as the context in which the observation takes place (Fourie, 1998). The epistemology underlying Maturana and Varela’s (1980) theory of the organisation of living systems distinguishes the basic epistemological act of an observer as the drawing of a distinction in language. As we are informationally closed systems, the objects, which we believe we see, are products of our own nervous system. Therefore the observer describes and distinguishes words and symbols. Without an observer, nothing exists. Van Heerden - Johnson (1993) reminds us that when observers reach social consensus in their descriptions of a

phenomenon, they think that they are describing something objective. This so-called objective reality is only of value in the language domain in which it was constructed, as we can never achieve accurate representations of an external reality. Our understanding of reality is based on our understanding of how we initially constructed differences in the process of making distinctions in language.

The phenomenon of language introduces for Maturana (1975), the observer. He explains that by being in language, we make distinctions or descriptions of descriptions and become observers and self-observers. Through language, we operate on ourselves. He states that "everything said is said by an observer" (1975, p.315).

As indicated earlier in this chapter, Maturana (1987) does not accept the existence of an objective reality. He puts objectivity in parenthesis. He explains that "objectivity in parenthesis entails accepting that existence is brought forth by the distinctions of the observer and that there are as many domains of existence as kinds of distinctions the observer performs: Objectivity in parenthesis entails the multiversa. It entails that existence is constitutively dependent on the observer and that there are as many domains of truth as domains of existence, she or he brings forth in her or his distinctions" (1987, p.332).

Van Heerden – Johnson (1993) comments that this means that we cannot focus on the world 'out there', but the focus has to be on the ontology of the observer. Based on Maturana's concept of objectivity in parenthesis, Van Heerden - Johnson (1993) points out that in objectivity without parenthesis the observer starts in a domain that is independent of existence, where the independent existence of things, entities, or ideas, specifies truth. Differences among observers involve claims of access to what reality really is. In objectivity in parenthesis, the acceptability of statements about reality focuses on observer community agreements.

Von Glasersfeld (1984) said that we do not discover the world out there, but that we invent it. To him knowledge reflects the coupling between organism and environment. It is not so important that our constructs match the items and environment, as that they fit sufficiently. Coaches often set out to change players and teams. The danger exists that the coach forgets about the fact that we are all observing systems. The coach may believe that it is his or her job to know how to change the reality of the team, but may overlook the possibility that this opinion needs to change.

The coach's awareness of multiple realities existing within a team will help him or her to entertain the notion of difference. In a similar way to the position of the family therapist, the coach is faced with a series of problems impacting on the performance of the team. The difference, however, is that the coach is always part of the team and is at once an actor and at

once an observer. The coach needs a meta-perspective in which the functioning of the team, the coach, and the coach in the team needs to be included. This highlights the concept of the observing system. The role of coach requires a high degree of oscillation between levels of participation within the team. Determining a strategy for managing a problematic relationship between the coach and groupings within the team is different from correcting a small technical error. An awareness that he or she may be contributing to a problem within the team requires not only constant evaluation of team process, but also an epistemology that allows for the position of the observer as actor.

### **Social construction theory**

Dallos and Urry (1999) describe the influence of social construction theory as constituting a 'third-order' cybernetic approach to human systems. They suggest that this approach shares an emphasis on meanings, as central to system dynamics and experience, with 'second-order' cybernetics. However, the meaning shaping interactions are now seen as not just personal and idiosyncratic, but as shaped by realities of the culture that we are immersed in. Social construction theory also denies the existence of an objective reality, but whereas constructivism emphasises reality as specified by the individual's nervous system, social construction theory views it as a product of communal interaction.

It is still accepted that we can never know the 'world out there' in any sense, but in contrast to the constructivist position, a social construction approach suggests that this world is real, both in the structures and actions that take place, and in the shared systems of meanings that exist. The shared ideas of a culture are seen as real and as important in shaping life and experience.

Gergen (1994) criticises constructivism as being too focused on the individual as the creator of meaning. His solution is Social Constructivism which views reality as a construction based on historical and cultural social interaction. This local social process determines the content and validity of constructs of reality and not the objective truth of the reality.

Social constructivism emphasises the social interpretation and inter-subjective influence of language and culture. This view runs counter to the constructivist image of meaning being generated through the operation of the nervous system in its interaction with the environment. The social constructivists posit that our beliefs about the world are social interventions. Gergen (1985) says that the "terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (p.267). People build their ideas about the world through conversations with other people. Social constructivists see meaning as evolving

through interaction. These meanings are not 'skull bound' as the constructivists imply, but are parts of a constant flow of changing narratives.

Social constructivists view the world as constituted in and through a network of stories. What is known as reality, is seen to reside in descriptions. These descriptions, in turn, evolve through social interactions that are themselves shaped by those descriptions (Sluzki, 1992).

The social constructivist position favours a multitude of realities that are evolving. Within these realities lies the reality for the coach and the team's players. These realities will show differences and similarities. The coach needs to be aware that his or her reality is one of a multitude. He or she therefore has a responsibility to integrate and connect these differences in such a way as to promote the optimal performance within the team. His or her task is not to promote uniform opinions and experiences. This process needs to be grounded in respect and tolerance for the differences within the team (Jennings, 1993). Within a team, there are different motivations, expectations, and standards of performance. If the coach's style is grounded in the philosophy of the coach knows best, his or her reality will dominate the team, at the exclusion of many other potentially 'useful' realities. His or her ideas may initially be novel within the team, but the dominance of the coach's ideas exclusively within the team may prevent the evolution of new ideas.

## Complexity

Cilliers (1999, p.viii) is of the opinion that "it is not possible to tell a single and exclusive story about something that is really complex". He differentiates between complex and complicated systems. He describes complicated systems as systems that can be completely described despite the fact that they may consist of many components (e.g. a computer or a jet aircraft). Cilliers' concept of the complicated system is analogous to Varela's (1979) concept of the allopoietic system, which can be programmed, controlled, and instructed. Conversely, in complex systems the interaction among the constituents of the system and the interaction between the system and its environment are of such a nature that it cannot be understood by analysing its components. Relationships in complex systems are not fixed but are continually changing. This is due to the self-organisation of the system. (Cilliers, 1999).

Cilliers (1999) considers his views of complexity to be a post-modern view. He argues that the term 'post-modern' does not necessarily imply relativism, but that it could also be viewed as a manifestation of an inherent sensitivity to complexity. Viewing teams from this perspective would lead to a rejection of traditional notions of representation. This approach to complexity avoids oversimplification that can result from traditional or 'first-order' cybernetic views of teams.

As regards any cause and effect statements, he states that the best that we can do is “at a very basic level, make remarks concerning the conditions for complex behaviour and the dynamics of complex systems” (1999, p.ix).

Cilliers (1999) cautions that due to the characteristics of complex systems, impacting these systems cannot be achieved in a unilateral manner. These characteristics are highlighted below with their significance for coaches:

- Complex systems consist of a large number of elements. Humans are seen as complex systems in themselves and therefore the team is a complex system made up of complex systems. Cilliers (1999) states that when the number of elements is large, then conventional methods of description are not only impractical, but they do not contribute to any understanding of the system.
- Complex systems interact and the interaction is dynamic. This results in the system changing over time. Cilliers (1999) states that the interaction need not be physical, but can also be the transference of information. In teams, there exists a constant flow of changing ideas and conversations.
- The interaction in complex systems is rich. Any element in the system influences and is influenced by others. The behaviour of the system is not, however, determined by the exact amount of interaction associated with specific elements. Within teams the relative influence of individual players' change and shift. The same applies for the influence of the coach.
- The interactions are non-linear. This guarantees that small causes can have large results and vice versa. In teams, it is impossible to predict the impact of an event on the functioning and behaviour of the team or individual members. What initially seems like an innocuous event may have wide ranging and lasting consequences within a team.
- The interactions usually have a short range; i.e. the information is received primarily from immediate neighbours. Long-range interaction is not impossible, but practical constraints usually force this consideration. As the interaction is rich, the route from one element to any other can usually be covered in a few steps. Consequently, the influence gets modulated. It can be enhanced, suppressed, or altered. Team members interact with one another as well as with the coach. In teams, the effect of the previous coach can linger, although his or her effect is generally superseded by the effect of the current coach.
- There are loops in the interactions. The effect of any activity can feed back onto itself, sometimes directly, sometimes after a number of intervening stages. This feedback can be positive (enhancing) or it can be negative (detracting or inhibiting). Both kinds are necessary. The activity and input of a coach may reflect back on itself. Within teams a good example of positive or negative feedback (although not to be taken literally) is a reaction to team performance. Winning or losing is a modulating event. A coach's response to losing might

be to shout abuse to team members that will have an effect (negative or positive) on their next performance.

- Complex systems are usually open systems; i.e. they interact with their environment. It is often difficult to define the borders of complex systems. The scope of the system is usually determined by the purpose or the description of the system, and is therefore influenced by the position of the observer. Cilliers (1999) refers to this as framing.
- Complex systems operate under conditions that are far from equilibrium (Elkaim, 1990). There has to be a constant flow of energy to maintain the organisation of the system and to ensure its survival. Cilliers (1999) sees equilibrium in systems as another word for death. The team is a constantly changing and evolving system that needs to adapt to new circumstances and challenges. Teams that consistently deliver good performances are the ones that have managed to maintain this constant flow of energy.
- Complex systems have a history. Not only do complex systems evolve through time, but their past is co-responsible for their present. Any analysis of a complex system that ignores the dimension of time is incomplete. Teams are often paralysed or mobilised by their history. Team members have many preconceived notions. These will impact on the ways in which the team operates and performs.
- Each element in the system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole. It responds only to the information that is available to it locally. Complexity is the result of a rich interaction of elements that respond to the limited information each is presented with. When you look at the behaviour of the system as a whole, the focus shifts from the individual element to the complex structure of the system. The complexity emerges as a result of the patterns of interaction between the elements.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the foundations of the ecosystemic approach to coaching. These foundational premises reject any position of logocentrism in coaching. Logocentrism is a view that knowledge is immutable and absolute. Instead, the ecosystemic approach places emphasis on the structure of the observer and on meaning making within a community of observers. Truth from within this perspective is relational.

These ecosystemic foundations also point to the limitations inherent in the nature of observers and teams. Players and teams cannot be moulded like clay as traditional approaches may suggest. There needs to be a fit between the structure of the coach and the structures of players and the team as a whole, as Von Glasersfeld (1984), and Maturana and Varela (1987) suggest. This fit determines the range of possible interactions and perturbations within a team, and not the expertise of the coach.

In moving to an ecosystemic approach to coaching it is useful to examine metaphors within coaching and teams. These metaphors are an extension of epistemological premises and provide a framework for understanding and explaining. The ecosystemic approach has moved away from traditional metaphors that guide thinking around teams and informs the role of the coach. This transition is explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

**METAPHORS IN COACHING AND TEAMS**

This chapter aims to illustrate the evolution of metaphoric expression from the systems approach to the ecosystemic approach. The Oxford English Dictionary (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) provides the following definition of a metaphor:

**Metaphor** [formed on Greek *metapherein* to transfer, which is formed on Greek *meta* + *pherein* to bear, carry]. The figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable.

Gruber (1980) explains that "metaphors, analogies, and models are part of a group of comparison processes by which we use some parts of our knowledge to illuminate other parts" (p.122). Metaphors are used to understand phenomena and are helpful as they provide a schema for the operation of teams and guide the thinking and action of coaches. They are central to this study as epistemology is mirrored in these metaphors. Freedman and Combs (1996) point out that the metaphors through which people organise their work have a powerful influence on the ways in which people perceive, and what they do. The movement towards an ecosystemic approach involves a movement away from traditional metaphors used to organise and instruct thinking.

Hoffman (1990) uses the analogy of the lens to illustrate metaphors and subsequently the ways in which people construct their own reality. This lens amounts to the assumptions through which people see what they deem to be reality.

The analogy of the lens highlights the different ways in which situations are viewed, instead of more or less accurate grasps of reality. Considering the different epistemologies that were discussed in the previous chapters, if one were to adopt a cybernetic lens the coach sees feedback cycles not only in machines but also in his or her team. Through a constructivist lens, the coach views reality as shaped in the process of a person evolving to fit his or her environment. A social constructivist lens would focus on the community that contributes to the meaning and would view opinions and ideas as products of the community in which they are created.

## Systemic metaphors

Family systems theories are widely accepted as lending themselves to intervene within systems other than clinical families. Applying systems principles to sports teams is not uncommon (Grau, Moller, & Gunnarsson, 1988; Zimmerman & Protinsky, 1993; Zimmerman, Protinsky, & Zimmerman, 1994). Whereas traditional coaching was based on the process of instruction, systemic principles were thought to be effective in approaching the concept of group cohesion. Cohesion is regarded as central in the success of sports teams (Zimmerman et al., 1994).

The systemic view emphasises relationships within the team, and is based on the hypothesis that sports teams tend to structure themselves in ways that are similar to family structures (Zimmerman & Protinsky, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1994). The rationale for this hypothesis is inherent in the Structural Family Systems Theory (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1982). People who have a history and a future together tend to develop organised ways of behaving with each other. This organisation is thought to include hierarchy, organised patterns of behaviour, and repetitive communication styles.

Teams are thought to relate according to certain explicit and implicit rules and the structure of the team can be determined through observation of repetitive patterns of communication. As regards hierarchy, the belief is that for any system to function effectively there must be clear lines of power. For the system to function effectively communication needs to be open and direct. Dysfunctional patterns of behaviour in teams will result from lack of leadership or communication that is closed. (Zimmerman & Protinsky, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1994). Structural theory also asserts that role rigidity may lead to dysfunctional systems. From this approach, the hierarchy of the coaches and the senior players resembles the hierarchy of parents and older siblings in a family. Coaches' comparisons of players can be seen to be similar to parents' comparisons of their children.

For Zimmerman et al. (1994), the advantage of conceptualising the team from a structural point of view is that the wider interpersonal context offers explanations of why people do what they do in teams. Interventions or changes in the team will be based on the structures that are observed in the team. The structural dynamics of the team becomes the blueprint for intervention in the team.

Sports teams also lend themselves to methods employed in Strategic Family Therapy, as there are parallels between strategies used in strategic models (Boscolo, Cecchin, Hoffman, & Penn, 1987; Haley, 1963, 1976) and team strategies. These similarities have to do with the idea that strategic family therapists track the behavioural sequence surrounding problems. Similarly,

when considering a problem in a team, a coach may assign a task to alter a sequence of behaviour in a team. Although the example used focuses on a problem and the resolution of the problem, these approaches are seen as useful in working towards peak performance and cohesion in teams (Zimmerman & Protinsky, 1993).

Systems theory provided coaches with a different set of constructs to study teams. The focus is on interaction within and between systems. When applied to psychology, health and pathology was regarded as system properties and no longer solely rested on the individual. The Strategic approach demands that the therapist focuses on interacting strategically with clients in such a way that the interaction changes. The Structural approach viewed pathology as due to dysfunctional subsystems in the family. The therapist's role aimed at normalising the structure of, and interaction between, subsystems.

Fourie (1998) comments that the concept of power is central to both approaches. The therapist is imbued with the knowledge to comment on and pathologise or de-pathologise interaction between systems and subsystems. In this approach the concept of objective observation is entrenched, and the knowledge of the therapist puts him or her in a hierarchically higher position of power.

The systemic metaphor derives meaning from observing patterns of social organisation, such as structure and role. Systems are viewed as layered. For the system to maintain its stability, the relation between the components of the system and the processes that go on between them must be such that the structure of the system and its components remain unchanged. Homeostasis and permanence are the prevailing conditions.

Homeostasis refers to the phenomenon of the behaviour of a system's members as having the function of maintaining a particular pattern of organisation. The concept of homeostasis is also reflected in the metaphor of the organism that is often applied to groups (Bogdan, 1984). In the field of family therapy it is postulated that members behave in certain ways because of a prescriptive rule that is imposed on them by a collective organism in which they play roles that are analogous to that of organs or cells.

The metaphor of the organism is one that is often used in systems theory and lends itself to descriptions of a team as a single organism in which different organs have roles to maintain the functioning of the whole. Often these different parts of the organism are viewed as not needing to have awareness of their role in the functioning of the system as a whole. From within this metaphor, one might notice that an individual within the team does something, and further notice that the team shows patterned regularity. One then combines the two observations and

concludes that when an individual performs a certain action, the function of this behaviour is to maintain a certain pattern of organisation (Bogdan, 1984).

Within a cybernetic metaphor, the system is then likened to that of an onion in that each layer is surrounded by a different layer and each layer is subordinate to the layer above it. Each layer is in the service of the layer above it. The individual is encircled by the family, which is encircled by the larger system, which is encircled by the community. Social roles provide order. Any problems that arise are thought to represent inadequacies in social role and structure (Anderson & Goolishian, 1986). The origin of problems is placed on the social system superior to the one expressing the deviance. This becomes very evident when a team loses in that the first persons to get expelled will be the team leadership, as they are deemed responsible for the performances of the team. The cybernetic metaphor emerged as a metaphor of guidance and control, through error correction, in a similar way to keeping a boat on its course. Thus, activities are framed as being on course or on target.

### **Critique of the systems metaphor**

Coaches use systemic metaphors that emphasise team structure and function as the basis for understanding teams. The role of the coach is seen to involve system analyses. The coach assumes the expert role and is expected to play this role out in the group.

Freedman and Combs (1996) point out that using the "structure" metaphor can invite people to pay too little attention to the shifting and changing aspects of the system, focusing instead on rearranging, strengthening or loosening existing structure. This metaphor approaches problems in the same way that carpenters or architects would approach a problem. This metaphor could lead to coaches viewing players in a dehumanised manner and contribute to "freezing perceptions in time and oversimplify complex interactions" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p.2).

Bogdan (1984) contends that structuralist and organismic metaphors of collective organisations are descriptions rather than explanations. They assert for the fact that the behaviour of each team member is related to that of every other member but do not account for it. He criticises structuralist and organismic metaphors and their assertion of homeostasis as these contribute to the reification of the collective entity. In the sporting world, the 'team' is often reified and afforded a status that sees it personified - it is as if it possesses a life e.g. 'Lets do it for the team' or 'sacrifices for the team'. The type of language used in teams implies "the existence of entities – structures, contexts, rules – distinguishable from patterns of communicative behaviour between individuals and to which certain causal properties can be attributed" (Bogdan, 1984. p

376). The effect of this language is that the image of a group of people communicating with, and adapting to, one another over time, is obscured.

The notion of the team is thus seen as existing independently of the individuals that contribute to its meaning. An example of this might be the statement "Tracy does not fit into the team". The statement might refer to a pattern of communication between people. In this way, it is a descriptive statement. More often 'team' refers to an entity that seems to exist outside of the individuals that comprise it, and that carries the power to reject Tracy.

Systemic metaphors are useful as they provide a means to talk about the processes and patterns that transcend individuals. It provides a better metaphor than the idea of individual bodies and individual minds which permeates newtonian metaphors. Although the metaphor of systems has contributed to the field of coaching, it is limited in its ability to consider the flow of ideas. From this perspective narrative metaphors may provide more possibilities.

### **Narrative metaphors**

Numerous authors (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1980; White & Epston, 1990) have chosen narrative metaphors to organise their work instead of metaphors of systems. Family therapists like Anderson and Goolishian (1988), and White and Epston (1990) took an interest in post-modern narrative and linguistics as an alternative therapeutic metaphor. This marks a movement away from the biological and cybernetic metaphors that compare human systems to machines or organisms. Terms like homeostasis, circularity, and autopoiesis carry implications of spatial descriptions, explaining ways in which entities remain the same. Narrative metaphors favour temporal analogies like stories and histories. Hoffman (in Simon, 1992) comments:

"In our descriptions of social systems, we are moving away from the timeless circle metaphors that represents this view – such as homeostasis, circularity, autopoiesis – to rivers-in-time metaphors, concerned with narrative, history, flow. The cybernetic analogue for human groups, which is essentially spatial, may be on the way out." (p. 71).

From the narrative metaphor, systems are seen as existing only in language and communicative action. Organisation and structure are the evolving results of communicative exchange and are determined through dialogue. Human systems are seen as existing only in the domain of meaning. Systems are thus communicative networks that are distinguished in and by language.

By language is meant the meaning that is generated through communication. This meaning within a particular context is evolved through the dynamic process of dialogue and communication. Anderson and Goolishian (1988) describe humans as language generating, meaning generating systems involved in an activity that is inter-subjective and recursive. They state that "We live with each other, we think with each other, we work with each other, and we love each other. All this occurs in language" (p.377).

Hoffman (1990) forwards the opinion that the narrative metaphor is valuable in helping people become more aware of their own realities. This concept enables the coach to widen his or her view and challenges the notion of the coach as expert. Guided by the narrative metaphor the ecosystemic coach has fewer preconceived ideas around what the team should look like. The team is allowed to evolve through the process of conversation and might be very different from what the coach or the team had in mind. Although it is naive and idealistic to believe that the coach can join a team with no ideas in mind, the post-modern appeal is that the coach be aware of the process of the 'creation' of reality through conversation.

### **Ecology of ideas metaphor**

This dissertation forwards the metaphor of the 'ecology of ideas' to inform the position of the coach. The metaphor of the ecology of ideas can be seen to be inclusive of other metaphors that describe ways in which ideas form reality. As coaching is an endeavour that takes place in conversation, this metaphor may be more applicable than biological and machine metaphors. The appeal of this metaphor comes from the fact that it is non-objectivist while at the same time being socially sensitive.

The ecology of ideas is similar to natural ecologies where ideas co-exist with other ideas. There is a high level of interconnection and interdependence between ideas and the impact of an idea can resound in the whole ecology.

Bateson (1972) compared ideas in families to natural ecologies. He suggested that genotypes of species correspond to the organisation of ideas in the minds of individual members. He suggested that the process of evolution is similar to the process of the learning, and that the patterns of co-adaptation between species in an ecology are similar to the behavioural sequences by which the ideas of family members conserve the ideas of other family members. Thus, the meaning circulating in the family is thought to have a similar operation to the process of life in an ecology.

