

Exploring Vision and Visionary Leadership in Head Coaches of Canadian University Large  
Team Sports

Matthew Milligan, B.B.A., B.S.M (Honours)

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Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University  
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## ABSTRACT

The concept of vision has been identified as a key contributor to effective leadership (cf. Donoso-Morales et al., 2017), where vision is related to both change and empowering organizational members to collaborate toward achieving goals (Sashkin, 1988). Scholars (cf. Collins & Porras, 1996) noted that regardless of the leader's abilities and the quality of vision, the vision is meaningless unless the leader develops a 'plan' that includes actionable and measurable processes and an effective communication strategy. Large team sports (i.e., football, rugby) employ large roster sizes and demand from both athletes and coaches a unique and high level of specialization. As team leader, the head coach is responsible for leading all team members towards achieving a common goal. The purpose of this study was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals.

To fulfill the study's purpose, a pragmatic qualitative research design was used to study large team sport head coaches. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to elicit themes most useful in answering the research questions. From the analysis, the coaches' plans to enact their vision were found to be focused on student-athletes' holistic development. Coaches were found to use communication and role-modeling strategies to enact their respective visions for their teams. These findings suggest that large team sport head coaches have an opportunity to concurrently impact their student-athletes' lives beyond the on-field sport experience while fielding competitive teams.

**Key Words:** Leadership, Coaching, Vision, Visionary, Student-athlete

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the process of “influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2013, p. 7). Many believe the most relevant indicators of leadership effectiveness include the extent to which organizational performance is enhanced and organizational goals are reached (Bass, 2008; Kaiser et al., 2008; Yukl, 2013), as well as the extent to which any leader is able to inspire others to work towards transcending their individual goals (Yukl, 2013).

Leaders are expected to have a vision for their organization, generally expressed as an imagined and ideal long-term future (Caldwell, 2019; Collins & Porras, 1996; Conger, 1989; Fullan, 2012; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sashkin, 1988; Schein, 2004; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukl, 2013). What seems increasingly more challenging for leaders however, is their enactment of this vision, given the pace of change in any organization’s environment (Caldwell, 2019). The concept of vision is values-driven (i.e., the vision is grounded in either or both the leader’s personal values and/or the organizational values) and is future-focused (Caldwell, 2019), where values represent the leader’s beliefs. In being future focused, the leader has a framework for the current and future key decisions they make in life (Frost, 2014).

Furthermore, one’s leadership is representative of their capacity to translate vision into reality (Bennis, 1984), while effective leadership is one’s capacity to inspire followers so all may actually pursue and ultimately enact that vision on a behavioural level (Vallée, 2002). Sashkin (1988) noted that a vision must address and include elements that deal with change, that define

ideal goals, and that empower organizational members to work together. By redefining the meaning of organizational membership and realigning the organization to new or existing values, leaders can inspire others to pursue a vision (Conger, 1989).

While leaders and followers both desire and idealize effective leadership, any leader may find that developing the capacity to translate and communicate a vision into reality and then to inspire others to pursue that vision as challenging. For example, a new leader may struggle with the “too-fast-too-slow dilemma” (Fullan, 2012, p. 18), where if they communicate and enact the vision too aggressively and/or unconventionally, organizational members may rebel or resist them from being fearful of engaging in drastic or sudden changes.

Alternatively, if a leader is overly respectful of the existing culture and hesitant to enact change (i.e., believes it should remain unchanged), they may maintain the status quo and thereby effectively eliminate any possibility of enacting a new vision (Fullan, 2012). Moreover, an experienced leader may also be so engrained in the existing culture that they are unable to create a vision that can direct the organization toward an ideal, long-term future (Conger, 1989). Furthermore, a leader’s vision of an ideal long-term future requires deep understanding of the environment’s current reality and of any external future threats to this reality (Conger, 1989).

Caldwell (2019) also noted that leaders may fall into a common trap when developing a vision when they confuse organizational mission with vision. While both organizational mission and vision are values-driven and are meant to provide followers with a sense of continuity and certainty, organizational mission is more tactical, whereas a leader’s vision should go beyond representing a statement of values and a bundling of targets such that organizational members are excited and unified.