Bateson (1972) states that the behaviour of an organism is governed by the images or representations it makes of reality. This amounts to the ideas that it has. He emphasises that the world of communication or context is a mental construct, as the world of communication is made entirely of ideas. He states:

"There are in the mind no objects or events - no coconut palms and no mothers. The mind contains only transforms, percepts, images, etc, and rules for making the transforms, percepts, etc" (p.271).

The implication of this metaphor for team coaching is that the team's effect on the individual depends on the individual's perception of the team. Bateson (1972) referred to this organised perception as 'context'. The behaviour of people is dependent upon the meaning of events rather than on the events themselves. Within a team, meaning is attributed to events and the meaning determines the outcome of an event rather than the event itself. The question of how a team is organised is centered on how the ideas and behaviour of team members support the ideas and behaviour of other team members.

In teams, themes emerge around which the ecology of ideas is organised. Whatever the theme, the process is one of co-construction of a reality through mutual qualification (Fourie, 1998). Anderson and Goolishian (1988) based their therapeutic work on the assumption that the 'problem system' becomes organised around a network of shared ideas about a particular problem. Thus the ecology of ideas organises the system, and not vice versa, as the systemic metaphors suggest.

Fourie (1998) points out that once an idea has been introduced into the ecology of ideas the system evolves to become more complex. For example, an act of individualism in a team (such as not wearing the team's tracksuit at a team event) can be regarded in the ecology of ideas as selfish. If this idea gains prominence, then attempts may be made to address this expression, leading to conflict within the team. A move on the part of a person within the team can inaugurate a chain of events resulting in the transformation of the ideas and behaviour of all team members. The result is a new ecology of ideas.

In referring to hypnosis, Fourie (1998) contends that a metaphor such as 'hypnotic responsiveness' refers to a system as a whole and not to an attribute of an individual. In this sense a description such as responsiveness needs to be regarded as "artifact of a particular place, time, system composition, and ecology of ideas" (p.57). From the ecosystemic perspective, any positive or negative ascription of performance or behaviour within a team does not refer to the performance or the behaviour, but rather to the ecology of ideas in which they

have become qualified. Thus, an ecology of ideas evolves which encompasses notions such as 'played well' or 'under-performed'. These notions are idiosyncratic and differ as the ecology of ideas evolves.

A 'fact' in a team is now viewed as a mutually qualified idea within a particular ecology of ideas. Ideas within the ecology of ideas have different degrees of importance or dominance at different times and in different contexts. Within the frame of these ecologies, team members establish priorities, claim or disclaim duties and privileges, make rules, and attribute meanings (Gergen, 1994; Sluzki, 1992).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Fourie (1998) warns against reifying the concept of ecology of ideas into an entity with an independent existence. Rather it needs to be seen as a metaphor for the way in which everyone in the situation attaches meanings and ideas to occurrences.

Guided by the 'ecology of ideas' metaphor, the focus of the ecosystemic coach shifts to include meanings and ideas within teams. Whereas traditional and systemic metaphors served to highlight individuals' and systems' properties as the terrain in which the coach could impact, the ecosystemic approach includes meanings within this terrain. As such, it emphasises the inclusion of ascriptions of behaviours and events into thinking about teams. The implication of this shift for coaching is highlighted in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

**COACHING AS AN ECOLOGY OF IDEAS****The team is a linguistic system**

An ecosystemic approach to coaching implies viewing the team as a linguistic system. Whereas systems theory and 'first-order' cybernetics saw human groupings as social systems defined by social organisation, ecosystemic thinking distinguishes systems on the basis of linguistic and communicative markers (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). This view supposes that systems do not exist in an external or unilaterally determined social reality, but that systems exist in languaged interaction and in the rhetoric and metaphorical narrative of our theories.

Focussing on language would lead to assume that the 'team' is a linguistic creation of the participants involved in the context of collectively competing and performing. Mumby and Clair (1997) suggest that "organisations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organisations are nothing but discourse, but rather that discourse is the principle means by which organisation members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are" (p.181).

As highlighted in the previous chapter, what is thought of as organisation and structure is the results of communication and determined through dialogue. Systems are thus communicative networks that are distinguished in and by language and are a result of the process of understanding that occurs in communication (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Thus, the team is viewed as a linguistic system in which participants engage in conversations that are relevant to the context of sporting competition. The team is a language and meaning generating system for which the communication has a relevance specific to itself. Meaning and understanding within the team are socially and inter-subjectively constructed. When team members agree that they are experiencing the same phenomena in the same way, an evolution of meaning occurs. This sharing of meaning is understood to be subject to change, and is often renegotiated or disputed.

Any system in coaching is one that is coalescing around some competitive or performance related context, and will engage in evolving language and meaning specific to itself. This is similar to other human contexts where the language and meaning is specific to its organising principle – its central reason for the existence. The therapeutic system, for example, is one that is organised around some complaint or problem (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988).

The linguistic view would regard coaching as the exchange of ideas through dialogue. Conversations within this context involve an exchange of ideas aimed at improving performance and gaining competitive advantage. The role of the coach is seen as contributing to the conversation and not as the director of team functions or the custodian of structure. The emphasis needs to be placed on the role of the coach as conversational expert. He or she helps to set the meaning parameters in such a way as to insure that the languaging of the team is moving in the direction of maximising team performance. This view challenges the role of the coach as one who has the master story.

The linguistic view assumes that people behave according to how they define the situations in which they are actors and that such definitions of the situation are generalisations learned through interaction with others. Team organisation would thus be regarded as the outcome of an evolutionary process by which some ideas are encouraged or confirmed and other ideas are disconfirmed. The ideas of each member lead him or her to behave in ways that confirms, disconfirms, or questions the ideas of other members.

Just as the linguistic approach focuses on problem dis-solution in the therapeutic context, so too it has applicability in generating maximal performance environment for teams. Whereas the therapeutic system seeks the dis-solving of the problem system by continuing the conversation, so the coaching system seeks the continual generation of meaning that optimises individual and team performance.

The linguistic approach emphasises how problems and solutions exist in language, and how they are regarded as a reality in teams. People act on them as if they were real and they have real consequences for all involved. Once a problem or an idea comes into being, an ecology of meaning forms that changes the team. In team sports, winning or losing a match is an event that is interpreted and becomes part of the conversation of the team. The team languages about it and meanings evolve that changes the reality of the team. It also changes previous meanings around the shared meanings in the team like the concepts of team, winning, performance, success etc. Thus, new histories get created.

An awareness of the team as a linguistic system informs the coach of the need to be a conversational artist in that he or she has to keep the conversation generating newness. The danger from this approach is that team's dialogue becomes the coach's monologue.

## Mutual qualification

Fourie (1998) points out that people co-construct a 'reality' through a process of mutual qualification. This happens in language and within an existing ecology of ideas. Maturana (1975) states that this takes place in a domain of consensus in which people in similar circumstances share a particular meaning. These meanings guide the behaviour of people, so that there is a fit in their interactions. Within a sports team, all the members understand that they are part of a circumstance and unity called the 'team'. They mutually qualify the situation as being part of a team. They have similar meanings regarding the situation and they contribute to sustaining the collective meaning. This meaning may shift as new opinions and actions are incorporated.

Andersen (1987) explains:

" A living system composed of two or more persons allows the possibility for exchanging pictures and explanations. When two persons share their views, each receives from the other different versions of 'reality'. These differences will give new perspectives to each person's picture, and the enriched pictures created from ongoing differences become...an ecology of ideas. These exchanges, which one can hardly escape, make life an ongoing changing process" (p.416).

Within the team, activities such as training and competition are mutually qualified and exist as co-constructed realities within the team. A situation may be qualified as 'psyching up' for a match which has implications for the behaviour of team members, or one of looking disappointed after losing a match. Similarly, activities within the team are mutually qualified as 'coaching' where players understand the situation as one where the coach takes an active role in co-ordinating the activities of players, and the players adhere to the instructions and directions of the coach. This must not be seen as the coach causing the players to act or behave in the way in which he or she directs. It is an expression of a mutually qualified meaning around the activity of coaching.

This process of qualifying meaning is also internalised in individuals. Bogdan (1984) asserts that people behave according to how they frame, define, or punctuate the situations in which they are actors. In a team it may be useful to explore how the ideas of one person fit with those of another. When a person holds a belief to be true, an event is often interpreted as being consistent with that belief or idea. This tends to strengthen that person's conviction of the truth of that belief or idea. The receiver's prior notions about the context will qualify an event or message. Bogdan (1984) notes that if a message is perceived as consistent with prior notions which calls for an increase of a certain type of behaviour, one generally increases that kind of behaviour. Similarly, if it is interpreted as a sign that the situation calls for a decrease in that type

of behaviour, one decreases it. This illustrates the ecology of ideas that includes a certain type of behaviour. Within a team, structural patterns can also be described as ecologies of ideas in which the definition of the situation of each team member leads him or her to behave in ways that confirm ideas held by other team members.

The social constructivist view emphasises that these mutually qualified meanings and even personal identities within teams are dynamic and prone to escalations (Dallos & Urry, 1999). For example, in a team there can be an escalating process or polarisation whereby people are ascribed increasingly divergent meanings and identities. This may mean that the coach or a player is assigned to an identity as the 'out' member in contrast to the others who are 'in'.

### Context

From an ecosystemic view players, the coach, and the team are not considered to function in isolation. Rather they are seen to exist and operate in a fluctuating and complex social context. Within this context there are many variables. These include the individuals selected to form part of the team, the competition or training situation, the expectations and the attributions of everybody present, the interpersonal dynamics, and intrapsychic state of all individuals. It is within this fluctuating and complicated context, that the team creates its own 'reality', through the process of mutual qualification (Fourie, 1998). The team therefore builds an idiosyncratic ecology of shared views.

Ecosystemic theorists (Bateson, 1972; Bogdan, 1984; Fourie, 1998) would posit that to have an impact in any team, it would be important to focus on the ecology of ideas as this contains the shared meanings and ideas circulating within the team. If one were to exclusively focus on any of the constituent parts that comprise a team (conceptual or physical) one runs the risk of what Keeney (1983) called 'fractionising complexity'. This would amount to a form of decontextualising. Fourie (1998) comments that the inherent problem with 'fractionising complexity' is the assumption that once an understanding has been gained of the elements that comprise a phenomenon, a comprehensive understanding of the whole can be achieved by adding up the elements. Ignoring the context not only leads to partial and isolated descriptions, but also may disregard the resources and potential for impact that the coach might have.

Having an awareness of the wider context including meanings and attributions can aid in perturbing the ecology of ideas. Consider the following example: when travelling in a foreign country the team may discover that the accommodation arrangements and meals are sub-standard. This may cause unhappiness in the team because they are used to better facilities and services and feel that the current arrangements are not conducive to optimal performance. The

explanation might be introduced that this is an environment that will test the mental toughness and resilience of the team. If the team manages to perform in an adverse environment, it will stand the team in good stead in the future. In this way, the attributions which players have of the physical environment may be perturbed to include the notion of this experience as a positive one in the future history of the team.

Considering this example, the context not only comprises the physical environment and circumstances, but also the context of ideas and attributions. Ecosystemically seen, the team and the coach operate in a complicated social context in which a large and interlinked number of variables are in operation. It is impossible to isolate any of these variables, as they are interdependent. At the core of the team is the meaning which everyone present helps to construct.

Just as meaning is reliant on the social context, Dallos and Urry (1999) point out that individual experience is fundamentally social and inter-personal. The social constructivist perspective emphasises that even identity is not seen as stable but that it is seen as fragmented and distributed across social contexts. For example, a team player may act and feel like a different person according to whether he or she is with his or her parents, siblings, or in the team context. We are shaped by the interactions across different contexts in which we are involved.

### **Coaching happens within an ecology of ideas**

Many coaches like to believe that, on entering a new team, they can start with a clean slate – the notion of the ‘new broom sweeping clean’. The ecosystemic view with its emphases on linguistic systems, mutual qualification, and context recognises that ideas and actions all contribute to and are grounded in an ecology of ideas (Fourie, 1998). Thus when a coach enters a system he or she enters a context or an environment, which has a set of ideas surrounding coaching and coaches. This context has been influenced by the ideas that have been introduced by and formed around preceding coaches and team events.

Various ideas around the coach circulate within the team system (including the broader system, which includes the team’s administrative decision-makers, the media, and the public). These ideas inform the parameters of acceptable behaviour, range of coaching inputs, as well as the parameters of acceptable performance. The coach also functions within an ecology of ideas regarding the life span of a coach within a team. The ecology of ideas surrounding the position of coach is not stable but is dynamic, reacting to new events and the introduction of new ideas and meanings. In the environment of elite performance, the ecology of ideas around winning, performance, failure, form, etc. can shift based on a single event like a match won or lost. Thus,

the position and the security of a coach in a team are subject to the ecology of ideas that abound in the team and the wider systems impacting on the team.

Players too, are 'contained' within the ecology of ideas. A player's form is something that for a variety of reasons can fluctuate. Where once the belief existed that a player was world-class, the meaning can shift to the belief that he or she is average. This belief can be prescriptive and strong enough to be adopted by the player in question, leading to a drop in form. In selection meetings, the notion of the evolution of the ecology of ideas is highlighted as selectors and coaches contribute to a body of knowledge in discussions surrounding the form of a particular player. This meaning can shift as people introduce various ideas and can 'settle' on a consensus view around the worth of a player. This is also true of coaches who were once successful and for whom the tide of meaning has changed. There is an adage amongst coaches that brings this point to light: 'there are two types of coaches - those that have been fired, and those that have yet to be fired'. This adage reflects the way in which the ecology of ideas can evolve to promote the notion that the coach can no longer contribute to a team.

From an ecosystemic perspective, the effectiveness of the coach does not refer to the proficiency of the coach, but to the ecology of ideas in which he or she is qualified as proficient. This changes the focus from the individual and his or her behaviour to the meaning that is attributed to the individual and his or her actions.

Apart from individual players and coaches, the ecology of ideas informs all aspects of team functioning. The meaning that a team ascribes to the concepts of 'team' and 'performance' contains clues as to whether the team will experience 'problems' when faced with an experience that challenges their meanings. In sport, this message is often delivered through the medium of losing a match. If the ecology of ideas around the concept of 'team' is informed by notions of enjoyment, togetherness, and fun, then a loss would be less critical than if the team is informed by notions of winning and performing.

Meanings in a team are not fixed. Teams are fluid systems that are always in a state of change and flux. In elite teams, membership of the group is not fixed and members enter and leave the team based on the perceived value that the member can add to the team. Meaning changes as membership changes. Coaches often utilise this fact when selecting players for teams or by appointment boards when selecting new coaches. Often coaches are concerned about undesirable meanings in a team, and may exclude a player from a team.

Players and coaches contribute to the shifting meaning in teams. The impact that a player or coach could have on a team can be highlighted by the extent to which they contribute to the ecology of ideas informing a salient issue in the team. By virtue of their central position in a

team, coaches can influence the ecology of ideas to promote an environment that generates preferred meanings.

Coaches often have normative prescriptions of team structure and functioning and may attempt to enforce their ideal model of the team onto the team, ignoring existing meanings. The coach may attempt to engineer the team in the direction of what he or she thinks it should be. In this way, he or she infuses his or her meaning into the team, which may not be accepted within the current ecology of ideas. The coach may believe that he or she can act intentionally within the system and may view any difference in opinion as 'resistance'. This view is counter to both the constructivist and the social constructivist view.

Bateson (1972) reminds:

"A human being in relation to another has a very limited control over what happens in that relationship. He is a part of a two-person unit, and the control which any part can have over any whole is strictly limited" (p.267).

The ecosystemic imperative for the coach is to focus on the ecology of ideas in the system. It is important to attempt to assess the meanings that abound in the system and the way in which they are connected to people and interconnected to different life contexts. Fourie (1998) points out that the creation of new ideas is dependent on reshuffling or recombining ideas. The coach will attempt to perturb this ecology of ideas in such a way as to facilitate its evolution in a direction that can be mutually qualified as positive and beneficial. In doing that the coach has to be aware of his or her own part in this system and that his or her own idiosyncratic attributions and ideas can help or hinder the evolution of the ecology of ideas.

## Change

The 'first-order' cybernetic approach viewed systems as stable and resistant to change. Evolution and adaptation was seen as essential in order to maintain stability in the face of changing external demands. This view included life-cycle models that described change in terms of necessary transitions. Problems within systems were often linked to difficulties imposed by these transitions.

The 'second-order' cybernetics view moved away from a view of systems as prone to 'stuckness'. Rather than starting from the question of how to help change, the focus was on how most people ordinarily manage to change events in their lives. In the field of family therapy, this

led to a non-pathologising view of problems and a model of change that attempted to utilise families' natural self-healing abilities. In narrative therapy, the process of identifying alternative stories and of redefining the problem is called reframing. Reframing implies that new ways of viewing problems can lead to the dissolution of the problem. It intends to alter the cycles of attempted solutions that maintain problems. Change in the second-cybernetics phase moved towards collaborative explorations of different ways of viewing circumstances (Dallos & Urry, 1999).

From the 'ecology of ideas' view, change in a team is analogous to change in natural ecologies. The introduction of new species, extinction of an established one, or an alteration in the climate can produce change in a natural ecology. In teams, these events could be an injury, a player being dropped from the team, an unexpected loss or victory, conflict between team members, or unfavourable media reports.

Using this reasoning, change within a team would amount to the acquisition or modification of an idea in one or more individuals leading to change in other individuals. In a team, this can be illustrated by the following example: After a succession of losses, a team loses another match. After the match, the team captain introduces the notion in a discussion with another player that the coach had made the wrong tactical decisions, which caused the team to lose. This meaning surrounding the loss of the match might be adopted by more team members and may connect to previously expressed opinions, thus introducing the idea that the coach is not competent, or the team may perform better if they had another coach. Bateson's (1972) view would be that new ideas evolved that replaced the idea of the coach as competent. Although this is a simple example, it illustrates the process by which new (or existing) ideas trigger new meaning. This process of ascription of meaning to events may also work in the coach's favour. An awareness of the process of ascription of meaning to events may lead the coach to being sensitive to how the team learns and evolves. The coach may introduce an idea that the match was lost because the other team's players were technically better. This ascription of meaning has more possibilities for future matches. The team may win matches in future but will first have to improve technically to compete. One of the main challenges of the coach is to introduce meanings into the team that have future success possibilities.

Change is brought about in an attempt to perturb the ecology of ideas that exist in the system. Important are the attributions of the team members and the existing ecology of ideas and meanings. Fourie (1998) notes that it is important to enter existing ecologies in creative ways in order to perturb them. No recipes exist for doing this. He states that an ecosystemic rationale for presenting perturbations is important. The coach is encouraged to explore novel ways of mutually qualifying techniques, situations and behaviour that perturb existing ecologies of ideas.

## Health within teams

Just as problems arise in families, so too teams can exhibit problematic behaviour and 'symptoms' which can influence the way in which the team functions and performs. One of the symptoms of these teams is problem-organised language. Teams often focus (in their discussions) solely on the problem and this reverberates throughout the team. An example of this is the moment when the problem in the team is named. This could be ascribed as lack of motivation or may be localised with an individual (the goalkeeper let in the goals) or a group in the team (the forwards cannot score goals). At this moment, the problem organises the system to respond to the defined problem. Anderson and Goolishian (1988) suggest that the solution to this dilemma lies not in what is being said, but rather that which has been unsaid. The language around the problem thus organises the system. The possibilities for the dis-solving of the problem is in the realm of the unexpressed. Solving the problem would focus on stories where the problem is not dominant to change the current ecology of ideas. White and Epston (1990) refer to the non-problem stories as 'unique outcomes' as they hold the possibilities of difference.

How a player or coach views problems or difficulties within a team may lead to escalation of these problems or dissipation of these problems. Systemic theorists believe that problems and solutions are connected in a circular way. Jennings (1993) reports that the way problems are defined allows for certain types of solutions. These solutions may not, however, be the appropriate solutions. Jennings (1993) relates the situation of a hockey team who were experiencing problems in scoring goals. Their solution to this defined problem was that the forwards were to be more aggressive in their approach. In the process of attempting to become more aggressive, their problem of not scoring enough goals was escalated by their attempted solution. These obvious solutions often lead to escalation of the problem and keep the discussions focussed on the problem.

To highlight the problem-organising system, consider the following example: In trying to cheer up a player or a team that is feeling down, the coach may inadvertently escalate the problem. He or she may intensify the feelings and the problem by being an external motivator in the team. The coach may decide to be more vocal and encouraging when a player seems discouraged or de-motivated. Furthermore, a pattern may develop where the coach is expected to play a motivating role in training and competition. In this way, the coach may be maintaining a problem. Problems often originate by some chance event, but instead of dying out, they are reinforced by attempts to alleviate them. The command 'relax!' to someone who is nervous is a classic example of a solution that may become the problem. The command 'relax!' is often interpreted as 'you cannot handle the pressure'. Therefore, the coach's need to fix things within the team may lead to problems being created or maintained. Jennings (1993) suggests an examination of assumptions regarding the problem. The coach needs to widen and deepen his

or her problem definitions. In this way, alternatives and new options are created. For Jennings (1993), the challenge is to introduce complexity in the way in which problems are viewed, as the possibilities arising from such complexity offer greater outcome.

Within a team, a story may become constricting. This story may be marked by episodes of relational disharmony within the team, or between coach and certain players, or most often by losing matches. As the success of the team is often gauged against the criterion of winning, the experience of losing shades the meaning within the team. Losing teams are often seen as unsuccessful and as failures. This ascription of negative meaning to events within the team is damaging and often the precursor to radical change. Very often, this involves the firing of the coach. The skill of the coach from within the framework will be the extent to which alternative views can be introduced and nurtured that challenge dominant stories. Once an alternative to the mainstream or dominant story becomes possible, new consensus may evolve around the alternative story. In teams, the coach may introduce and explore stories that create new options, patterns, and promote a sense of agency in individual players and in the team as a whole. In this way the coach is 'favouring new stories' (Sluzki, 1992).

Blame is an important issue that often needs to be addressed within teams (Jennings, 1993). Within a high performance environment, teamwork is essential. Team management and players are responsible for performing tasks at a high level of proficiency. Teams are reliant on these contributions. When one individual fails, it reflects on the performance of the whole team. Attributing blame for a problem usually reinforces or heightens the problem. In this way teams function similarly to families. In problem families, psychologists attempt to shift ideas that have to do with the perceived responsibility for problems. These interventions are aimed at challenging perceptions of causation (oriented to the past) as well as patterns of expectancy (oriented to the future). Hoffman (1985) reminds that if we take the observing systems stance seriously, we have to decide that the 'fix it' context is part of an attribution of fault that goes with the territory. This leads to the puzzle that the act of offering to change a person or team gets in the way of doing so. Another useful way of viewing negative ascriptions is the model of circular organisation. Hoffman (1985) states that there is no first horse on the merry-go-round, and it follows that we cannot isolate the cause for a problem or a condition except as an artifact of our own observation.

## **Conclusion**

The previous chapters examined existing epistemologies of coaching and forwarded an ecosystemic approach. These ideas comprise the theoretical foundations of an attempt to highlight the ecology of ideas within a team. The following chapter outlines the research methodology chosen for examining the ecology of ideas informing the life span of the coach in a team.

## CHAPTER 6

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study is a hermeneutic endeavour which “seeks to forge meaning and understanding out of the practical activities and contextualized lives of individuals, without benefit of pre-established theoretical assumptions” (Packer, 1985).

As regards an adequate research design for this study, it is appropriate to expand on the newtonian view before a post-modern, ecosystemic paradigm is forwarded. Research rooted in newtonian thinking emphasises the notions of linear causality, researcher neutrality, and reducing the whole to its parts to get a clearer understanding of the whole (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Newtonian thinking supports quantitative research designs. Garbers (1996) notes that these designs are based on the view that if the researcher remains in the background and collects the ‘facts’ he or she could accurately diagnose the ailment and control the defects. Methodology is greatly emphasised in these designs, with the assumption that the correct methodology ultimately leads to the truth.

The shift to an ecosystemic understanding of coaching and teams involves a shift in methods of inquiry and research designs. From a post-modern approach, the researcher is more involved in the inquiry than from a newtonian approach. Within the newtonian approach, the product of the research is a position that assumes the existence of objective truth. In contrast, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) point out that the post-modern position is characterised by the belief that any paradigm does not have a privileged position. It implies doubt that any method or theory has an universal claim to authoritative knowledge. Methods of inquiry in the post-modern viewpoint are important, as newtonian or positivistic methods are not seen as appropriate. Garbers (1996, p.337) suggests that a research paradigm needs to comprise the “metaphysical, theoretical, conceptual, and instrumental convictions” of the person conducting the research and those of the researcher’s discipline which sanctions the paradigm as the authoritative method of research.

The post-modern approach moves away from the rigid newtonian view and legitimises a design which is “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). This method places less emphasis on collecting information deemed to be ‘factual’, and more on improving understanding by describing how individuals make sense. Emphasis is placed on processes and meanings that cannot be examined in terms of quantity, amount, or intensity. There is a relationship between the researcher and the subjects that is contextual and which shapes the inquiry. The methodology

and design adopted in this study is the result of seeking answers that places emphasis on the co-creation of meaning. The co-creation of meaning is the foundation of this study. This renders the notion of objective observation meaningless.

The research design adopted in this study falls within the boundaries of an ethnographic design. Kellehear (1993) states that the ethnographic design is less of a method, but rather an approach to analysing and portraying a social system. The researcher attempts to understand common-sense meanings and experiences within a social system.

In ethnographic designs, the researcher takes the view that the theory, the explanations, and the connection between action and interpretation should be suggested by the social system being researched. Researchers are interested in immersing themselves in the social system. They are interested in the accounts of the system and in the patterns of meaning that emerge from the system (Kellehear, 1993).

Ethnographic research requires that the researcher is aware of, and sensitive to, the impression he or she is making. Allen (1991) states that what goes on in the interview will have repercussions for the future relationship between the researcher and members of the social setting being studied. This is because the activities of the researcher are often discussed in the social setting. Allen (1991) maintains that it is very difficult for the researcher to remain marginal, as there are often strong and divergent opinions and cliques within the interest group. He reminds that not taking sides is difficult, as there are some people who are more congenial and compatible with the researcher, than others are.

While the concepts of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity are crucial in traditional scientific research, post-modern research emphasises criteria such as trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and confirmation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Kellehear (1993) believes that the authority of concepts such as reliability and validity is spurious. He maintains that issues of reliability and validity are of little concern when the central issues concern the nature of meaning, experience, and power. He makes the assertion that traditional scientific reliability says more about the culture of professional conformity than it does about the pursuit of understanding.

From the social constructivist viewpoint, the community in which the researcher finds him or herself, legitimates the research. Thus, the methodology is not legitimised by the ideal of the objective truth, but by individuals' perspective of the multiverse. Becvar and Becvar (1996) describe multiverse as each individual living in and creating reality in a slightly different manner based on unique combinations of heredity, experiences, presuppositions, and perceptions. They comment:

"From this perspective we can no longer talk about a universe. Instead we must concede that we live in a multiverse of many equally valid observer-dependent realities" (p.82).

The limitations of this study are ones that are inherent to designs of this nature. Firstly, the contents of the study cannot be verified, as it is a portrayal of a unique situation. Secondly, it must be realised that the descriptions that will be forwarded will in all probability no longer exist after the completion of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) report that given the fact that interactions are continually shaping the reality, by the time that the study is recorded, another situation will probably exist.

### **The research problem**

The research problem of this dissertation lay within the ideas surrounding the 'life cycle' of the coach within a team. The aim was to investigate how a team views the 'life cycle' of the coach. This aspect reflects only a part of the total ecology of ideas circulating in the team. Often these views will become the prescription of both the team and the coach in terms of his or her life within the team. The supposition is that researching life span ideas within the ecology of ideas in a team can inform the coach to better understand teams and coaching. An awareness of life span ideas in a team can guide the coach to move beyond a possible limited life span in a team or to accept the notion of a limited coaching life span within a team.

While this study investigates ideas circulating within a team, it is important to introduce the notion of discourse, as discourse informs ideas. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explain that the meaning of the term 'discourse' refers to broad patterns of talk that are woven up in speeches and conversations, and not the speeches or conversations themselves. These are called texts. Discourses operate in a certain text. Within sports teams, for example, there are ways in which players can or cannot speak to the coach, as well as ways in which the coach can or cannot reply. These ways of speaking are structured by discourses that can be recognised. It is important to be able to reflect on the culture generating the discourse. This enables the researcher to identify the 'way of speaking'. Researchers concerned with discourse attempt to recognise what discourses do. They are not concerned about accuracy, but more concerned about effect: "What texts do, not what do they say?" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.160).

Terms, phrases, and metaphors function in the text in a way that supports the discourse, e.g. asking a player "What do you think you're doing?" While this utterance by a coach may be viewed on a superficial level as a question aimed at generating information, it could also be viewed as supporting and sustaining the discourse of the coach as the leader whom players are

meant to follow blindly. Discourses construct reality. These texts often do many things. They might try to convince the players that the coach is right, they might discredit another coach, or they may try to motivate the players to act in a certain way.

### **Method and strategy of inquiry**

Ecosystemic research emphasises the process of the mutual shaping of ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study is in effect the researcher's construction of the constructions of others in conversation with the researcher. As this is not an empirical study, the researcher's concerns are in creating a 'story' which can serve as a knowledge base for others in similar contexts. Fourie (1998) states that when one says that the aim of ecosystemic research is to make sense of the world the emphasis falls on 'make', implying that sense does not objectively exist and that the researcher forms part of the construction of an understanding (p.114). This approach is in contrast to newtonian thinking around research, which does not acknowledge the role of the researcher in the construction of research conclusions.

#### The setting

The research was conducted with respondents selected from the South African National Women's Hockey Team. At the time of the data gathering, the researcher was the coach of the team, and this fact provided a convenient research setting for investigating the ecology of ideas within a team. This fact also complicated the research process as the researcher held the dual position of researcher and coach simultaneously, and the research subjects were simultaneously respondents and team players.

The interviews were conducted in different settings at different stages of the team preparing for the Champions Trophy Tournament in Holland. The first two of the interviews were conducted in a non-competition period, while the remaining two interviews were conducted when the team was assembled for competition.

All the respondents had represented their country at the Hockey World Cup, the Commonwealth Games, and the All-Africa Games. The team played approximately 30 test matches a year for the previous four years, and the team was assembled for approximately three months in a year.

The team had been moderately successful in recent years. South African hockey gained readmission to international competition in 1994 and at the time of the interviews, the team was ranked within the top ten teams in the world out of more than 100 hockey-playing nations. Since readmission to international competition, the team had four different coaches. They are referred to as *Coach A*, *Coach B*, *Coach C*, and *Coach D* in this study. All these coaches were male and the average coaching tenure was two years. Of these coaches, the national association dismissed one coach, and two coaches resigned their positions.

### Participants

In this study, sampling was purposive. The participants were selected on the criteria of time spent in the team (more than four years) and international playing experience (each having played more than 100 international test caps). Each of the participants had played international hockey under at least three different coaches. It was deemed that the sampling criteria would qualify the research participants to comment meaningfully on the life span of the coach. The sample comprised four players: Ruth, Sarah, Kris, and Debbie (not their real names). It was reasoned that the length of time that these respondents spent in the team, and their exposure to various coaches, allowed a level of reflexive thinking that 'newer' players might not have. These respondents needed to be able to track the ecology of ideas in a reflexive way.

### Data of participants

#### **Participant 1**

Ruth was regarded as one of the hardest trainers in the team. She had played under all four national coaches since the national team's re-entry into international competition. Although not regarded as one of the most talented members of the national team, she forced herself into contention for national selection on her level of fitness and her training ethic. This made her a dependable and consistent team performer. She had been in the team intermittently over the past six years, as she had been dropped from the team on previous occasions. She had once been dropped from the national team prior to an important tournament. The reason given was that the team management was concerned that her friendship with another national team player was too exclusive, and not conducive to the optimal functioning of the team as a whole. Despite her previous selection disappointments, she had trained hard to regain her position in the team.

She was generally quiet and introspective, and liked to spend her time in the team on her own or with specific team members with whom she felt comfortable.

The research interview was conducted at her home after a training session for the Cape Town based national players. She lived near the training facility so this provided a convenient location for conducting the interview. The researcher's relationship with Ruth was closer than that of the other national players as they had worked together in both club and provincial setting before, and were thus well acquainted with one another.

The interview was not as fluid and flowing as subsequent interviews. The answers to questions were shorter and the researcher had to ask more clarifying questions compared to the interviews with the other participants. Ruth was less forthcoming with information and had to be coaxed into commenting about team processes. The researcher felt that the process of the research interview mirrored their interaction in the coaching environment, which was guarded and hesitant. This may have been influenced by the fact that she has been dropped from the national team before based on a 'non-playing' reason, and that the researcher was aware that this might be a possibility.

## **Participant 2**

Kris is regarded as one of the most talented players in the world. She was one of the youngest players ever to be chosen for the national team and has played under three national coaches. She is a natural athlete and possesses a natural ability as a ball player. In spite of this, her past performances had been erratic and she was often considered to be an underachiever who did not live up to her ability in terms of her performance or her training ethic. Other team players had commented that she 'flatters to deceive' in terms of her ability in relation to her performance. This trend had however started to shift after she was put in the role of team captain in a previous test series, due to injuries to two other captaincy contenders. At the time of the interview she had seemed to be taking more responsibility for her performances, and was playing well in international matches. She was regarded in the team as a light-hearted and friendly person who loves to socialise and who is seldom serious.

The research interview was conducted at the training ground, after a training session for the Cape Town based national players. The national team was preparing for a tour to Argentina, and was set to gather for a week of training prior to the tour. Kris is a lively conversationalist. Previous conversations between the researcher and Kris in a 'normal' team environment were generally of a light-hearted and flippant nature, except for conversations that dealt with coaching and performance matters which often involved the researcher berating her for under-performing.

The research interview was more informal and colloquial than the other interviews and this mirrored previous interactions in other contexts between Kris and the researcher. This proved useful, as both researcher and participant were able to express ideas and views openly without much regard for the different status of the player and the coach, or the researcher and the respondent. In the role of coach, the researcher was always able to gauge the 'feeling' in the team as regards important issues by talking to Kris. Kris was aware of this, and this had been discussed on previous occasions between Kris and the researcher.

### **Participant 3**

Sarah had made a recent return to the team after an absence of nearly 18 months due to a serious injury. She had injured ligaments in her knee on two different occasions and had managed to return to international competition on both occasions after surgery and lengthy rehabilitation. It is not common for an elite athlete to return to international competition following knee ligament damage, and to accomplish this twice was remarkable. The researcher was curious to interview Sarah as she was an astute observer and commentator of team processes, and her absence from the team for an extended period would allow a perspective that was unique in the context of the interviews.

During her absence, team members had commented that her presence was missed as she provided maturity, genuine competitiveness, and neutrality in serious team issues. As coach of the team, the researcher was pleased that she was back in the team because of the value that she added. Interaction between Sarah and the researcher had always been open and intense. Of all the research participants, she was the person to most likely to provide the researcher with honest and uncompromising feedback as regards his coaching decisions and the direction the team was taking.

The interview with Sarah was conducted on the flight back from a national team tour to Argentina. The tour had been mentally and physically very demanding. In the past the researcher had taken the opportunity to talk to Sarah after tournaments and test series, regarding her impressions of a competition period, so the interview situation was not unique to either the researcher or the participant. She was accustomed to being approached by team management for her opinions, and both players and management regarded her as a team leader, even though she was not the team captain. The interview proceeded smoothly and the researcher was again impressed by her keen observation of team process and her no-nonsense approach to feedback. She was not afraid to point out the potential shortcomings of the researcher as coach, and this made her feedback valuable to the researcher in more than just a research context.

#### **Participant 4**

At the time of the interview, Debbie was the most internationally capped player in the team. She was the captain of the team and had the reputation of being fiercely competitive. This earned her the respect of the international hockey community. Off the field she was regarded as straight talking and direct, and was considered uncompromising in her self-belief. As captain of the team she was part of the team management structure and was usually consulted on matters relating to team management. She had also worked hard to recover from a serious knee injury, although she was fortunate in that her injury occurred at the end of the season. This allowed her time for rehabilitation during the off-season, which meant that she was able to return to international competition relatively soon after the injury.

She set very high standards of performance for herself and the team and there were occasions when the researcher felt pressure on him, due to her exacting standards and expectations. She did have conflicts with the previous coach based on personality differences and on differences in their views on how the team and the players should be managed. This conflict was at its height at the time of the resignation of the previous coach. This made her a force to be reckoned with when the researcher became the coach of the team. As the coach of the team, there were occasions that the researcher felt the need to appease her for the sake of team harmony and to follow the path of least resistance, as going head to head with her might be too costly especially at the start of the researcher's life span as team coach. The impression that the researcher had was that the relationship was one of trade-offs. The researcher felt that her strengths and her continued involvement in the team outweighed any negative aspects or any difficulties in the relationship between coach and captain.

The interview was conducted in a hotel room in Holland prior to the Champions Trophy Tournament. The interview differed from the other interviews in that it was less interactive and the respondent spoke more and volunteered more information than the other participants did. She had very precise ideas around how the team should play, and did not hesitate in expressing these ideas. The researcher's impression was that this interview did not evolve as much as the other interviews and was less context and researcher specific. The researcher's impression was that another context or researcher would have produced a similar interview with the same participant.

### Data collection

The data for this study was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews. The research problem was defined and questions were set to focus the answers. The notion of the ecology of ideas was introduced by providing the metaphor of the birth, life, and death of ideas. This technique is similar to the technique used by White and Epston (1990) in their work on externalising symptoms. It was felt that this metaphor could enable more reflexive thinking about the ecology of ideas in the team.

Ideas around the life cycle of the coach were discussed. The life span of the coach in a team is very seldom discussed between players and coaches. These discussions themselves could be viewed as perturbations to the existing ecology of ideas around the life span of the coach. It was important for the researcher to maintain an attitude of curiosity in the conversations due to the familiarity of the researcher and the respondents in the interview context. Players and coaches often interact and the danger was that the conversation would lose its research focus. In completing this study, cognisance of the ascriptions that both coaches and players have about the roles of coaches and players needed to be observed. As such, the interviews were simultaneously a means of gathering information and a creation of new ecologies of ideas. This concurs with Fourie's (1996) notion of 'making' sense through the research.

The interviews became more streamlined as they progressed (from individual to individual), as the researcher was more able to focus questions and the discussions in the direction of the ecology of ideas around the life span of the coach. This highlights changes in the researcher as he evolved in terms of his understanding of the ecology of ideas regarding the life span of the coach in a team. Previous interviews and discussion shaped subsequent interviews in that they focussed the researcher's questions. Thus, the ideas generated in previous interviews impacted on the subsequent interviews.

The interviews tended to mirror the interaction between the coach and these players outside of the research context. The coach often has one-on-one discussions with players. This happens during each international competition event. Although these are different and often one-sided as the coach uses these to provide feedback to the players, the researcher felt that they mirrored the interview situation in terms of the fluidity of the interaction.

The initial interviews with Ruth and Kris were conducted in a non-competition setting as these players live in the same city as the researcher. They were conducted in a more informal atmosphere due to the frequency of interaction between the researcher and these players. The researcher had more contact with the Cape Town based players, while he only saw the other

respondents when the team as a whole were training or competing. The following interviews with Sarah and Debbie were conducted prior to and after international competition. As such, the context was more formal.

The interactive nature of the interviews is important. It must be remembered that the answers and inputs that the respondents provided were in response to questions from the researcher. These questions in turn may have been prompted by previous responses. Therefore, the interviews have to be seen as a process of mutual perturbation and mutual qualification of ideas. It is too simplistic to view opinions of either the researcher or a respondent as representing a reality that is replicable. It is context specific. Ecosystemic research attempts to highlight and portray sensitivity for complexity. The onus is on the reader to maintain this sensitivity for complexity when interpreting the research findings and to extend the process of perturbation and mutual qualification to the meaning that emanates from the interaction between the reader and the research story.

During the interviews, the researcher commented on the existing ecology of ideas and how the act of research would impact on the team, leading to an evolution of the existing ecology of ideas. This is highlighted by the following exchange:

**Researcher:** How do you think the act of me interviewing the players around the issue of coaching changes their view of the coach and the coaching process?

**Sarah:** It is difficult to assess the coaching process while you're still involved. You don't know how it is going to turn out, and how it ends is how you look back in retrospect and view the process. You don't really view it while you are in it as much as you assess in retrospect and look back.

This interaction not only highlights the unpredictability of the coaching and team environment but stresses, from the position of the player, an awareness of the impossibility of the coach or researcher externally controlling the team system.

### Method

The method chosen for analysing the data was a hermeneutic thematic analysis. Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) state that the aim of hermeneutics is "to discover meaning and to achieve understanding" (p.266). This method does not have a set of prescribed techniques (Addison, 1992). The thematic analysis was conducted based on the suggestions of Wilson and Hutchinson (1991), and Addison (1992). The following steps were followed:

- The interviews were audio taped and transcribed.
- The taped recordings were listened to while simultaneously reading the transcribed interviews. This information was sorted into units of meanings, and a summary of these units was formulated. This analysis focussed on a content level and later moved to an interpretative, meaning level.
- The original transcripts were read and reread, and patterns and themes were extracted which were deemed relevant to the research. These contain the stories about the life cycle of the coach in the team. Themes were identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which are often meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985, p.60). The themes that emerged were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of a collective experience. Leininger (1985) points out that the "coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together" (p.60).
- A story containing the respondents' stories was then generated. This is contained in the research report. This section is a description portraying the recurrent themes that emerged. General themes emerged that subsumed other themes, but as Rapmund and Moore (2000) point out they are "nonetheless idiosyncratic and context-specific" (p.23).

The views of the participants are recounted through the research story of the researcher. The research therefore says as much about the researcher as it does about the stories of the participants. This demanded that the researcher examine his existing views and stance in relation to coaching and the life cycle of the coach in a team.

Boyatzis (1998) is of the opinion that the researcher's knowledge of the field of study and of the community in which a study is done forms a crucial foundation of thematic analysis research. This 'tacit knowledge' requirement makes thematic analysis very researcher-dependent. Kellehear (1993) expresses the view that the validity of this research is tied to how well the researcher's understanding of a culture parallels that culture's view of itself. Whilst this tacit knowledge may be viewed as contributing to the reliability of the research, it may also be viewed negatively. Boyatzis (1998) mentions the danger of researcher projection. The researcher may attribute his or her own characteristics, emotions, values, or attitudes to a respondent especially when the information appears ambiguous. He suggests that the researcher be mindful of maintaining consistency of observation, labelling, and interpretation of the data.

## Research concerns

Researcher bias is emphasised as inherent in this type of research. Kellehear (1993) states that thematic analysis is “demanding on the personal resources and intellectual art and craft of the individual researcher” (p.39). It is important to mention this bias as it maintains a clear perspective on the researcher's involvement in the context (Reason & Rowan, 1981). In the case of data collection for this study, the issue of researcher bias coupled with the researcher's history of interaction within the system was important to address.

The most significant concern was centered on the dual role of the coach and researcher. The two roles have different power ascriptions and moving between the roles of coach and researcher proved to be difficult. Respondents also faced a dilemma, as they had to move between the dual role of respondent and player. Confusion on the part of either researcher or respondent could have negative outcomes in the contexts of the team functioning, and the research process.

The team had never experienced the coach in the role of researcher. Players were expected to give inputs into the researcher's contribution to the ecology of ideas. This issue was impossible to side step and the only way around it was a heightened awareness of the power relations implicit in the role of coach and of researcher. Foucault (1988) comments:

“I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow the games of power to be played with a minimum of domination” (p.18).

Secondly, players may have felt uncomfortable commenting on the previous coaches in the team, as this may have raised issues of loyalty, confidentiality, and guilt. It was hoped to overcome these concerns by emphasising that the ecology of ideas was the 'object' of study and not specific people.

Lastly, the system had never been perturbed in this fashion, and the long-term impact of this study will be impossible to gauge or predict. The researcher was curious as to the impact of this event on the current ecology of meaning, as the study emphasises the way in which people create their own meaning. This research forms part of the act of coaching of the team and will be

incorporated in the ecology of ideas. It would be naïve to see this event as a research event only. It was a coaching event as well, and has implications as such.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the research design used in this study. The possibilities and constraints of an ethnographic, social constructivist methodology were highlighted. Combined with the possibilities and constraints implicit in the researcher's position as both coach and researcher, this study paints a very idiosyncratic picture. It does not attempt to capture the truth, but rather to portray a social situation that was bound in a particular context.

The following chapter comprises the researcher's conception of the ecology of ideas that existed around the life span of particular coaches within a specific team. It operationalises the concept of an ecology of ideas by highlighting the constituent parts. These parts were the ideas that existed for a particular group of individuals in a particular time and space around the life span of a team coach.

## CHAPTER 7

## THE ECOLOGY OF IDEAS INFORMING THE LIFE SPAN OF THE COACH

Guided by the methodology of hermeneutic thematic analysis, the researcher generated themes that informed and comprised the ecology of ideas around the life span of the coach in a team. These major themes are presented in the following sections with their comprising sub-themes. The sub-themes comprised responses the researcher considered to be clustered under the following major themes: the life span of the coach, respect for the coach, relationships, demeanour of the coach, and the concept of newness.

Although there was a measure of consensus of responses during the interviews, the researcher chose not to include all the respondent's comments on all of the themes, but rather to extract those responses that were felt to encapsulate the essence of a theme. The researcher was aware of the necessity to mediate the inputs of all respondents so that no respondent's input dominated the total story. The intention was to give all the respondents equal representation in the researcher's story. The researcher considered the extent to which respondents' views overlapped as an indication of the extent to which team players discussed ideas regarding coaches and coaching, and were therefore mutually qualified or collective views.

The format used to present the themes is one where the original words used to describe the 'units of meaning' surrounding the life span of the coach had been extracted. Although these extracts have been decontextualised from the conversation that generated them, the intention of the researcher is to weave these into the research to provide a story of the stories surrounding the life span of the coach.

### The life span of the coach

This dissertation highlights the context or the climate in which coaching life-span ideas are formed or sustained, as central to the ideas themselves. The respondents indicated that this context is connected to, and informed by, aspects such as the length of previous coaching tenures, the timing of the previous coaches' resignations or dismissals, and the developmental stage of the coach and the team. The theme of life span is dealt with under the sub-themes of a limited life span, a new coach equals new ideas, individual and team history, results, and resignation or dismissal.

### Limited life-span

The concept of a coaching 'life span' was introduced to the respondents by the researcher. The researcher used the concept of the 'life span' of the coach above the more widely used concept of coaching tenure, as 'life span' was felt to be more accessible to an ecological metaphor. The researcher felt that referring to the 'life span' of the coach would aid in viewing the team as an ecology in which people and ideas compete, survive, thrive, or become extinct. It was also felt that this metaphor would allow both the researcher and the respondents a measure of reflexive thinking about sensitive and emotionally laden stories.

Both players and coaches understand that coaching at an elite level is a temporary endeavour. Just as players get dropped from a team for not performing up to coaches' expectations, so too coaches are dismissed or expected to resign should the team they coach be seen as under-performing. The coach can never be sure of how long he or she will be involved in the team. The future of a coach is uncertain. When analysing the research data, the researcher realised that the notion of a limited life span for a coach was transmitted in the researcher's comments and questions. This is highlighted in the following examples: "You have seen different coaches come and go"; "The coach comes into the team, lives in the team, and then goes"; "How long do you think a coach should stay with a team?"; "Sometimes coaches stop, and sometimes they get fired."

These questions and comments framed the life span of the coach as connected to a limited life expectancy. All the respondents acknowledged that the life span of a coach within an elite team is limited. Debbie commented: "Because most coaches generally end their hockey careers after four years with the team, I believe their vision has been to the end of four years. They have seen the team growing up to that, and then when they get to the end, they stop and there is nothing more the coach can give".

Although it is understood that coaches have a limited time in a team, it is also understood that similar to players, their role is connected to performance and that if the coach is deemed successful, his or her role as contributor to the team will continue. Therefore, the ecology of ideas surrounding the life span of the coach is connected to the ecology of ideas surrounding performance and success.

Irrespective of the results the coach achieved with the team, the respondents expressed the view that every coach connected to the team during their playing career contributed to the growth of the team. Their efforts and contributions were generally considered positive. Regardless of whether any previous coaches resigned their positions or were dismissed by the

governing association of the sport, the players realised that the coaches contributed to the growth of both the individual players and the team as a whole. Debbie remarks: "I believe a team carries on growing [after the coach leaves]. Every coach has added something. The team will carry on growing".

The respondents emphasised that the relationship between the team and the coach was a complementary one and not a linear one where the coach is unilaterally responsible for the outputs of the team. Debbie mentioned that the developmental stage of the team was an important factor in the 'success' of the coach. She remarked: "I think each coach might have had the team at a different stage of development and I think that made their jobs easier or harder or whatever. The first coach we had, had to deal with provincialism and cliques forming. So I think that was difficult in itself".

#### A new coach equals new ideas

The entry of a new coach into the team is usually accompanied by a period of change for the team. This period is considered as a stage of dynamic growth for the team, and the team views the introduction of the new coach positively due to the accompanying newness and novelty. This 'honeymoon period' is recognised to be short-lived. The team is very accommodating of the coach and receptive to his or her new approach in this phase. Commenting on the initial period in a coaching tenure, Sarah observed: "I think immediately if there is a new coach, initially everyone is very excited about the whole thing. There is change. There are new ideas. I mean even if the ideas are good or bad, or positive or negative - it is just the change. Because of the change, you are going to get some positive results out of that. Whether you can maintain those positive results is a different story". She cited the example of a previous coach to highlight the notion of newness and the team's immediate acceptance of the coach: "we had a new change, and a new coaching style, something different... Immediately his ideas were taken as written in stone, sort of God preaching, and what he said was the Bible - sort of the players accepted it without even questioning it".

The entry of a new coach in the team is often viewed with anticipation by team players. The coach often enters the team with little previous contact with the team and is not aligned to any individuals or groupings within the team. This is viewed as a positive factor in teams. The perception exists that a new coach arrives in the team with fewer preconceived ideas about players. Ruth pointed to the non-judgmental approach that accompanies a new coach: "He came in and looked from almost a fresh perspective. He had never seen anybody. There was no history with anybody".

The selection of players for an elite team often falls within the responsibilities of the team coach. The selection process and selection decisions are often controversial, and the coach is always under the spotlight regarding selection decisions. New coaches often escape the intense questioning that more established coaches endure, as players and administrators are more receptive to new ideas as they are considered to be less contaminated in some way. Ruth describes this freshness in the new coach's decisions: "It was what he saw, and he picked from that. It was quite nice I think. I think often people get picked on their name more than anything".

### Individual and team history

The notion of preconceived ideas does not only exist in the endeavour of selection, but extends to all aspects of team functioning. The ecology of ideas metaphor emphasises the fact that coaches do not step into a vacuum, but that the team has ideas on coaching and coaches based on its interactions with previous coaches. The new coach enters a team and has to contend with 'inherited' team issues. Previous coaches are tied to the team's history, which may include negative team aspects or 'baggage' as some respondents referred to it. The dismissal or the resignation of the coach is often tied to a salient issues or 'baggage' within the team.

As a contributor to the ecology of ideas within the team, the previous coach played an important role in the team and his or her exit from the team withdrew a certain impetus of ideas, either with a negative or a positive ascription of meaning in the team. Sarah mentioned that the new coach is "sort of stepping into a set of ideas that are pre-subscribed by the team, and what already exists".

'Baggage' issues have in the past included the process or decisions around selection, or the elevated status of an individual or grouping within the team. These issues are carried over in the team and inherited by the new coach. This demands that the new coach be aware of enduring issues within a team, and take time to learn what these issues may be. Ruth commented that the context into which a new coach step "depends a lot on who the previous coach was, and what happened previously. Probably, I think people always think of the bad first, before they think of the good things. So players think that this was bad last time and I wonder if these bad things are to happen again, or what bad things are going to happen now?"

Another reason for the positive expectation players have for the arrival of a new coach has to do with the individual players' relationships with previous coaches. The respondents commented that their relationship to, and interactions with, a coach might be of such a nature as

to hamper their progress in a team. Conversely, players whose positions within a team were established may view the introduction of a new coach as threatening to their position. Ruth highlighted her positive view of a new coach and how this view changed with a history of interaction: "When he came in everything was new. There was no history with anybody. In the second year, there came history. He started to clash with some of the players which caused a little bit of an upset, and I don't know if you can call him holding grudges. He was kind of a bit of an elephant and never forgot. If you did something he didn't like, he held it against you for a long time and that caused a lot of stress in the end".

### Results

The relationship between the results that the team achieves and the life span of the coach was explored in the interviews. All the respondents indicated that this was an important factor impacting on the life span of the coach. Sarah noted that "...in any sport, whether it be soccer or rugby, or whichever sport you are in, as soon as you're not getting the results, obviously that is an indication to the administrators that there is a problem".

The respondents indicated that speculation around the future of a coach often starts outside of the team, and is not initiated from within the team. The team had been coached by four different coaches in seven years, and the respondents were thus acquainted with the phenomenon of the dismissal or the resignation of the coach. Debbie was immanently qualified to comment on the processes leading to the dismissal or resignation of the coach, as she had been the captain of the team under three coaches. She combined weak team results with speculation (usually from outside of the team) around the proficiency of the coach as factors leading to the coach leaving a team. She commented that "talk from outside the management group of the team is often false and that is quite scary, but results are often the reason [for the coach leaving the team]".

When asked if the interviewees agreed with the view that results should be the main reason that determined whether the coach stays or goes, the consensus was that this should not be the case.

A factor such as the continued growth and improvement of the team was deemed more important for the respondents, than the absolute measure of the results that the team achieved. Kris noted that this view within the team opposes the more dominant view of the results that a team achieves as being an indication of success. This alternative view of the worth of a coach for a team may place the coach in a precarious position when considering his or her future. She

makes the point: "It is hard because if you have a bad tournament do you pack it in and say 'this is it, I'm out of here' or do you know that you can do better?" Respondents pointed to occasions when the team achieved good results, but that growing dissatisfaction within the team led to the downfall of the coach. They implied that this dissatisfaction was tied to a period in which players felt that the team was not growing or evolving. In referring to a previous coach, Ruth remarked that he "...definitely came to the end of his run because there was nothing new that he taught the team in four months. I think when a coach realises, or the association realises that nothing is happening here, then maybe the coach needs to go anyway. He has tried everything and done everything, and maybe he is saturated. Then it is time to move on".

### Resignation or dismissal

The respondents were hesitant to comment on the appropriate time or conditions under which a coach should be dismissed or resign. This may have been because the researcher was also the coach of the team. All of the players felt that the coach should in some way be able to anticipate the association terminating his or her coaching contract. They felt that the coach can feel it coming and should recognise the signs so that he or she can resign before he or she is dismissed by the association. The respondents intimated that the dismissal of the coach was more traumatic than the resignation of the coach. As the coach of the team, the researcher surmises that the time that elite coaches spend with their teams, and the intensity of interaction within elite teams, would lead players to prefer a more dignified exit from the team, as the dismissal of the coach is often a public and humiliating experience for a coach.

Commenting on the timing of dismissal or resignation Kris noted that "I don't think you can put a time on it you know. You can't put a tournament on it either. I just think there comes a time where - I think it has a lot to do with feeling". Ruth was emotionally colder on the issue of the coach leaving the team. The researcher assumed that it was related to her experience of being dropped from the national team on two previous occasions. Citing specific coaches Ruth explained that "*Coach C* came to a definite time, and *Coach B* did as well. Everything blew up in his face, the same with *Coach C*. But maybe you need to find out just before it happens".

Sarah speculated that good results could persuade a coach to lengthening his or her intended tenure: "When you win a gold medal at the Olympics, you're going to go for a gold medal at World Cup. When you win a gold medal at the World Cup, you're going to go for a gold medal at the next Olympics. Is it when you start losing that you resign or get fired? I'm not sure what happens first".

The ecology of ideas around the life span of a coach includes many factors that are inherent in the context particular to coaches and teams. This includes the novelty of a new coach entering the team, the team climate that a coach inherits as a result of previous coaches' interactions with the team, and 'baggage' issues. These factors are traditionally difficult to perturb, as they are powerful ideas in the ecology of ideas. They exist relatively independently of a specific coach's presence and exist before the coach's arrival.

## **Respect**

All the respondents mentioned respect for the coach as important in ensuring the coach's continued existence in the team. Debbie summed this up as "if the team no longer respects the coach then it is over for the coach".

Respect for the coach is an integral component for the efficacy of the coach in a team, although different respondents highlighted unique dimensions for the concept of respect. The researcher postulated that these dimensions were connected to personal experiences of the respondents within the team. In this way Debbie emphasised the ways in which a coach dealt with situations of disrespect, thus emphasising the role of the coach as discipline enforcer. Kris emphasised the coach's role of promoting of team harmony, while still being detached from the team, as worthy of a team's respect. Ruth valued open and honest communication by the coach, emphasising that the coach take the initiative in dialogue between the coach and the players, while Sarah focussed on the analytical and intellectual qualities of the coach.

The respondents agreed that the coach's behaviour and his or her example to team members would serve as a model for the behaviour of players and relationships between players in the team. The theme of respect is explored in greater detail under the sub-themes of trust, the knowledge of the coach, and fear for the coach.

## Trust

Elite teams often spend much time together under conditions of competition pressure where the coach and the players have to perform at a high level to achieve results. Relationships in this context have to serve to promote a high degree of interaction to achieve a goal. It demands trust for the coach and fellow team-mates as all team members rely on each other to achieve in high-pressure situations such as a World Cup tournament or an Olympic Games. Respondents pointed to the importance of the players trusting the coach. An agreed upon

dimension of trust was that of the continuing honesty of the coach with players. Players often confront the coach when they have been omitted from the team for a match or a tournament. These conversations are often very uncomfortable for the coach and the player, as the coach may be aware that honest feedback may hurt the feelings of the player. Telling a player that the coach does not think the player is good enough is harder than generating a 'softer' reason such as the coach being concerned about an old injury or wanting to give other players a chance to play. Coaches need to be alert to the fact that avoiding the discomfort of being honest with players in situations like this may contribute to the players' impression that the coach is not honest. Debbie emphasised that "the first thing I would say is to try and get the players' trust. I would say that honesty is one of the hardest things for a coach to actually have and once, once the players trust for a coach is gone, that is when the life span will end"

### Knowledge

The knowledge that the coach possesses on the sport's techniques and tactics is an important dimension in players respecting a coach. The knowledge of the coach is seen to be the coach's main contribution to the efforts of the team. A perception among team members of a coach's lack of knowledge will impact on the coach's ability to influence the team. Ruth emphasised that respect for the coach "starts with the players respecting the coach's knowledge". She continues: "I need to respect the coach for what he knows and if I don't respect him for what he knows, I'm not going to follow his ideas. Straight away, I'm going to step back and think what do you know?"

The coach is scrutinised by the players to ascertain his or her level of knowledge and subsequently his or her proficiency for coaching the team. Ruth criticised a previous team coach implying that his lack of knowledge was portrayed in his coaching sessions: "So even the way he held his stick showing us how to do something at a coaching session didn't leave a good taste in the mouth. You need someone to show you decently, and he couldn't really hold the stick properly. To me that doesn't give off a good image". In this way the ecology of ideas around the proficiency of the coach may move or evolve to settle on the notion that the coach is not equipped to coach the team. The previous ecology has been perturbed by a challenging view regarding the proficiency of the coach. In this situation, the coach will have a hard task in future to persuade Ruth of the efficacy of the game plan or the validity of his or her opponents' analysis.

The respondents expect that the coach be forthcoming regarding his or her knowledge and not attempt to compensate by faking knowledge. Debbie suggested that: "If you are honest in the beginning about what you know and do not know, I think it helps a bit. It might start off that

you are exposed to a lot of questioning by especially our players, but after a while I think it will eventually become a respect".

If the team perceives the coach as being knowledgeable, they are more likely to trust the judgement of the coach and consider the direction that the coach embarks on as the best for the team.

### Fear

The respondents mentioned that it is a positive factor in the team for the players to have an element of fear for the coach. This aspect was often seen as running concurrent with respect for the coach. The fear that players have for a coach serves to set the coach apart from the team while at the same time being an integral part of the team. This fear is related to the power that the coach has over the selection of players to the team.

The players felt that this fear was healthy for a team and necessary to ensure that players continually trained hard and excelled. The respondents linked complacency within a team to the impression that team members do not fear the coach or the consequences of under-performing. Respondents pointed out that the coach needs to be consistent in his or her sanction of unacceptable actions or performances. This demands a continual vigilance from the coach and consistent action and communication with players. The relationship is similar to that of a teacher with his or her students, and demands the same ethical considerations. This type of relationship is functional in the setting of elite sports where in certain circumstances the team needs to 'blindly follow', especially in high-pressure match circumstances. In describing a coach, Kris stated that: "he can see there is a line between him and the players. They have got a huge amount of respect for him. I sometimes think they are probably a little shit scared of him. He is very powerful... What he says is the Bible to those girls and they believe him. He is so strong and powerful in that way that he can make it happen. If he tells them to play a 9:1 system they probably would".

## Relationships

All the respondents mentioned the coach's relationships with individual players and team groupings as potential pitfalls in the career of the coach. They commented on the dangers of becoming too involved with players or groups of players. They felt that this was unfair to the 'out-group' and negatively influences the coach's ability to be consistent in his or her behaviour and decisions. All of the respondents cited particular incidents and relationships in which they felt that the coach became either too involved with certain players or groupings within the team, or too distant from certain players or groups within the team. The respondents felt that this was one of the primary contributors towards the dismissal or resignation of the coach.

The theme of relationships includes the sub-themes of exclusive relationships with players, the elevated status of individual players or grouping, the status of senior players, and the importance of dialogue.

### Exclusive relationships with players

Exclusive relationships with players or groups of players were often the reasons cited for the end of a coaching tenure. The respondents indicated that exclusive relationships between the coach and a player, or groups of players, would influence the coach's ability to view players or groups objectively and make unbiased decisions on the ability and worth of a player. The feeling was that an exclusive relationship with a player or groups of players would lead to those players or groupings being advantaged to the detriment of the team as a whole. Although the notion of an objective view runs counter to the ecosystemic view, it does have a life within an ecology of ideas. Players expect coaches to be detached enough to make "objective" decisions. The notion of the coach needing to be objective is a mutually qualified view in the ecology of ideas and as such deserves credence in terms of the ideas that exist in a team. The coach needs to consider his or her 'objectivity' in the eyes of the team.

Debbie reasoned that it is understandable that the coach may feel more comfortable with certain team members than with other members of the team. She commented: "I believe sometimes the coach can become too familiar with certain groups just because it is easy, because they suit your lifestyle". She qualified this by maintaining that it is still expected of the coach to maintain neutrality and objectivity towards all members of the team.

This issue remains sensitive both with players and coaches, and the respondents were generally reticent to comment on this issue. This was reflected in their non-committal comments

when questioned on the issue of exclusive relationships. In referring to a previous coach, Debbie remarked that: "I do not think players could understand it. It became difficult. His closeness to individuals in the team became difficult".

Relationships that were regarded as unacceptable to the respondents were when the coach and a player were related or when the coach and player developed a personal relationship that stretched beyond the boundaries of the mutually qualified standard for a coach and a player relationship. This includes a physical relationship or an emotionally dependent relationship. The team expects the coach to regulate the nature of the coach and player relationship, and is seen as accountable above the player. The team had previously dealt with the situation of the coach's daughter being selected for the national team. Debbie expressed the team's view: "that obviously caused a lot of distrust in the side regarding selection. I think he eventually resigned because of his daughter's career". Sarah recalled a previous coach's mistake when he got 'personally involved' with a team member: "I just think he tended to get too um, well not picking on him personally, but in coaching you can't afford to get too personally involved with players. I think that at certain stages he got too personally involved with players and that could immediately be the downfall for a coach to get too personally involved or just involved with certain players".

If the team perceives the relationship between the coach and a player to be in any way irregular or blurred, it is viewed as a betrayal of the objectives of the team and viewed harshly. Kris reflected that "they got too close. It is almost like a, you know, whether it was a relationship or a father-daughter thing or whatever it was, but they were too close. There was no line between them. I think that had a huge impact on the team. When *Coach B* was coaching, it had an impact on us, because everyone knew what was going on but no one sort of pinpointed it, and people could see it with *Player X* as well. He became too close".

#### Elevated status of individual players or groupings

The respondents indicated that the coach needs to guard against creating the impression that certain players are more crucial to the success of the team than other players. He or she needs to be careful about the way in which he or she communicates about, or refers to players in the team. All players like to be seen as instrumental to the functioning and success of the team, and singling out or creating the impression that individual players or groups within the team are more instrumental than others, is viewed as counter-productive in the team. In elite teams, this is difficult to prevent as the coach is often expected to comment on individuals to the media. This demands a heightened awareness from the coach, as players are sensitive to any form of favouring. In commenting on this Debbie noted: "...he built up individuals into heroes, he

idealised people and broke them down very quickly. I don't think it was ever intentional, but it happened... he got overly excited about the technique and technical skill, of certain players and forgot about the other players that were contributing. I think you never forget the value of everybody".

The ecosystemic view of coaching would propose that once the impression has been created that certain individuals or groupings in the team are more significant than others, then the coach has contributed to a problem which will negatively impact on the team in the future. In alluding to a coach, Kris explained the consequences of allowing an elevated group: "I don't think he coached on his own. I think he coached with six or seven people that gave him ideas or were telling him how to do it. With all respect to him, I think he did not know how to get out of it. He was caught in a trap of just allowing six people to tell him how to coach".

The respondents' consensus was that they did not believe that it was the intention of the coach to create the impression that certain players are more crucial to the success of the team than other players. Kris pointed out that "I think that at the end of the day the intentions are good. You want someone like *Player X* to do their best you know, and if you can see her straying then you want to put her back on track, because you know she can do well. I think that it is such a fine line from wanting people to do well, to it becoming an obsession for them to do well". She advised that "I think you must try to make sure each person gets the same amount attention. Lets say I go coach at a school level, but I'm always going with kids that are good, and not worrying about the kids that aren't too good or just the work horses in the team. I think you must make sure that you give each person in the team, not attention as such, but the individual needs what they need. Even the weakest player or the player that is not that talented - you can help them as much as you can help the person that can win us games".

#### The status of senior players

While being opposed to the idea of certain players having an elevated status in the team, the respondents were in favour of the coach consulting with senior players as regards important team decisions. They felt that, as these players were experienced in top level competition, they are able to provide crucial inputs into the management of the team. There may have been different responses to this issue had the interviews included younger or less experienced players. Less experienced players have less inputs in the direction a team takes, and may feel disenfranchised in the team due to the higher status of senior players

The respondents felt it was strategically wise for the coach to consult and confer with senior players as their commitment to the coach's decisions and coaching style would insure not only the better functioning of the team, but it would aid the continued survival of the coach in the team. This highlights the role of coach as politician, where he or she has to make sure that the various interest groups within the team have been to an extent appeased. Senior players are often very influential both within the team, and outside of the team, in terms of their media profile and their connections to the sports governing authority.

This sub-theme was expressed as a veiled warning. Kris remarked that "I think when you coach a team that has a couple of players over 100 caps everyone sort of knows what they are doing and when they are agreeing with you all the time, then you can still stick around". Sarah pointed to the coach having to be strategically astute. In commenting on this group of players, she remarks that "...they have their own opinions and their own thoughts, even coaching thoughts on what a coach should be doing. These are the kind of people you have to ensure are buying into the ideas, because as soon as they haven't, that is when there is a problem. Questions are asked of the coach, and questions are asked of the tactics, and whatever. As soon as the questions are asked of the coach, the doubt is placed in the minds of the sheep. I mean you have probably got 80 percent sheep, and 20 percent sort of people who are thinking for themselves. The rest are just following the yellow shirts to the airport. You need to make sure that the 20 percent are supportive of you because that is what will count. The 80 percent will follow what the 20 percent think. If there is a break between the coach and the stronger players, that is when the downfall of the coach comes".

#### The importance of dialogue

The previously mentioned factor emphasises the importance of continual dialogue between the coach and the players. Dialogue between the coach and players ensure a constant flow information. Respondents felt that this flow of information can be used to promote functional and healthy relationships within the team. Ruth suggested a problem-solving forum to ensure that the opinions of the players are being expressed. She remarked that "I think that you need to chat to the players on a regular basis... Obviously the coach has the ultimate say and the coach still needs to be the authority figure and lead the team. Sometimes, the coach also needs to come down and meet on some issues halfway".

Sarah advised coaches to: "consult the players even if you don't take their opinion. Even if you don't agree with their opinions, consult them because they feel like they are part of the decision-making process. Then they feel like they are contributing to what is happening in

management. They have an influence in how we play and what happens off the field. I think it is really important that the players know their position and that they are not going to be making a final decision, but that they are contributing to the decision-making process on the field and off the field".

Dialogue with the players involves the notion of the coach getting players to 'buy into' the ideas of the coach. Sarah suggested the importance of making team members feel that their ideas are being incorporated in the course that the team takes. She advises that coaches "get the players to buy into those ideas, almost as if the players have come up with those ideas in certain respects, as if the players are the ones that are contributing to the coaching process, with the coach facilitating and overseeing the whole procedure." She continues that if the coach can get players to buy into his or her ideas then "they have a strong belief that those ideas are theirs. If that is what you strongly believe, that is what you're going to passionately follow. I think as soon as you get where the players feel that the coach is either completely off track, or not in touch with the team, then there comes dissent and there is very little turning back from that".

Relationships within a team are a potential minefield for the coach. This is highlighted by the divergent responses under the theme of relationships. Respondents simultaneously expressed that the coach needs to maintain neutrality in his or her dealings with team members, while also insisting that senior players need to be recognised for their knowledge. The ecosystemic approach does not provide formulas for the management of such seemingly exclusive demands. What it does provide is a framework for understanding complexity and difference. This is provided through the metaphor of the ecology of ideas. This ecology shifts and evolves, and variables change. The imperative for the coach is to work within an environment characterised by shifting meaning.

### **Demeanour of the coach**

All of the respondents referred to the demeanour of the coach in interaction with the team, as well as individual character traits of the coach, as impacting on the life span of the coach in the team. These factors either contribute to, or detract from, the perceived worth of the coach in the ecology of ideas. Kris summarised this factor as "I think that it has a lot to do with the way in which you present yourself".

The sub-themes that comprise the theme of the demeanour of the coach include communication style, consistency of decisions, flexibility, approachability, passion, and stable emotions.

### Communication style

The respondents emphasised that they expect the coach to communicate in a positive manner. They indicated that they do not appreciate the coach communicating with them in a way that is demeaning or that causes embarrassment. In elite coaching it is often appropriate to communicate a message of non-approval or to give critical feedback, but the way in which this message is communicated is important. The respondents felt that the coach's respect for the players needs to be reflected in the way in which he or she communicates to them. Ruth commented: "I think the way in which the person carries the knowledge across is important. If the team is more like a flowing type of team like we are - if you come into the team and bark orders, we are going to step back, and we are not going to like you very much. If you came into the team and you put your ideas across in a nice way then the team is going to accept you... You come into the team and say 'these are the ideas that I have, let's try them'. If we tried your ideas, they didn't work, and you still insisted on using them then the dynamics of the team are going to go, and you will hit a brick wall".

### Consistency of decisions

Whether the coach remains congruent and consistent in his or her interactions with players is viewed as important for the continued team support for the coach. The different respondents highlighted situations involving team coaches where the coach's consistency as regards decision-making was questioned. Once the impression exists that the coach is not consistent in his or her decisions or actions, team members are more likely to question the quality of the coach's decisions and actions in future. Debbie remarked that the tide of opinion had turned against a particular coach in the team due to the idea within the team that what he said and what he did were different: "It started turning against him. He taught us that it was the team that was important, and it landed up that the individual was important in his eyes. I think that is where the honesty and the trust and belief in him started getting further and further away. What you initially teach, you should never forget. You can't let your team down". Ruth focused on a coach's inconsistency with decisions to highlight the circumstances in which the tide of the team opinion turned against the coach: "There was a decision made for one person and not for another. There were always two sets of circumstances".

### Democratic leadership style

When questioned about the management style of the coach, the respondents commented that they prefer a more democratic leadership style to an autocratic leadership style. Sarah saw this as a form of openness to new ideas: "I think what is really important is a democratic coaching style, a sort of an openness to players ideas. I really feel that an autocratic coaching style might last for a couple of months, but you are going to outlive yourself". She introduced the notion that an autocratic style of leadership is limiting for both the team and the coach in a context of elite performance and can be viewed by the team as self-centered: "I think that can only last for a short while, and then the players are going to start questioning certain ideas that possibly are not holding true the whole time. Either you get a bad result, or those ideas are not flexible, then people start questioning the coach. They start questioning the tactics and they start questioning selection. I think that coaches in the past have not been flexible enough - too autocratic! The team revolved around them, not the team being the main focus. The coach was the head of the team, and the coach was the main focus".

Debbie identified the autocratic style of a previous coach with a loss of an opportunity for growth as "the resources of everybody in the team was not being recognised". Ruth expected the coach to be flexible, and pointed to an increasingly autocratic approach in a previous coach as related to an increase in pressure to achieve results. She remarks: "I think that *Coach C's* downfall was that he was too rigid... We were not allowed to deviate, and that is what got to the players in the end. When there was pressure on him, he showed it too much, and it filtered down to the players and they got tense, especially towards the end".

The respondents indicated that a more democratic leadership style should not compromise the effectiveness of the team in an elite setting. They did not regard a democratic style of leadership as the coach relinquishing his or her position as team leader. What they proposed was not a laissez-faire form of leadership, but rather a form of leadership that was open to player inputs and that promoted team evolution. Ruth illustrates this using the concepts of structured and unstructured: "There is structure, but unstructuredness around the team. You would give us structure, but then we are allowed to evolve within that structure, which the players like because they feel like they are growing and learning".

### Stable emotions

An important sub-theme was the emotional stability of the coach. This was emphasised as especially important for high-pressure conditions, such as when the team was under-performing, or when the team absolutely needed to win. The players viewed the emotional state of the coach in high-pressure situations as contributing to a team under-performing. Players want the coach to be a pressure buffer for the team. Ruth noted that "we started to have more pressure on us and we weren't doing that well. The pressure that was on him and we felt it coming through to us".

The team looks towards the behaviour and emotional state of the coach, which they feel models the behaviour of the players in high-pressure situations and sets an emotional tone for the team. Players prefer an emotionally stable coach who is passionate in his or her behaviour and never loses control. Respondents feel that the mood of the coach must be predictable and not vary too much. Debbie noted that "his emotional state went against him in the end. It could have been a strength, but actually landed up going against him".

This factor does not preclude the coach from showing emotion, but rather it refers to the coach being emotionally mature. There are often occasions where the coach needs to show his disapproval or anger at players or at an umpire. Kris commented: "[players] need to get shat on at times, but the coach has to make sure that if he is going to shit on us, he must do it, it is over, and he can't sulk now". While the coach needs to appear emotionally stable he or she must also exhibit a partisan belief in the players and appear passionate about his or her task. Debbie saw this aspect as crucial to the success of the team: "I think sometimes not even fairness, but passion, and complete belief in your individual players is going to put you through".

### **Newness**

All of the interviewed players singled out the continued growth of the team as a guarantee of the continued existence of the coach in the team. International competition is a highly dynamic environment where the ability to adapt and innovate contributes to the success of the team. At the elite level, teams prepare for matches by analysing all aspects of their opponents' play. The implication of this is that a team must continually strive for newness in order not to be predictable. If a team is predictable, it is possible to gain an advantage by counteracting their style of play.

This factor applies to both the play of the team as well as management of processes within the team. Players defined this component as 'newness'. Ruth recalled a particular time

period in the team's history and how the coach contributed to the feeling of newness: "It was unique and new. Everyone was all excited and uplifted and the fun element came back in. Enjoyment came back in, especially in the training programs. He always came up with something different".

Sub-themes that emerged from the theme of newness included outside sources of newness, team evolution, and appearing professional.

#### Outside sources of newness

The coach cannot be expected to be proficient in all the aspects of team functioning. However, it is expected of him or her to provide expertise to the team through the inputs of other people. Debbie remarked that "I think sometimes not being able to know how to pull in other people's resources was a bit of down side. No coach can be expected to know everything. If you look at management groups of teams nowadays they are growing, from maybe three to ten. So people are being drawn in with a lot of expertise, not just your own".

Ruth expressed this factor in her advice to the researcher: "I think sometimes you need to let go of things you don't know too much about, and let professionals, not maybe the right word, but someone who knows more about a certain area step in. It is not to trust them more, but to let go of that area rather. Sometimes you are running around doing too much."

#### Team evolution

Team tactics have a limited life in international competition. Opposing teams continually conduct thorough video analyses of all aspects of a team's play to increase their team's chances of success. This demands that coaches anticipate opposing teams' strategies. Respondents highlighted this emphasis on changing, and often described it as 'moving with the times'. To the team members it encompassed more than only progressive team tactics. The respondents considered 'moving with the times' as essential for the progress of the team and the survival of the coach. There were divergent ideas on what comprises 'moving with the times', and responses included, the content of training sessions, continued novelty in team activities, and constant evaluation of the team's functioning to maximise team functioning in future.

Elite players generally have the license to make strategic decisions during matches. Training sessions therefore need to be designed to have a strategic decision-making component. This forces the coach to continually introduce novel challenges to team players in learning and training environments. The coach would attempt to perturb players in training environments to enable appropriate responses in match situations. This is in contrast to a strong directive approach. This is achieved by designing competitive training sessions that include games that simulate match conditions. The intention is to promote appropriate tactical reactions in players, as matches are won or lost on the ability of players to read match situations and respond accordingly. Players expect this to continue in the off the field management of the team.

Australia is currently the dominant force in international women's hockey. In the interviews, the respondents would often use the example of Australia as a team that 'moves with the times'. Sarah commented: "one thing about Australia from their kit to their administration of the game and their coaching - its just very progressive, and they are kind of always striving to be one step ahead of the rest of the world. I think that by maintaining that kind of attitude you are consistently looking for new ideas trying to be one step ahead. I think as soon as you become static and you think you're at the top, that's exactly when you will get knocked off".

The respondents mentioned that a failure to 'move with the times', or a failure to introduce newness, will lead to stagnation and complacency within the team and contribute to non-optimal performances. Ruth mentioned player boredom as a consequence of always doing the same activities. Sarah described this sameness when referring to a previous coach: "Like what happened to *Coach C* where it got to a point where it is too long and too much of the same thing, kind of where you get to a point when you walk into a team talk and the players can say the team talk already in their heads, because it is the same old story mashed up and spat out in different ways".

### Professional

The coach needs to contribute towards what the respondents termed the professional image of the team. The respondents expressed concern over the impressions that team outsiders and opponents have regarding the team, and wanted to portray a positive and professional image.

The respondents indicated that the scientific input into the team is important in contributing to the team being professional. This professional input is viewed as necessary in the physical and psychological preparation of the team, and in creating an atmosphere of constant

evaluation to determine where the team is still lacking. Ruth explained the growth of the team in terms of becoming more professional: "Things got a bit more scientific. We researched a whole lot more with regards to what the other teams did. All of a sudden video came in where we would sit and analyse games, which never happened with *Coach A*. I don't think we ever had a video machine. A lot more research came in and we then had fitness programs... I think the whole approach got a whole lot more professional when *Coach B* took over".

The danger of the coach not introducing newness into the team is that the team recognises this and strives to gain newness without the inputs of the coach. This is a critical event in the life span of a coach and is often the forerunner of the team turning against the coach. Sarah expressed this as: "I think there comes a point where unless the coach is willing to change, or unless the team changes and creates ideas or new ways of thinking, there is a point where the team outgrows the coach". Later she added: "I think that *Coach C* took us to certain level and then sort of couldn't keep it going - couldn't keep the momentum going".

Respondents felt that the team needs to be disciplined in their approach to their tasks on the field, their training ethic, and in terms of the interpersonal relationships within the team. From this perspective, the coach needs to elicit feedback from the players and this information needs to form the basis for the future functioning of the team. It is a mistake for the coach or the players to think that the team automatically builds on its past successes. Instead, the success of the team is built on constant evaluation of all aspects of team functioning. Thus, success for the team is not incidental, but the result of a co-ordinated effort by all team members initiated and maintained by the coach.

## Conclusion

The above-mentioned themes and sub-themes serve to highlight the ecology of ideas that comprise the notion of the life cycle of the coach. The researcher's intention was to extract those ideas informing the ecology of ideas surrounding the coach. It is surmised that an awareness of the ecology of ideas surrounding the life-span of the coach will allow the coach a greater sense of agency, and allow him or her to act more intentionally to impact on his or her own life-span within a team.

Not only was the researched system unique, but the responses were contingent on a particular time and space. This factor implies that coaches must not view stories around coaching as recipes for success or an extended life span within a team. Rather, the coach needs to proceed with heightened awareness and a reflexive stance.

The researcher's interest in this particular aspect of sport is centered in post-modern deconstruction which Janse van Rensburg (2000) defines as "the general strategy that exposes...the myth of the fixed, essential timeless, and naturally accessible structures of an independent reality"(p10). By highlighting the nature of meaning in a team, the researcher hoped to challenge the 'universal truths' that abound in the sporting world and in the minds of coaches and players.

As an ecosystemic approach to coaching is not a method of doing, but a method of thinking about teams and coaching, it is more appropriate to refer to ecosystemic guidelines for coaches rather than prescriptions. These guidelines are highlighted in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 8

**TOWARDS THE ECOSYSTEMIC COACH**

Coaching from an ecosystemic perspective impacts on all aspects of team coaching. This chapter explores salient aspects of ecosystemic coaching by providing ecosystemic guidelines as opposed to the traditional newtonian form of prescription and direction. These guidelines aim at improving the effectiveness of the coach in a team. They are a response to the stories and ideas that may curtail the life span of a coach in a team. These are discussed under the headings of control, learning and evolution, coaching techniques, reframing, awareness and responsibility, and post-modern guidelines.

**Control**

A traditional approach or a 'first-order' cybernetic view of coaching leads to the coach playing an 'expert' role. Coaches define their role in the team around giving instruction. The assumption is that the better the quality of this instruction, the more matches will be won, and the more successful the team would be under the coach's leadership. A pattern is established whereby a coach tells the players what they need to do, and the players follow these instructions. This pattern reinforces the established idea of the coach as expert.

In the traditional or the 'first-order' cybernetic approach, teams are viewed as displaying 'real' patterns and structures, which need to be altered and strategically adapted by a variety of skilful techniques or interventions, based on the expert knowledge of the coach. There is an assumption of hierarchy regarding the information flow (Jennings, 1993). The coach's knowledge is assumed to have higher validation and verification than that of the players.

In contrast, the ecosystemic approach puts less emphasis on the coach playing an expert role. Instead, coaching is seen as a collaborative process, involving a co-construction of new meaning. Rejecting the role of the expert Dallos and Urry (1999) emphasise that there is an expectation for a sophisticated awareness. Coaching from an ecosystemic perspective requires an awareness of issues of power and control both in terms of the structural inequalities, and the potentially oppressive impact of dominant discourses (Dallos and Urry, 1999). Coaches must be aware of, and continually monitor their own power and control prejudices. Coaches can unintentionally promote potentially oppressive assumptions and practices inherent in a privileged position of power and status.

The attribution of expertise by the team to the coach needs to be managed in the team. The coach can perturb ideas on the expert position by introducing discussions and exercises (such as letting team players do tactical preparations for a match) which demystifies the position of the coach and increases team accountability and agency.

In the context of family therapy, therapists like White (1995) propose that the therapist shares his or her thoughts and concerns with the families he or she works with. In this way White addresses the potential 'political' traps that he or she might face and the dominant notions of the discourse can be laid open. Open discussions around the dilemmas and contradictions contained in situations are proposed rather than the team's agency vested in the role of the coach.

As suggested in previous chapters the proficiency of the coach is seen as the mutually qualified ecology of ideas that exist around the proficiency of the coach. To be 'instrumental' in the system, the coach has to be sensitive to the existing ecology of ideas in the team around the position of the coach. His role thus shifts from the control of the system to that of contributor to the ecology.

The ecosystemic approach would propose that the relationship between the coach and players within the team be defined from a position of difference and not hierarchically. Although this might be construed as too idealistic, an awareness of the power implicit in the positions of coach and player may lead the coach to emphasise aspects of the difference in positions. In this way, both components are seen as equally crucial to the effective functioning of the team.

### **Learning and evolution**

When the position of the coach as expert is entrenched in the team, the coach often assumes responsibility for the development of the team. The equation is often; the more control the coach takes, the more passive individuals and teams become. There is no need for shared responsibility as the coach has 'everything under control'. This view of the coaching relationship is only one side of the whole coaching relationship. Jennings (1993) encourages coaches to create an environment where players take responsibility for developing themselves. This mindset changes the responsibility of the coach from one where he or she is the expert imparting knowledge and advice, to creating an interpersonal context where players assume the responsibility for their own development and learning. This is done in dialogue.

Dialogue between the coach and players insure a constant flow of ideas. Bateson's (1979) idea of the double description illustrates the extra depth that is generated when two perceptions are integrated:

"It is correct to begin to think of the two parties to the interaction as two eyes, each giving a monocular view of what goes on and, together, giving a binocular view in depth. This double view is the relationship"(p.133).

Participation in dialogue creates the possibility of shared responsibility. When there are more people taking responsibility for the performance of the team, commitment to the team's ideal is increased. Jennings (1993) equates dialogue with a process of linking realities, whereby different individual 'chunks' are integrated into a meaningful whole. Thus, the coach's role shifts from the traditional idea of the coach as the knowledgeable inspired leader, to include the role of integrating the various realities within the team.

Apart from dealing with technical and tactical information, Jennings (1993) suggests that the focus of the coach should always be on the coaching relationship. The coach needs to be acutely aware of him or herself as he or she provides one part of the coaching relationship. He or she is not separate from the coaching process and is thus part of the learning process. If players are to benefit from the coaching process, the coach must be able to create a learning context that allows for open discussion and problem solving. This emphasises the process of evolution in teams and in coaching relationships. The implication here is that an inability to learn and evolve implies an inability to coach.

Lastly, Jennings (1993) warns that the coach should never force his or her own reality onto the players or the team. Rather, he suggests the evolution of new realities created in dialogue. A team develops its own nature and personality by the nature of the relationships within the team. This nature may be restricting or it may allow freedom of difference.

### **Coaching techniques**

Expert knowledge and techniques are generally associated with the position of the coach in the team from a traditional or a 'first-order' cybernetic stance. The belief is that the coach has acquired techniques and methods that can have an instrumental impact on individuals' and the team's performance. Fourie (1998) notes that from an ecosystemic perspective, the power of a technique is not inherent in the technique as such. It has to do with the ecology of ideas associated with the person 'applying' the technique, the ecology of ideas associated with the

techniques (there may be the belief that the technique was successfully used with other teams), and the ecology of ideas in circulation in the team in a particular time and space.

In a discussion on hypnotic induction from an ecosystemic perspective, Fourie (1998) notes that all techniques carry ideas and connotations for all participants. Moreover, the way in which the technique is used, and the time at which it is used, and by whom, plays a role. From an ecosystemic view, the 'success' of a technique can be explained as pertaining to the process of mutual qualification. The technique provides ideas for individuals or the team as a whole, to which they can react in a way which fits them and the ecology of ideas that exist at that time. Therefore a technique is seen as a vehicle for ideas and not as a method for unilaterally influencing people. These ideas are not always the same for all people, and serve as perturbations for the ecology of ideas. The 'effect' of the perturbation is contingent on the person's existing ideas, needs, preconceptions and the ecology of ideas (Fourie, 1998).

The implication of this reasoning is that techniques are not used in typical ways in ecosystemic coaching. They need to be used creatively to convey ideas (Fourie, 1998). They are presented in an attempt to co-create types of realities, as opposed to bringing about a particular outcome. Techniques are only used to perturb the ecology of ideas, as it is impossible to predict the outcome of the technique.

The impact of the coach's thinking and methods lies in the attributions ascribed to it. If players think that the coach's methods can make a difference, they act in accordance with this attribute. Conversely, if the ascription is negative, the method is mutually qualified as not effective and subsequently not regarded. This attribution of meaning convinces players of the accuracy of their belief. Therefore, techniques, and coaching as a whole, rely on the mutual qualification of the coach's methods and techniques.

## **Reframing**

Fourie (1998) notes that reframing occurs in all psychotherapy approaches. It refers to an attempt to influence ideas about particular behaviours or events. Reframing is central to the ecosystemic approach as it focuses on the "disruption of entrenched meaning and connotations – the existing ecology of ideas" (Fourie, 1998, p.76).

Reframing is an essential skill in coaching as it involves providing alternative meanings. To be able to skilfully use reframing, the coach needs to be aware of current meaning attributions in the team and how these are maintained through mutual qualification. Fourie (1998) explains that reframing can be done verbally, non-verbally, or even organisationally. These meanings

have the ability to 'carry' different descriptions. In an example of reframing, a coach explained to a team facing a crisis, that the Chinese word for crisis has a dual meaning - both danger and opportunity. The coach has offered an alternative description of the situation aimed to disrupt the current meaning. The team may now view the situation not as one fraught only with danger, but as an opportunity to excel. The effectiveness of the reframe rests in the way in which a new meaning can be incorporated into the current meaning to replace dominant ideas.

### **Promoting awareness and interaction**

While traditional coaching is characterised by instructions, ecosystemic coaching is aimed at improving players' awareness, and on the process of learning. Whitaker (1999) suggests that coaches 'ask rather than tell', to promote awareness and responsibility in a team. Questions now form part of the coaching situation, not only instructions. Coaches generally talk a lot, as instructions to players are easy to give. While it is easy to understand verbal information on a mental level, these instructions often demand that players perform the instruction with their bodies. The effective use of questioning enables players to have a heightened awareness of the mind-body interaction. Examples of these questions include: "What did you notice about the ball as it was coming towards you?" "What did it feel like to strike that ball?" "What did you notice about yourself when your direct opponent scored the goal?" Jennings (1993) suggests that coaches avoid 'why' questions as these imply judgement and lead to speculation. 'What? How? When? or Who?' questions stimulate problem solving ability and connect processes on the field to mental processes.

Whitaker (1999) reports that the result of using effective questions is that they generate high levels of awareness and offer the opportunity for players to produce improved responses. This process empowers the players to solve problems and to take responsibility. He refers to the process of generating awareness and responsibility as "high quality coaching interaction" (p.47). This generates the following effects:

- Players are involved in learning and development.
- The knowledge and experience of players are valued and used.
- Players participate in the creation of their own future performance.
- Individuality and uniqueness are acknowledged and integrated rather than excluded.
- Empowerment is a natural outcome.
- A clear focus on performance enhancement through the involvement of players.
- Players are more self-reliant, self-monitoring, and self-motivated.

Apart from facilitating and creating awareness in players, the coach also needs to be aware of him or herself in interaction with players. This includes his or her feelings, the way in which he or she speaks to players, his or her impact on individual players and the team, and the environment in which he or she is operating.

When approaching coaching from an ecosystemic position, the coach aims at making the team less coach-dependent. Jennings (1993) comments that in the process of creating awareness in a team "the player learns to become his own psychologist, his own physical trainer, his own coaching strategist, his own dietician, his own monitor. He is taking on responsibility for his own development in a holistic way"(p.125). The participation of the players in the learning process, and a willingness of the coach to relinquish the expert role, creates the reality of shared responsibility.

### **Post-modern guidelines**

The rise of the post-modern worldview is a foundation of the ecosystemic approach. Hoffman (1993) would describe the traditional position as a 'colonial' one that 'practices down' and does not examine its own, often insidious, assumptions and methods. The ecosystemic approach to coaching embraces the following post-modern tenets and prescriptions:

- Ecosystemic coaches do not believe in an 'out-there' reality. Ideas within teams are co-constructed. Teams decide on social agreements or challenge each other's values and rules. In each case, there is no outside judge and the team is responsible for its own creation of meaning. Hoffman (1993) refers to this process as the idea of a 'hermeneutic circle' – a process of continual change through exchange.
- Ecosystemic coaches want to move away from dichotomies. This is because dichotomies obscure connections and serve an isolationist approach. Language around sport is dotted with many either/or dichotomies. These include winning or losing, good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, motivated or unmotivated, body or mind, practice or competition, technique or tactics etc. The language is one of success, winning, domination, and strength. Not buying into this way of communicating, in the extreme, can be viewed as not having a strong or worthy opinion. It is a language where the notion of successful or unsuccessful actions is promoted. It has borrowed much from the western scientific tradition with the emphasis on control and manipulation of variables, search for predictable results, and mastery of the discipline.
- Ecosystemic coaches describe cause by association and not logic. Hoffman (1993) remarks that this is because it is less likely to point the finger and apportion blame than a linear causal view. If any person is designated as the problem or the cause of an undesirable situation, it

assumes the newtonian conception of linear causation. In ecosystemic thinking there is no linear cause implication (Fourie, 1998).

- Ecosystemic coaches are less certain in claiming results for their methods. This is because they realise the limitations of instructive interaction. This leads to a less active posture.
- There is no more meta-position for the ecosystemic coach. Instead, biases and opinions are openly expressed. The coach's 'superior' story is exchanged for more emphasis on drawing out the team's stories. There are less coaching secrets and more sharing and transparency.
- There is a move away from normative ideas within teams and normative models for teams. In this way, the coach cannot know what the final product is, and contributes to the continual creation of the team.
- The ecosystemic coach focuses on the whole coaching situation. The coach does not focus on a single person, or situation, but on the total context which qualifies the activities of the team or the situation of coaching. The ecosystemic coach's efforts are focused on the ecology of ideas in the team. The coach would attempt to assess how players define situations, and what meaning players attach to themselves, each other, and different team situations. He or she will attempt to perturb the ecology of ideas in order to evolve the ecology in a mutually qualified positive direction. The coach needs to be aware that he or she is part of the system and that his or her own attributions and ideas can help or hinder the evolution of the ecology of ideas (Fourie, 1998).
- The individual is confirmed from within ecosystemic thinking. There is no attribution of blame for problems. Instead, the coach views individuals as capable of performing and acting within the parameters of their own structure (Maturana & Varela, 1980, 1987).
- Coaching is a narrative endeavour. It involves a group of people in conversation (verbal and non-verbal) within a sporting context. These contributions form the basis of the co-evolution of an ecology of ideas.
- Ecosystemic coaches recognise that their techniques and methods are not inherently powerful. The ecosystemic coach may use the power attributions that players have around the coach or the coach's techniques and methods. These attributions can change the ecology of ideas. The ecosystemic coach can use this to perturb the ideas within the team.

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed at forwarding guidelines for ecosystemic coaches regarding salient coaching issues. As the ecosystemic approach is not based on specific techniques or success recipes, it must be realised that these guidelines do not comprise the ecosystemic view but rather mirror aspects of it. It comprises a means of thinking more than a mode of doing. Ecosystemic thinking views any production of the mind as an artifact peculiar to the individual or community that created it. It should also view itself as an artifact. An ecosystemic coach cannot consider his or her approach as truer than any other. One of the main premises of the ecosystemic view is that meaning, behaviour, and actions are context dependent. Fourie (1998) contends that any observation or method needs to fit the context. He comments that the closest that the ecosystemic approach gets to a universal comment would be that the observation or method fits the context better than another, and even then it would be the expression of an opinion.

## CHAPTER 9

**CONCLUSION**

This study aimed at furthering an ecosystemic approach to sports coaching as an alternative to traditional approaches to coaching. The life span of the coach in a team was explored using the metaphor of the ecology of ideas. This metaphor places notions and ideas that arise about the coach within a context of competing and complementary ideas, similar to that of a species within a natural ecology. This ecology of ideas evolves to either limit or confirm the impact that a coach has within a team.

In contrast to a traditional newtonian approach to coaching, the ecosystemic approach acknowledges the inherent complexity in human systems. While the newtonian view considers the coach as unilaterally responsible for the progress of the team, an ecosystemic approach sees the relationship between the coach, the team, and the context, as a process of reciprocal causation and interaction.

Although successful in its application in elite sports, the traditional approach is limited in that it ignores contextual issues that impact on teams and individual players. The ecosystemic approach offers a framework for processing and utilising a vast amount of information (O' Connor & Lubin, 1984). Part of this information involves and includes the observer who becomes viewed as part of that which is being observed.

Themes contributing to the ecology of ideas regarding the life span of a coach in a team were explored and presented. Although these themes may provide useful information for other coaches, they are essentially an idiosyncratic representation bound by a specific context.

This study contributes to solving the research problem of stepping outside the traditional life cycle of the coach. From within the ideas expounded in this dissertation, the 'grand' theories and stories of effective coaching can be challenged. This position supports a deconstruction of the traditional role of the coach in favour of a more collaborative, reflexive position where different stories are given the space to emerge (Hoffman, 1992). 'Knowledge' is now viewed as a plurality of smaller stories that function well within the contexts where they apply (Cilliers, 1999).

When coaching is viewed as a process of social construction, all the participants involved are contributors. While each participant does not have an equal position in the interaction, each one collaborates. The team is a collaborative product. From a traditional coaching perspective, the process is very one-sided, with the coach in charge of the direction of the team and the

players are the primary focus of attention. The traditional approach sees the players' role as that of seeking the instruction that the coach provides. By contrast, in ecosystemic coaching the coach is more open to examination.

When informed by an ecosystemic approach, the coach views his or her entry into the team as entering an ecology of ideas. His or her aim is to perturb the ecology in a way that is mutually qualified as successful. The ecosystemic approach moves beyond traditional coaching, as the coach's thinking about the team and coaching is at a different level of abstraction, using different metaphors for understanding.

An ecosystemic approach involves impacting on the ecology of ideas in the coaching system and not only focusing on individuals and team groupings. As such the ecosystemic coach needs to have a wider focus of impact. The coach needs to consider the realm of meaning connected to conversations, behaviours, and events and not only the conversations, behaviours, and events in themselves. Essential to this notion is attempting to assess how these are defined in a team. The coach works within this ecology attempting to perturb it in a direction that is mutually qualified as positive. He or she needs to be continually aware that he or she is part of the system and that his or her own ideas can either contribute or detract from the evolution of the ecology of ideas in a positive way.

If a coach and a team can view their reality as an ecology of ideas or a story that is told about them or that they tell about themselves, it allows the team to move in the direction of stories which emphasise success. Health in the team is now the extent to which the stories that are told about the coach and the team are the stories that people want to be told.

An ecosystemic approach proposes that the coach has a heightened sensitivity to the complexity existing in teams. Acting in the team may demand that the coach use certain techniques and knowledge, which the coach deems to have an impact on the team. Fourie (1998) reminds us that the ecosystemic approach does not 'own' any techniques and that techniques are not seen as having a linear or predictable outcome. Success does not reside in the technique or the knowledge of the coach. The coach must remember that at best he or she can only perturb the meanings, ideas, and attributions within the team.

Coaches are encouraged to find and explore novel ways of perturbing a team. The ecosystemic approach to coaching is not an 'anything goes' approach. It is recommended that coaches become proficient at describing their role and impact within a team in ecosystemic terms. In this way, they are better able to describe their thinking and the rationale behind coaching interventions and actions.

The ecosystemic approach does not limit the coach to a certain way of working within a team. What is important is the ecosystemic rationale for choosing a way of being in a team. Coaches may work with teams in ways that are seen as reflecting 'first-order' cybernetics. A 'first-order' perspective draws attention to patterns and regularities in teams. It may make good sense to acknowledge the reality of actions and processes from within a 'first-order' cybernetic view.

A 'second-order' view would implore the coach to consider the uniqueness of actions within teams and what it means to be part of a particular team. It would alert the coach to be sensitive to differences between teams and team members that may seem superficially similar in terms of patterns and rules. A social construction view would alert the coach that teams can be predictable and rule-bound but with the recognition that these are not simply constructed by the team but by the cultural context and commonly held ideas about teams.

Fourie (1998) points out that ecosystemic research constructs consensus. The sense that the researcher makes of his or her area of study must fit with the sense of the community. The understanding is therefore consensual. It is from this departure point that the researcher aimed at extracting themes which contribute to the total ecology of ideas informing the life span of the coach in a team.

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# APPENDIX A

## Interview transcripts

### Interview with Ruth

**Researcher:** Thank you for helping out with my dissertation. I am looking at the ways in which a team views the coach, not only specific individuals, but also at the collective views that are formed around a coach. It is generally accepted that coaches have a certain life span in the team. They come into the team and eventually it is time to leave the team. I am looking at the ideas behind the life span of the coach. I might ask you to comment on these ideas and on certain coaches, as you have been part of the national team for a while now. You have been part of the team under four coaches. You therefore have the ability to compare. The research is not concerned with specific individuals as I am only researching the process of coaching. I want to talk a little about your experiences and views. When you came into the national team, what was your relationship with the coach, and what did the coach bring to the team?

**Ruth:** It was *Coach A*. It was quite an exciting time for me. It was probably the year that I least expected it - that I made it. I found him quite, I must say, I was a bit scared of him actually, because I didn't know him at all, and I was quite young at the time, and I hadn't quite established myself. I had only played one year in Western Province. I wasn't really well known in the senior circles. I wasn't comfortable really. I was probably a little scared of him, and because I was younger as well, I was scared to approach him about things. I would turn more towards other players than anything else.

**Researcher:** What were the issues in the team at that stage? I think that ideas get born in a team and live in a team. It was obviously an exciting time in the team with the introduction of South Africa into international hockey. What were the issues in the team at that stage? Can you remember? Can you put yourself back into that time?

**Ruth:** I think it was more like this is what we've seen other teams play like on video and lets see what we can do. I think we were quite naive. I think it was more like lets see what we can do and let's take the game to them. Ja, and that was more than anything else. There was not much science in it. There was obviously a tactical awareness. It wasn't like lets see what they are doing and then let's try and counter that. It was we're doing this and that's it. If it works, it works, and if it doesn't, it doesn't, and that was it.

**Researcher:** How long were you with *Coach A* for? What period?

**Ruth:** It was probably about three or four years I think. I can't remember.

**Researcher:** In that time, how did the team change?

**Ruth:** It didn't actually change much. The personnel were pretty much the same. At that time it was more difficult to get out of the team than it was to get in. The age was much older, the age of the team. I must say that the team didn't change that much at all. He tried to bring in a sports psychologist here and there. They would research a bit on nutrition here and there, but nothing was ever carried through. It was all just dabbling in this and dabble in that. Let's try this and let's try that.

**Researcher:** How many test matches did you play? Did you play very often?

**Ruth:** We played against Canada - unofficial games. I can't remember it was two or three, and then we had a series here against England. It was a travelling circus. I think we had two games here (Cape Town) and two in Port Elizabeth or Johannesburg. Then we also played against Australia. It was pretty much the same amount of matches - more or less five.

**Researcher:** What were the conditions around the team when *Coach A* left the team? Can you remember why he left the team?

**Ruth:** No I don't. I was too young to actually know what was really going on and I didn't ask questions at that stage. I probably had blinkers on. I didn't really know.

**Researcher:** What would you say were his strengths and weaknesses?

**Ruth:** I think his weakness was that he was not very approachable. I didn't personally find it very easy to go and speak to him. It was his way or no way. Another thing, he never played hockey himself, so even the way he held his stick showing us how to do something at a coaching session didn't leave a good taste in the mouth. You need someone to show you decently, and he couldn't really hold the stick properly. To me that doesn't give off a good image.

**Researcher:** Then *Coach B* came into the team. How did things change when he came into the team?

**Ruth:** Things got a bit more scientific. We researched a whole lot more with regards to what the other teams did. All of a sudden video came in where we would sit and analyse games, which never happened with *Coach A*. I don't think we ever had a video machine. A lot more research

came in and we then had fitness programmes. With *Coach A* we would have fitness programmes done by *Assistant coach A*, but they were like long and drawn out, which somebody had done sometime, but nobody had really gone into anything. So I think the whole approach got a whole lot more professional when *Coach B* took over.

**Researcher:** And team dynamics? Obviously, the coach often brings something new into the team. What was his contribution coming into the team?

**Ruth:** That was the thing just mentioned. There was a new dynamic. He also tried to - there was a lot of provincialism with *Coach A* because it was the start of people getting together for more hockey. I mean previously it was only a week that people got together for the A team versus the B team. Now we had to spend more time together, so he tried to build on more team dynamics, team harmony, a bit of team building - that sort of thing. So players started getting more comfortable with one another as well. I think that was his big thing.

**Researcher:** How did you see things change within *Coach B's* life span as coach. Did you notice any changes from when he took over until he left the team?

**Ruth:** Everybody got more professional. There was a lot more dialogue between the team and the coach. He was more approachable and accessible to ideas especially from the hierarchy in the team - the more established players. He did sit down and listen more. That was a big change.

**Researcher:** Did you think this was a strength?

**Ruth:** I think it was a strength and a weakness, because some players had more influence - they had more say. I don't think the little people had that much say in it. So I think it was a bit of both.

**Researcher:** Then there was *Coach C*. How did you see the change in the team, not only the way the team played, but also the way things were done?

**Ruth:** South African hockey had always struggled with basics. *Coach C* brought in new dynamics as regards to that. I don't think we would be as far as we are if we didn't get that right. Because he was Dutch, he brought in a new way of doing things. It was unique and new. Everyone was all excited and uplifted and the fun element came back in. Enjoyment came back in, especially in the training programs. He always came up with something different. Obviously towards the end it got a bit boring because it was always shuttles, which people started getting very bored with. In the beginning, it was a new thing and I think it was very good. I think what he brought in was that he was not associated to any specific province or any specific person. He

came in with fresh eyes and did not know anything about anybody. He came in and looked from almost a fresh perspective. He had never seen anybody. There was no history with anybody. It was what he saw, and he picked from that. It was quite nice I think. I think often people get picked on their name more than anything. Sometimes it does happen. I think that *Coach C's* downfall was that he was too rigid. I think South African players like flair. Give them a pattern and let them develop themselves around the pattern. I think he was too rigid with our team. We were not allowed to deviate, and that is what got the players in the end. When there was pressure on him, he showed it too much, and it filtered down to the players and they got tense. Especially towards the end.

**Researcher:** I think that in the two years that he was involved there were two different atmospheres. Why do you think that in the two different years there were different sets of circumstances? What is your explanation for it?

**Ruth:** When he came in, everything was new. There was no history with anybody. In the second year there came history. He started to clash with some of the players which caused a little bit of an upset, and I don't know if you can call him holding grudges. He was kind of a bit of an elephant and never forgot. If you did something he didn't like, he held it against you for a long time, and that caused a lot of stress in the end. The first year we did very well with him because everything was new - so it was easy. The second year people started to get to know how we were playing, because nothing much changed from the first to the second year in our team. So we started to have more pressure on us and we weren't doing that well. We got into the World Cup, which was his home ground, and I don't think that helped much. The pressure was on him and we felt it coming through to us.

**Researcher:** This is more difficult because I am the researcher as well as the coach. It is a difficult question. Then I became the coach of the team. What do you think changed after I became the coach of the team?

**Ruth:** I think what you did was you took out what was good from *Coach C*. You didn't lose it, but you became more open to players, which I think they like. If players came to you, you would listen, and if you didn't agree with them, you would discuss why. With *Coach C* previously, if you didn't agree with him, you would not know the reason why. I think that you have brought continuity in with decisions, whereas with *Coach C* there was a decision made for one person and not for another. There were always two sets of circumstances, whereas with you there is continuity with decisions made, which is a very good thing. I think the biggest thing that you have brought in is the openness, and almost the un-structuredness. There is structure, but un-structuredness around the team. You would give us structure but then we are allowed to evolve within that structure, which the players like because they feel like they are growing and learning.

You are teaching them, but you allow us to teach you as well. There are things that people can learn from each other and I think the two-wayness is very good.

**Researcher:** I am aware that time brings changes in teams. I am in my coaching life span leading up to the Olympics. What are the dangers of the way in which I do things? I think it is so easy for things to fall apart in a team. What do you think are the potential pitfalls for me if you could cast your mind into the future?

**Ruth:** I think sometimes you need to let go of things you don't know too much about, and let professionals, not maybe the right word, but someone who knows more about a certain area step in. Its not to trust them more, but to let go of that area rather. Sometimes you are running around doing too much. Maybe just say "that's your job, do it" and just check up on them. The nice thing is that you are spreading our wings because you're getting professionals in. I think that sometimes you need to leave the professionals to do their jobs, and just keep a handle on things. I also think that sometimes you need to be a bad boy. I know it is not in your nature because you do not like confrontation, which is also good thing because you need team harmony as well, but I think sometimes because you're not a bad boy some players get away with things and this upsets other players. Generally I think you're learning a lot and the whole time, which is nice. You don't accept that you know it all and you accept that there is an evolution happening here, and you do not stagnate which is very nice, and you learn from people.

**Researcher:** How do you view the ideal coach? If we were to talk about the concept of the ideal coach, what would it be for you?

**Ruth:** Probably a bit of *Coach C* and a bit of *Coach D*. A bit of rigidity, and maybe also rigidity needs to come out when we have free time, more than only when we play matches. Not so much in our playing structure but more like "this is it girls and you stick by this". I think giving the girls freedom, openness, and no hidden agendas in the team, and letting players develop around structure, is important. You understand that we have differences in our team and South Africans are different to the Dutch. You need to learn what the players are about and respect them more than anything else. I do not know if you understand what I'm saying. I think recognise the strength of players, which you do well and *Coach C* did that as well. He had specific tasks for specific players, because that was a strength in the team. I don't agree with what the cricketers do. When they finish playing the game they each go their own way and don't see one another for the rest of the time. I don't agree with that. I think that forced time together is a good thing, because off the field is where we get to learn about other players and their differences, and you chat with one another. In learning about each other off the field, you learn how they respond on the field.

**Researcher:** When do you think it is time for the coach to be either fired, or to leave the team?

**Ruth:** Generally a coach is fired when the team has a bad run, and I don't think that is necessarily it. Generally, I mean *Coach C* definitely came to the end of his run because there was nothing new that he taught the team in four months. I think when a coach realises or the association realises that nothing is happening here, then maybe the coach needs to go anyway. He has tried everything and done everything, and maybe he is saturated. Then maybe it is time to move on. I think there is a definite time when you can see it. I mean *Coach C* came to a definite time and *Coach B* did as well. Everything blew up in his face, the same with *Coach C*. But maybe you need to find out just before it happens.

**Researcher:** I would like to follow that a little. I am interested in the meanings that are generated within the team around the concept of the coach. Whether it is true or not does not matter, but the meaning exists. I like to use the analogy of an ecology. A new species comes into the ecology and the ecology changes. I am specifically looking at the ecology of ideas. New ideas are born, and these ideas are dominant at certain times. Often when one idea becomes very dominant another one dies. So I am specifically looking at the process of meaning within the team around the coach. The coach is not only a person, but also a body of ideas that the team holds around this person. How do you think the coach goes about changing the body of ideas that exist in a team? What is the process by which the body of ideas, the consensus of ideas within a team, changes?

**Ruth:** I think it starts with the players respecting the coach's knowledge. If someone comes into the team - let's say we ask a school kid to come and coach the team. You straightaway know that they haven't got it because you don't respect what the person knows. Maybe you bring a netball coach in to coach a hockey team. They don't respect that person for what they know. I need to respect the coach for what he knows, and if I don't respect him for what he knows, I'm not going to follow his ideas. Straight away, I'm going to step back and think what do you know? I do not want to name names, but if *Assistant coach A* came to coach the team, her ideas on hockey and her ideology would not carry over to me at all. Her theories and whatever she would want to create in the team would not hold with me. I think it comes to respect for that person, and respect for the knowledge of the person.

**Researcher:** How do things change when a new coach comes into the team, even someone with a lot of knowledge? Sometimes the mood shifts. It has happened before in this team.

**Ruth:** I think that the way in which the person carries the knowledge across is important. If the team is more like a flowing type of team like we are, if you come into the team and bark orders, I think we going to step back, and we are not going to like you very much. If you came into the

team and you put your ideas across in a nice way then the team is going to accept you. You are not going to shout that "you will" or "you won't". You come into a team and say "these are the ideas that I have, let's try them". If we tried your ideas, they didn't work, and you still insisted on using them, then the dynamics of the team are going to go, and you will hit a brick wall. I think that the openness of communication, and openness of the give-and-take of ideas of the coach is important.

**Researcher:** If the coach is aware of the fact that the meaning in the team is important, that consensus is important, do you think that affects the way a coach reacts in the team? How is it possible for coach to become even better with an awareness that meaning around what he or she is, or the meaning around what his or her role is, or what he or she can offer is still positive?

**Ruth:** I think that you need to chat to the players on a regular basis as we have done in the past. We have evaluated each tour and from that you can pick up what has been successful and what has not been successful. We have done it during a series when the players were having problems, or management was having problems, and we have got together and worked on a consensus. So constantly evaluating what is happening, and what is going right for you, and what is going right for the team, and what is going wrong for both parties, and working at consensus for both parties. Obviously the coach has the ultimate say and the coach still needs to be the authority figure and lead the team. Sometimes, the coach also needs to come down and meet half way.

**Researcher:** Even though it is part research and part intervention, I think the fact of researching these type of issues changes me and it changes the players, because we get to talk about coaching issues while the normal coaching context does not allow us to reflect on these type of things.

**Ruth:** I have never really sat down to think about it. You always just think that the coach has been there and the players have been there. I think that happens kind of naturally and the team always fights for it and coach always fights for it and always wants it, but sometimes the coach doesn't always come and say "how can I help?" or "what is happening here?" The players have not stopped to think about what the coach's role in the team is, and the coach has not stopped to think about what his role in the team is, and "what do the players expect from me?"

**Researcher:** The coach walks into the team and sometimes he walks into a whole set of attributions that players have around coaches. What do you think the attributions are, because if the coach ignores the attributions, or challenges the attributions, he or she may become what the team does not want him or her to be. Now this could either be good or bad, but what do you think these attributions are? What does the team project onto the coach?

**Ruth:** I think it depends a lot on who the previous coach was, and what happened previously. Probably, I think people always think of the bad first, before they think of the good things. So players think this was bad last time and I wonder if these bad things are to happen again, or what bad things are going to happen now. Maybe if people brought the positive things across first, instead of the negative things, then that wouldn't happen. I think that whenever you meet a new person and you don't really know them, there is always a bit of aloofness between both parties. Because the coach is the authority figure, he needs to make the first move. If the coach is open, you can't really say friendly, but open, and steps forward and the first thing you need to do is sit down and say "what I expect of you" and "what do you expect of me?" I am not sure anybody ever does that.

**Researcher:** This is fascinating for me because I think that there are things that depend on the previous coach. You previously used the word history and I like that. Do you think that the coach inherits a lot? What do you do as a coach if you have inherited a lot of things from the team?

**Ruth:** I would try and discover where this history comes from, or what caused it, and try sort that out. If it is a player or two causing problems, you need to sort that out or those players must not be involved anymore. You know, if you come across resistance you need to try and whittle it out, and maybe not even from the players, maybe you have to ask management, the manager from the previous team, or something like that.

**Researcher:** O.K Ruth, unfortunately we have come to the end of our time. Thanks so much again.

**Ruth:** It is a pleasure.

Interview with Kris

**Researcher:** Kris, what do you think the ideal team should look like? What are the characteristics of the ideal team?

**Kris:** I would say professional, but I don't know how you look professional. I think it is probably how you play and how you dress, and you know, like off the field things, but I would say that on the field it is how you play as a team. I also think that looks are quite important, if like, you are quite athletic looking. If you have a whole lot of podgers or something like that - take the USA, they look athletic, and everyone looks at them and says "wow, they look good!" They might not know what to do with the stick and ball, but they look athletic anyway. I think that the saying of nice guys is quite important. It is important to be friendly as well - the look of happiness. Look like you respect one another instead of abusing each other in front of other people. Ja, I think that's it.

**Researcher:** How does the coach contribute to the ideal team?

**Kris:** I think he has got to make sure that off the field there is a happy vibe. I think he can sense if there isn't. I mean you need to get shat on at times, but the coach has to make sure that if he is going to shit on us, he must do it, it is over, and he can't sulk now. He can't sulk for two days. If he can make sure that that doesn't happen, that the team doesn't wander around sulking, then I think that he can make sure that there is a happy vibe. I know with Coach C it was - people were very serious all the time. He almost took himself onto a pedestal. What he said we took as the Bible, whereas with other coaches and with you especially, you come down to our level for a bit, but you know where to draw the line. You come down, everyone can joke and laugh and everyone looks happy. We look comfortable. Teams like New Zealand always look comfortable with one another. I think that it has a lot to do with the way in which you present yourself. Obviously there is that respect among us, but I think that, I don't think that the coach should put himself on the pedestal where players are nervous to have a laugh or nervous to have a joke. It should be open and honest you know. I mean if you stand on the side of the pitch shouting at us, we are not going to have the respect for you, and you can see that everyone is a bit tense. So I think that the coach has a lot to do with the team.

**Researcher:** How long, do you think, should the coach stay with a team?

**Kris:** It is hard because sometimes in the past, I mean, I don't have first-hand experience of this except once or twice with Coach C and Coach B, but I think that you can start to feel it. You start to feel that you are not needed anymore. It is hard because if you have a bad tournament do you pack it in and say "this is it, I'm out of here" or do you know that you can do better? I know that

we have discussed this before and you brought up the point with me that when you don't have any new ideas to give us, and we can't stimulate you, and you can't stimulate us, then it is over. This is hard because where do you draw the line? You might think it, but it might not be true, or you might think "I can help them" but the time is right for you to move on. I think it is difficult.

**Researcher:** My study has to do with the life cycle of the coach. I am interested in what the life cycle involves. We spoke about this earlier. The coach comes into the team, lives in the team and then goes. What do you think the signs are - when is the time that the coach should leave the team?

**Kris:** I think the one thing is ideas. If you have no new ideas to give us, and we have nothing to stimulate you to give us new ideas, that is a kind of crucial time, but I also think you can sense it from a lot of players though. You know when you just start losing them, not losing it like you going off at them, but you start losing the edge with them the whole time. They start doing their own thing. It is hard because there are two sides to everything. When players start doing their own thing it doesn't mean you must leave them now. Maybe they need to be called in and get shat on because they are just doing their own thing and they are not listening - maybe disciplining the players. I think when you coach a team that has a couple of players over 100 caps, everyone sort of knows what they are doing and if they are agreeing with you all the time, then you can still stick around. I don't think you can put a time on it. You can't put a tournament on it either. I just think there comes a time where - I think it has a lot to do with feeling. I don't know if that makes sense.

**Researcher:** You've been under three national coaches, so you can compare the life cycles of the coaches. If you were to think about the different coaches, what was it like? Why did *Coach C* stop coaching, and why did *Coach B* stop? Sometimes coaches stop and sometimes they get fired. Most coaches kind of stop just before they get fired. I have no doubt that it would happen to me as well. I do agree with you - there is a time when there is no more newness. If you had to look back over the other coaches, what were the signs of that, and how did that come about?

**Kris:** I think with *Coach B*, he had too many - I think the reason he stopped is that he had too many personal conflicts in the team. It is hard because it was a tough tournament we went through. I think he made up his mind before that tournament even started that it was over. There was too much shit going on in the team, too many personal things he had with people in the team. I don't think he knew how to stand up to certain things that were happening in the team. I don't think he coached on his own. I think he coached with six or seven people that gave him ideas or were telling him how to do it. With all respect to him, I think he did not know how to get out of it. He was caught in a trap of just allowing six people to tell him how to coach, and listening to them, and players, and management, you know, things like that. But I think that his personal

conflicts were one of the biggest reasons he stopped coaching. With *Coach C*, I think it was the same thing. I talk about *Coach B* and *Player X*, and then I talk about *Coach C* and *Player Y*. I still think that they had too many personal issues.

**Researcher:** Did they get too close?

**Kris:** Yes, I think that they got too close. It is almost like a, you know, whether it was a relationship or a father-daughter thing or whatever it was, but they were too close. There was no line between them. I think that had a huge impact on the team. When *Coach B* was coaching it had an impact on us, because everyone knew what was going on but no one sort of pinpointed it, and people could see it with *Player X* as well. He became too close. He started to favour people like *Player X*, *Player Y*, and *Player Z*, and then he just took *Player X* on his own. He was too personal, and I think the players started losing respect, and then he could not take us to another level. He realised it. I think that is why he gave up, and if somebody else asked me, that is what I would say. He did a lot for us, he did magic for us, but I think he realised that he became too familiar, and he could not take us to another level. I think both of them made that mistake. They became too involved with people in the team. That is where I think you're good because, we've got 1000 different personalities. People are straight, people are gay, people are whatever they are, and everyone must accept it otherwise they can't play in the team. If someone has a problem with somebody else then I think it is going to come out on the field. I think you allow us more to be free with ourselves.

**Researcher:** How do you think a coach can prevent himself from becoming too familiar?

**Kris:** I don't know. I think it is hard because I think that at the end of the day the intentions are good. You want someone like *Player X* to do their best you know, and if you can see her straying then you want to put her back on track, because you know she can do well. I think that it is such a fine line from wanting people to do well, to it becoming an obsession for them to do well. I think that at an international level you have to allow people to make their own decisions - what they want to do, and it is really difficult to push someone even if they need it or they don't need it. You have 15 other players looking down on you saying "why are you getting so close?" or "what is the relationship between the two of you?" or "why is he pushing her so hard and does not care about me?" I think it is very hard. I don't know how you stop doing that. I don't think it should become an obsession. I think in the past it has been an obsession. I think you must be very careful. I think you must try to make sure each person gets the same amount attention. Lets say I go coach at a school, but I'm always going with kids that are good, and not worrying about the kids that aren't too good, or just the work horses in the team. I think you must make sure that you give each person in the team, not attention as such, but the individual needs what they need. Even

the weakest player or the player that is not that talented - you can help them as much as you can help the person that can win us games. It's quite difficult though.

**Researcher:** I think sometimes it is very easy to get too familiar with people, so I have started to think about it. Not necessarily whether I felt I have become too familiar, but whether the team thinks I have. I would always feed that in, and that would determine what I am like. I think that familiarity is very important for a coach, because without it there is not really any warmth in a team, and I think teams need warmth. There is a line without a doubt. I have become very careful. In the past, I was not, but now I am much more careful. Why do you think Charlesworth [Australian coach] is so successful? To coach a team successfully for seven years.

**Kris:** I think he is lucky because they are bloody talented. Obviously a winning team has the best players in the world. I don't really know him but looking from the outside, you can see there is a line between him and the players. They have got a huge amount of respect for him. I sometimes think they are probably a little shit scared of him. He is very powerful, not only in his hockey talent as a coach, but elsewhere as well. I get the feeling he is almost what *Coach C* was to us. What he says is the bible to those girls and they believe him. He is so strong and powerful in that way that he can make it happen. If he tells them to play a 9:1 system they probably would, but I think it helps that they are talented.

**Researcher:** I think that he maintains newness. There are always new ideas, but I think there are different ways of getting new ideas. Another way of getting new ideas is when the players look like that have run their course. He will get rid of them. Therefore, even though it is the same ideas it is new for the players coming in. I think that newness is maintained. You don't always need to change the coach to get newness, you can change the players as well.

**Kris:** If no one likes your ideas you just fire the whole team (laughing).

**Researcher:** Or you get enough people that this is new for.

**Kris:** But don't you think the Australians can do that because they have got 30 in their squad, and if he drops one or two players it does not matter.

**Researcher:** And if they are old players that have been dropped and come back in again, they feel like they are new because they are shit scared.

**Kris:** I think that they are always the first to do something, except they were not the first to get to the drag flick. But they were the first to have the bodysuits and they were the first at

Champions Trophy to play this bloody foot rule. Because he is so powerful and his players see that, but I think they are shit scared of him.

**Researcher:** O.K. Kris I think that's about all. Thank you very much for the chat.

**Kris:** It's a pleasure.

Interview with Sarah

**Researcher:** Sarah, I want to talk to you about coaching. I am doing my dissertation on coaching, specifically on ideas that exist around the coach. In many ways I think that the coach is not only a person, but also a group of ideas that are constructed around the coach. I also want to talk about the process of coaching. What do you think is essential for the coach to have - the type of skills that the coach needs to have to be effective in a team?

**Sarah:** I think what is really important is a democratic coaching style, an openness to players' ideas. I really feel that an autocratic coaching style might last for a couple of months, but you are going to outlive yourself. You need to be open to new ideas, to the player's ideas, sort of constantly moving with the times and not remaining static.

**Researcher:** You have been part of the national team for a long time and you have seen the impact of certain coaches. I think that every coach that comes into the team brings something new, and I think that the impact of the new coach is almost immediate. So how would you describe the process of the coach coming in, joining the team, and then leaving. I know it is difficult to comment on me, as I'm still involved with the team.

**Sarah:** I think immediately if there is a new coach, initially everyone is very excited about the whole thing. There is change. There are new ideas. I mean even if the ideas are good or bad, or positive or negative, it is just the change. Because of the change, you are going to get some positive results out of that. Whether you can maintain those positive results is a different story. For myself, I think previously coaching has been very autocratic in terms of having set ideas, set ways where the coach has got preconceived set ideas how they want the team to play, how they want certain individuals to fulfil certain roles. I think it is quite short-lived unless you keep moving with the trends or with different playing styles. I played under, not to mention any names, but obviously *Coach B*. I just think he tended to get too, well not picking on him personally, but in coaching you can't afford to get too personally involved with players. I think that at certain stages he got too personally involved with players and that could immediately be the downfall for a coach to get too personally involved or just involved with certain players. I think that with *Coach C* we had a new change and a new coaching style - something different. For us, immediately in that phase, outside was better, foreign was better. Immediately, because he was a foreigner, you thought he must know more. Immediately his ideas were taken as written in stone, sort of God preaching, and what he said was the Bible - sort of the players accepted it without even questioning it. I think that can only last for a short while, and then the players are going to start questioning certain ideas that possibly are not holding true the whole time. Either you get a bad result, or those ideas are not flexible, then people start questioning the coach. They start

questioning the tactics and they start questioning selection. I think that coaches in the past have not been flexible enough - too autocratic! The team revolved around them, not the team being the main focus. The coach was the head of the team, and the coach was the main focus.

**Researcher:** I like to have a look at coaches and teams that have survived for a long time. Obviously someone like Rick Charlesworth comes into mind as being able to achieve consistently good results over the last seven years. I think that not enough people study the process of what he does. They study his tactics but not the way he coaches. If you were to have to go at why Australia is successful or why their coach is successful, how would you describe that in terms of the things you have mentioned?

**Sarah:** Like I said previously, as soon as you become static, everyone just catches up to you. One thing about Australia, from their kit to their administration of the game and their coaching - its just very progressive, and they are always striving to be one step ahead of the rest of the world. I think maintaining that kind of attitude, you know, consistently looking for new ideas and trying to be one step ahead. I think as soon as you become static and you think you're at the top, that's exactly when you will get knocked off. If you try to keep doing the same things that have got you into a winning position - I think the reason why they are so successful is they know the winning formula but they keep changing the winning formula to stay ahead of the pack. This is really important.

**Researcher:** When do you think the coach should leave the team? I know it is a difficult question as I am still the coach, but when do think the coach should leave, either be fired, or as is often the case, given the opportunity to resign?

**Sarah:** I think it is a really difficult question because it is really up to the individual and really what kind of individual the coach is. I think, obviously most coaches will, I mean, in any sport, whether it be soccer or rugby or whichever sport you are in, as soon as you're not getting the results, obviously that is the indication to the administrators that there is a problem. I think as far as the team is concerned, the last two coaches that I have been involved with, it has been kind of the team has outgrown coach, and they haven't been able to adapt. The coach has got to a certain point where they have taken the team to, and if I look at the history of the coaches that I have been involved with, each has played a vital role in where we are right now, cause I think that *Coach B* took us to certain level and then sort of couldn't keep it going, couldn't keep the momentum going. Then *Coach C* stepped in with a new impetus and a new way of thinking, and in a different way contributed a lot to the success of South African hockey. I think there comes a point where unless the coach is willing to change or unless the team changes and creates ideas or new ways of thinking, there is a point where the team outgrows the coach. When that happens or when the coach should step down? That is really hard. When you win a gold medal at the

Olympics, you're going to go for a gold medal at World Cup. When you win a gold medal at the World Cup you're going to go for a gold medal at the next Olympics. Is it when you start losing that you resign or get fired? I'm not sure what happens first. I think also if the coach outgrows the team, that is also an indication, but I think it's very - I don't think you can put a defining point on when a coach should resign or when a coach should be fired, unless obviously the results are very poor. I think that is a difficult moment to pinpoint, because it depends on the individual and it depends on the team.

**Researcher:** My dissertation revolves not around the truth, but around notions or ideas. My dissertation is around ideas as ecologies similar to natural ecologies. A new species gets introduced and the ecology adapts. Either that specie can suffocate another specie or be suffocated with the result of some form of extinction. Similarly the introduction of a new species will be assimilated in an ecology. In a similar way, I am looking at coaching as an ecology of ideas. I think it is important to manage the ecology, not so much the people as the ideas. Whether the coach is a good coach or not does not really make a difference. The important thing is the ecology of ideas that exists around the coach as a good coach. So I would say that for me, although sometimes I get it wrong, I see coaching as managing the ecology of ideas. An idea needs to be introduced to be dominant at certain times. The result of this is that another idea may become extinct. I would say that the ideas around the competence of the coach are important. More so than whether the coach is really competent or not. Sometimes it is impossible to control that. With this as background, how would you say the coach could change the ecology of ideas that exists around him or her? I think that a coach inherits an ecology of ideas, a history of ideas, because the team has a history of ideas around coaching. I think that the team has strong notions around how the coach should be. How would you say the coach should challenge, I don't want to use change as change and manipulation often gets seen as hand in hand. How does the coach perturb an existing ecology of ideas around the coach?

**Sarah:** I agree with what you say about the coach sort of stepping into a set of ideas that are sort of pre-subscribed by the team, and what already exists. I think really importantly, that when you allow the players to feel that they are involved in those ideas, then you are buying them into the process and into the ideas, rather than seeming as dictating to them and you only setting the ideas, and the players conforming to that. In a way, if the coach can get the players to buy into those ideas, almost as if the players have come up with those ideas in certain respects. As if the players are the ones that are contributing to the coaching process, with the coach facilitating and overseeing the whole procedure, but with the players coming up with ideas. I just feel that in that situation the team really buys into it. They have a strong belief that those ideas are theirs. If that is what you strongly believe, that is what you're going to passionately follow. I think that is really important for a coach because if the players contribute to the ideas, they buy into the ideas. I think as soon as you get to where the players feel that the coach is either completely off track, or

not in touch with the team then there comes dissent and there is very little turning back from that. I think you have to make sure that the players are really buying into the ideas almost as if it is coming from them, and what you're doing is overseeing those ideas.

**Researcher:** I learnt a lot from a certain incident involving Tom [Dutch coach] and one of the players. I'm not sure whether you remember that story around Noor? That story was quite a cameo of coaching in terms of ecologies of ideas. The story was that she had gone to some of the senior players and tried to gain support for him to be fired as the coach of the team. The result was that the Federation supported the coach and the player was dropped. I spoke to him about this and he said that he was concerned about the ideas that were distracting the focus of the team away from performing. I think it is an extreme example but in a way it shows how certain ideas were removed from a team. In this case it was a player, but ideas were also removed. This created space for other ideas to flourish. I think that as a coach, the moment you start thinking about people instead of ideas, there is an amount of danger involved. It is always a difficult process but I think you need to manage it. I think it is less personal if you think of coaching as a process of managing ideas. There is less danger of people being offended and there are more possibilities for the coach to be creative. But the same time the danger is that your ideas might not be accepted. With me as the coach, what do you think are the dangers in the way in which I have approached the team?

**Sarah:** I think most importantly you must ensure that senior players buy into it. I think for example *Player A* is crucial. I think immediately when her and *Coach C* started to fall out the whole team could feel it, and I think in that respect it is the exact opposite of the Noor and Tom story. *Player A* really sort of, other than the fact that *Coach C* sort of played himself out of the picture, well, *Player A* really won that one. I think you have got to ensure that someone, like a very strong individual buys into your ideas. I think dangers to you - I think sometimes some of the players battle to conceptualise the whole thing. There are some basic people in the team and it is better to give more simple ideas, than complex ideas and comparisons. But I think those kind of people are more the sheep anyway, and its not too hard to sell them an idea. There are the kind of individuals who have their own opinions and their own thoughts, even coaching thoughts on what a coach should be doing. These are the kind of people you have to ensure are buying into the ideas, because as soon as they haven't, that is when there is a problem. Questions are asked to the coach and questions are asked of the tactics and whatever. As soon as the questions are asked of the coach, the doubt is placed in the minds of the sheep. I mean you have probably got 80 percent sheep and 20 percent sort of people who are thinking for themselves. The rest are just following the yellow shirts to the airport. You need to make sure that the 20 percent are supportive of you because that is what will count. The 80 percent will follow what the 20 percent think. If there is a break between the coach and stronger players, that is when the downfall of the coach comes.

**Researcher:** How do you think the act of me interviewing the players around the issue of coaching changes their view of the coach and the coaching process?

**Sarah:** I think it is really hard because you are still involved. You know, it would be interesting to see Post Olympics if you were to ask the same questions, and things have gone sour for you. I think if you had been asking me the same questions post World Cup qualifier everyone would have been singing the praises to *Coach C* and his coaching style and the same thing with *Coach B* after his successes. I think it is difficult to assess you as a coach now, because, I'm not saying its going to get sour but you can't say how it is going to turn out. You have sour Olympics, it doesn't go right, there's a lot of disappointment, a lot of back stabbing, and it could can all sort of turn quite nasty. I think it is difficult to assess the coaching process while you're still involved. You don't know how it is going to turn out and how it ends is how you look back in retrospect and view the process. You don't really view it while you are in it, as much as you assess in retrospect and look back. I mean, if you had asked us straight after the World Cup qualifier if *Coach C* was a big hero, the guy with the new ideas, who made the drag flick and blah blah blah, you know, then I think that this interview would have been quite different. I think it is difficult to say now. I don't think it will get that point where it will turn sour. I know because it is not the type of person you are. You have grown aware of how the team is developing and how the individuals are developing and you are very aware what is going on in this team, and making sure that the atmosphere is right and that the right components are sort of installed. I don't think it would ever get to a point where maybe you wouldn't get as favourable results as you have hoped for purely because of your coaching style, which is a lot more democratic and open-minded. You are never going to get to that stage when you have a total revolt against you, like the whole *Coach C* issue where the team just completely revolted against him. I don't think you would ever get to that point where it got like that. I think maybe, I think because of your attitude to the continual change, I think the players would wear out sooner than you would. I think after the Olympics if we achieved our goals, or if we didn't achieved our goals, many players would retire anyway and the whole thing changes again and you have six new players. I can't see it getting to a point where you have a complete blow-out like what happened to *Coach C*, where it got to a point where it is too long and too much of the same thing. Kind of where you get to a point when you walk into a team talk and the players can say the team talk already in their heads because it is the same old story mashed up and spat out in different ways. I mean that's when you know. I mean the World Cup was like that. You got to the team talk and you knew what was going to be said. There were no new tactics. You would never allow it to get to that point, and if it did, I think you would step out before it happens. You would be tired and you know, you would not be looking for the new ideas, and you would already be assessing yourself, and you would step out when you felt that you could not keep on contributing. I don't think it would get to that point, but like I said, it is hard to assess because you don't know how it will turn out.

**Researcher:** How does me consulting the players change the ideas that exists around the coach?

**Sarah:** I think I was just saying to *Player A* yesterday. I said with you as a coach, I never feel that if I make a mistake I am going to look up and see No. 9 on the side of the field. If you make a critical mistake or you're not in the game there is just cause for substitution, but with *Coach C* you kind of felt that one mistake and your number would be up there. I would continually look across to see if No. 9 was up. I obviously have a different role now. If you are in the midfield, you change more and blah blah blah. I just think for me it is more of, you know, you are always going to make a final decision. Remember, I asked you about the injuries at the player forum. You are going to make the final decisions, but I think you are not nearly at a higher level, almost on some areas on the same level and obviously as a coach you have to be on a high level, but because of your whole sort of democratic style, I think, I just think you're going to get so much more out of the players. Like I said, you are really getting the players to buy into the feel that it is not you making all the decisions and all the tactics and the team just having to follow along. I think you're really getting the feel that we are making the difference and when the group assesses the attacking short corners, they can make a difference if they can find something new, and the defensive short corners and hits outside the circle. Ja, I think its brilliant. I think, consult the players even if you don't take their opinion, even if you don't agree with their opinion, consult them because they feel like they are part of the decision-making process. Then they feel like they are contributing to what is happening in management. They have an influence in how we play and what happens off the field. I think it is really important that the players know their position and that they are not going to be making a final decision, but that they are contributing to the decision-making process on the field and off the field. This is really important.

**Researcher:** I think that we have almost come to the end of our tape and the end of our discussion. Thank you very much. I can carry on talking about it because I think it is really interesting. Thank you for your feedback.

### Interview with Debbie

**Researcher:** Debbie, thank you for agreeing to help with this study. I am doing my dissertation on a specific aspect of coaching. I am having a look at coaching and specifically at the lifecycle and life span of a coach. It is often very difficult to research something that you are personally so involved in. What do you think are the ideal characteristics of a coach?

**Debbie:** The first thing I would say is to try and get the players' trust. I would say that honesty is one of the hardest things for a coach to actually have, and once the players' trust for a coach is gone, that is when the life span will end. That is what I believe any way, for me at least. If you are honest in the beginning about what you know and do not know, I think it helps a bit. It might start off that you are exposed to a lot of questioning by especially our players, but after a while I think it will eventually become respect. So honesty can become a very good strength from a coaching point of view, I believe.

**Researcher:** You have played in this team since readmission, so you have seen different coaches come and go in the team. I am not concerned about comments on specific individuals because my dissertation deals with ideas that are formed around people, not the people themselves. Sometimes these ideas can damn or these ideas can liberate. I would like you to look at the process of the different coaches that came into the team and comment on the evolution of ideas that formed in the team around the different coaches.

**Debbie:** I think each coach might have had the team at a different stage of development, and I think that maybe made their jobs easier or harder or whatever. The first coach had to deal with provincialism and cliques forming, so I think that was difficult in itself. Also, the coach's age and being associated with a certain province made it a vulnerable situation for sensitive people. His emotional state, I feel, went against him in the end. It could have been a strength, but actually it landed up going against him.

**Researcher:** Was this the first coach?

**Debbie:** This was the first coach, international coach, or no the second coach. With *Coach A*, I think his strength with the team was his thought process and his tactical knowledge. I believe we tactically played to our strength and that is why we got some good results. I do not believe he developed us technically, and at that stage our technical skills were very weak for astroturf anyway. So he needed, I believe, to pull in a couple more people who could have dealt with us on the technical side, because his strength tactically was really how we produced some good results in the beginning. We had a lot of players with flair, which also helped, so they could

create on their own as well. But generally our basic skills were quite atrocious at that stage for astro hockey at an international level. We just didn't match other teams. So I believe with *Coach A*, we needed a lot more technical work. But then again we didn't have time together. You know we just met to play a series. So generally to develop your technical skills over a short span of time was not really efficient. We didn't have high-performance squads running or things like that. So ja, I think he really got good results in the short time he had with us. The problem with his era was that he had his daughter playing at the same time and that obviously caused a lot of distrust in the side regarding selection. I think he eventually resigned because of his daughter's career. And *Coach B* then, his life span was short, it wasn't long. I think his passion and emotional state eventually made his life span sort. I think sometimes not being able to know how to pull in other people's resources was a bit of down side. You know no coach can be expected to know everything. If you look at management groups of teams nowadays they are growing, from maybe three to ten. So people are being drawn in with a lot of expertise, not just your own. I think that we were just a small little group, and like I said four provinces were really big with lots of cliques and with lots of different ideas and players. Players not knowing how to travel as a group was also a problem I think. So we had quite a few of those hiccups. I believe sometimes the coach can become too familiar with certain groups just because it is easy, because they suit your lifestyle. When travelling a long way from home you might need that as your resource, to help you get back and I don't think the players now read that too well. So I don't think that worked too well. After *Coach B* was *Coach C*. Ja, I think to me *Coach C* was good because he was a new person coming from outside South Africa. We needed somebody from outside South Africa at that time, because we had generally used everybody that we could possibly have used in South Africa at that time. So the players needed the input from that side. Our technical skills developed very quickly with him. He also got rid of the provincialism. He generally worked a lot on team building, which helped. We needed that in the beginning. I think his initial two years - I think the first year was a gradual build up and then we struggled at one or two tournaments because he got overly excited about the technique, the technical skill of certain players, and other players were contributing, but he forgot. I think you never forget the value of everybody. He put importance, as the media would, on certain individuals. He also didn't know enough about us as people and our country, so his excitement might have worked, and the way he put pressure on individuals as being heroes might have worked in other countries, but not in our country where we like to be seen as equal and have a role to play. It started turning against him. He taught us that it was the team that was important, and it landed up that the individual was important in his eyes. I think that is where the honesty and the trust and belief in him started getting further and further away. What you initially teach, you should never forget. You can't let your team down. Once you start letting your team down on the initial beliefs or because of success or failure, would eventually be your downfall as a coach. I believe a team carries on growing. Every coach has added something. The team will carry on growing. The coach's life span depends on remembering what you have taught and why, and your progression based on your honesty to

each individual player, and also knowing that you are not teaching individuals, you are coaching individuals, but the result does not come because of individuals, it comes because the team works.

**Researcher:** Although it is difficult to comment on, I would like to you to talk a little more about *Coach C* towards the end. It is something that I was a part of as well. I have certain ideas around that. I know it is fairly difficult to comment on it, but how did things change?

**Debbie:** I think the funny thing with *Coach C* was that he was very autocratic in the end, and I think that shocked everybody because the first two years it was a big team thing. Suddenly with success it changed and I don't know - maybe we didn't know how to handle success as a team as well, so the growth stopped when the resources of everybody in the team was not being recognised. It included you as an assistant coach and the way he treated a highly qualified physiotherapist was just totally unacceptable. That upset a lot of players because we had a lot of respect for our physio, and even the way he tried to win over people from management was wrong. I think the way that you were used was wrong and he didn't know. I think we, as players, couldn't respect you because of the way he saw you. How you got into being coach was after, well I do not know if that was how you got into being coach. Really an assistant coach theoretically should have value as a coach, and should be able to take over from the coach if necessary at any stage. There should be that building up by the coach. Maybe not being the national coach but being able to take enough responsibility at matches or practice matches. And when South Africa decided what they should do after Commonwealth Games - I think *Coach C* was definitely not going to stay. I personally believed that it was time to go back to using what we had in the country, because with the women's team, I am not sure how the men work, but with the women's team I think we put a lot of our lifestyle into the success of the team. Understanding us as South Africans is important because we are difficult. I do not believe we are the same. We have different ways of thinking, and I think we are even different from our men. Some of us are a bit concerned about professionalism and how you are going to earn. In the end we have all made enough sacrifices to be in the team, so all we want is for someone to understand that we just want to achieve on the field and get the best out of ourselves. I think you had to become yourself again, and I suggested that you be the one to come in, not anybody else. I was not going to play. I had enough. I hadn't grown and if you didn't grow - I always said if I hadn't grown over a year like 1998 when we had so much hockey and you didn't enjoy yourself, then you must stop because then it is time. Then getting you in - I believed that you had travelled with the team long enough to have the experience you needed to coach. I wasn't sure about your coaching style at all, except that I had been coached by you once in Northerns and it was nice, and you were still very young then as a coach, but I would never forget that it was a very nice style. Keep the flair with a bit of structure. That is South African Hockey - always has been. I don't know, I just believed we needed a South African coach, because there were a lot of names on the list of S.A.

coach, and there was a lot of reasons why they shouldn't come in. I believed that understanding and travelling with the women was very important. A lot of coaches haven't travelled with women, haven't seen women's hockey at all, and I did not believe that they could just step in.

**Researcher:** I think in a way there is a time when every coach, irrespective of how good they are - it is time to go, and that is the same for a player. There is a life cycle. There is a time to live and a time to die in a team for a coach. What do you think the dangers are for me as a coach?

**Debbie:** I think people are used to saying the coach's life span is only four years. I do not agree with that because that is what we used to say about players. But I believe it definitely has to do with growth, and I believe the way you have started already - we haven't stopped growing. I was really angry after Argentina - the first two matches, because progress was slow and then something had to be done to change that. If we hadn't made the progress in the next game it wasn't going to come I believe. Every practice you have done there has been progression around the same system and structure. It is progression on developing the skills to provide the progression of how we can eventually play. So it hasn't been this is how we are going to play and you give everything all at once, and I think that is clever. You know where we are going and it is important. You know as a coach, which other coaches certainly do not have. You know that when you get to that level there is going to be a next stage because of your vision. I can see it in our practices. We are getting little bits and it will help towards our growth. I believe at this stage now, when you have had two years to just get the flair fluent, it is going to come because of the little games we play. That overlap running and things like that. I think as a coach to keep the growth in players and you yourself is important, and to keep moving your targets but not changing your targets. If you get to the end of four years and you have reached your targets, it means you have been too rigid in your coaching, so you haven't allowed for more progression. I think Rick Charlesworth [Australian coach] is a good example.

**Researcher:** I was going to talk about him because of that.

**Debbie:** Because most coaches generally end their hockey careers after four years with the team, I believe their vision has been to the end of four years. They have seen the team growing up to that, the team reached the end, they stop and there is nothing more the coach can give, whereas I believe Rick Charlesworth has never done this. He has just sort of said that as long as the players are growing and as long as we are growing as a team, we will achieve the winning result and that is what counts.

**Researcher:** I love watching Rick and Tom [Australian and Dutch coaches]. I have learned quite a bit in different ways from each of them. I have adopted the view that in a team, you have an ecology, like in nature, but the ecology is not an ecology of people it is an ecology of ideas and an

idea will come in and an idea will be dominant. The problem is just as in an ecology - the moment an idea becomes too dominant, others start dying. So you constantly need ideas feeding off each other, but there needs to be difference otherwise the ecology as a whole does not grow. Something like a new idea would come in and like a weed it will take over and the rest will die. I think the coach is important to manage not necessarily the people, but the ecology of ideas, the ecosystem of ideas. One way of doing it as a coach would be to drop a player, because if you drop a player, the impetus of an idea gets taken away. I think it is a very extreme way and I would be very hesitant to do it. Another way is when a coach gets fired. Immediate thereafter there is a new ecology of ideas in the team. I think that thinking in this way opens up so many possibilities for being. There is enormous possibility. You mentioned something at the beginning of the interview that I found fascinating, because I have started to view what happens in the team in terms of managing ideas. The ideas need to be fresh and need to be new otherwise the team will die. If you had to think about Rick - what he does when he drops players is that there is always new ideas coming into the team, but also the idea around the powerfulness of the coach never changes and he uses that. He can be anti-social because nobody is going to challenge him, because you never know if you are going to be there long enough to challenge him. In a way it is really good, but I would find more creative ways of doing that.

**Debbie:** That is what makes it so special about your style of coaching in comparison with him. Doesn't mean that your results are going to be different - it could be the same results. It is just what works, how you introduce it, and how you continue to build it. If I look at Tom, I would thrive under his type of coaching because he is quite passionate, which I believe is a huge strength. He acknowledge other teams, he never disrespects them, he is not arrogant at all, but he is confident. I know he allows flair but within their own style. I think sometimes not even fairness, but passion, and complete belief in your individual players, is going to put you though.

**Researcher:** In a way, I have learned from Tom in a specific situation. He brought that seventeen-year-old on the tour of South Africa. The last thing he said to her before she went on for her first cap was that she was not allowed to pass the first ball she got. You have got to run and see where it takes you.

**Debbie:** Wow, that is a very good thing to say.

**Researcher:** Yes, especially to someone who is new. I thought not only about that specific thing, but also about how you empower new people on that level. You are not allowed to pass the first ball you receive.

**Debbie:** That must be the best thing a coach can tell someone new.

**Researcher:** That was a great thing to say and I have learnt a lot from that. But I also learnt from his handling of Noor. The moment she didn't support him, she was out. I think those are two cameos of the different aspects of coaching.

**Debbie:** I think that is very important. I think that your downfall will be if you do not handle issues of disrespect, because players, doesn't matter when they do it, if they pass a comment of disrespect, it must be dealt with straight away. Because they will learn then that in life there are always people who deserve the respect, and you have got to give it to them, and you get it back from other people. I think there are players in our team that you have to handle like that as well, because there are lots of players that do not know who deserves respect. Because they are very much living on their own, in their own world. They train on their own. That is one of the things I think you must deal with in South Africa. We do not train with coaches on the side of the field, we all train on our own and we feed off ourselves a lot of the time. That is tiring and exhausting and selfish in a way as well, because as players in South Africa you having to protect yourself a lot. You have to protect yourself when you are trying to get a skill right and try use it in matches and people abuse you. You have to protect yourself because you do not have enough money. You have to protect yourself because you are training long hours and you are tired and fatigued and you are sensitive to bad comments. So when we actually meet you are teaching us things and the way you present it to us is important. So we see it as positive and not a negative criticism, because it is very difficult for us to grow when we have been growing on our own, or hopefully growing on our own. We do most of our conditioning on our own and that is mental toughness in itself, which means, I believe, mental toughness comes from protection of yourself.

**Researcher:** Debbie, if we had to talk about the process of a coach, either resigning or being fired - when is the right time for that to happen?

**Debbie:** It is quite difficult because I believe a management group is more powerful than you think and that is a resource in itself. Talk from outside management group is often false and that is quite scary. Results are often the reason. I would not actually know, except from experience, like with *Coach A*, his daughter was in the side and it did make a difference with him being coach. I did not believe he could be the coach because of that, personally. *Coach B's* life span - his results just dropped. His emotional state was - I do not think players could understand it. It became difficult. His closeness to individuals in the team became difficult. *Coach C*, well, he handled individuals, he built up individuals into heroes, he idealised people and broke them down very quickly. I don't think it was ever intentional but it happened. I think every situation must be different. It has to be. Obviously the Association is important, but I always believe that the coach should know as well. The coach should know when to hand in his resignation. It is almost like a job. You should know the signs.

**Researcher:** I think if I had to look at the team right now and if I had to cast my mind into the future, I think that post Olympics would be a huge change, because there would be the retirement of a generation. The team would lose a huge slice of memory after the Olympics. I think that is the proper way. That is the natural evolution of teams. In a way I would like to be involved post Olympics, because I think there are unique possibilities for the introduction of new ideas and retaining old ones with the younger generation of players. I am curious how SA hockey would look post (*names of probable retiring players*) because in the whole ecology of ideas, a lot of ideas are going to lose significance.

**Debbie:** I think if I was coaching, I would be looking forward to what is ahead. I wouldn't want to end with that change, because I think the way you have been coaching opens up a lot of growth. I think there will be enough players left to continue what you have introduced, but I still believe it is an introduction, and I am sad that it didn't happen early in my career because the flair has been allowed and changing is crucial in my view of astro hockey. Everybody based hockey on astro play in Europe, and I do not think that was right. I do not think that suits us and I don't think astro hockey is becoming like that. The teams are winning with no off sides and I don't think those teams are going to become champions once the short corner changes. I think the teams that would become champions are the ones that can interchange, intermingle, create with touches and that is hockey at its best I think. I think you have an exciting phase if your energy and your future is opening. I think the hardest thing in South Africa is the money, because coaching is a tiring job and also with us also being far apart - I think it will be good thing when a lot of the older players are leaving because you can now say lets have a center or a base, which is the way it should be.

**Researcher:** I share many of those views of yours.

**Debbie:** It is exciting, I think that you still have a lot of years. I don't believe I would ever think of only four years as a minimum. I would say two Olympics easy. I would say the next Olympics would be the best South African team.

**Researcher:** Debbie thank you so much for your time and your views. I really appreciate your comments.