While visionary leadership is defined as a process where the leader engages in the specific steps of creating a vision, communicating the vision, and empowering others to ‘own’ the vision for themselves (Sashkin, 1988; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989), Wallace (1996) stated that visionary leaders inspire people within an organization and enable organizational members to cope with change, set goals and establish directions for the organization, and relate well to and build healthy reputations with individuals external to the organization. Schwahn and Spady (1998) described the essence of any visionary leader as one arising from their paradigm breaking imagination and innovation, such that visionary leaders excel at creating novel possibilities that others do not see. Such leaders chart new direction and destinations for their organization and thrive on translating environmental shifts and trends into productive options for organizational transformation. In other words, visionary leaders opt less for traditional strategies and opt more for completely reformulating issues and problems before communicating a preferred course of action (Schwahn & Spady, 1998).

For example, when Robert Kraft, owner of the New England Patriots, hired Bill Belichick as head coach in 2000, the Patriots had only hosted one post-season game in its entire history to this point (Bishop & Baskin, 2019), and had spent \$10 million over the NFL salary cap limit (Camerota, 2017). Belichick and Kraft shared the same vision of building a team that while they could become perennial Super Bowl competitors, they could also consistently stay within the limits of the NFL salary cap (Camerota, 2017). Both “understood that you could win a Super Bowl with a team of average players as long as that team was all of one accord” (Camerota, 2017, para. 15). Belichick, an economics graduate, began to recruit affordable players who played according to his system and follow his team-first philosophy, whereas most NFL team leaders at the time were focused on signing talented though costly players, attempting to

‘purchase wins’ (Camerota, 2017). From 2000 to 2019, the Patriots averaged 12 wins per season of a possible 16 over that time span, competed in nine Super Bowls and won six of them, thus becoming one of the most successful franchises in NFL history (Camerota, 2017). Kraft and Belichick opted for a paradigm breaking, innovative, non-traditional approach to team building to enact their shared vision.

Great leadership is synonymous with effectiveness and effective leadership is one of the most desired capacity from a high-performance sport coach (Bloom, 2002). In a sport context, the coach is generally regarded as the “definer, provider, and deliverer of sport experience for the athlete [such that] the quality of an athlete’s experience can never exceed the quality of the leadership providing it” (McGuire, 1992, p. 12). That is to say, the sport experience is directly reflective of the coach’s philosophy, beliefs, values, behaviours and priorities (McGuire, 1992). According to Côté and Gilbert (2009), coaching effectiveness may be represented and measured by athletes’ level of achievement and their personal attributes, as well as by a coach’s years of experience. In this way, the coach’s success is directly tied to the athletes’ success.

In his exploration of leadership behaviours that facilitate effective coaching, Armstrong (2001) noted that effective coaches are “skilled at choosing the best leadership style for their sport and their individual athletes” (p. 44). Such coaches generally demonstrate high ethical standards and view their athletes as equal contributors to the team. These coaches highly value playing a part in developing followers’ leadership and life skills and emphasize qualities including fair play, total group effort and honesty. As a result, athletes who work with such coaches begin to identify with the coach and develop a deep level of trust, which leads them to duplicate their coach’s behaviours and philosophies (e.g., they use similar terminology and engage in strategies to study opponents). Team excellence and success, as measured by the

degree to which the leader has accomplished desired goals, are considered outcomes of effective leadership by those who can create and articulate a vision of the future and inspire people to pursue that future (Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

Scholars have noted that regardless of any leader's inspirational abilities and the quality of their vision, a leader's vision is meaningless unless they couple the vision with a 'plan,' that includes actionable and measurable processes, and an effective communication strategy (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Donoso-Morales, Bloom, & Caron, 2017; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sashkin, 1988; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Developing such a plan supports a leader when they align the vision with the organizational culture and its members. Schein (2004) stated that organizational culture is a pattern of shared assumptions that guides organizational members' behaviours. Furthermore, Schroeder (2010) noted that leaders create these patterns of shared assumptions that guide behaviours through the enactment of their visions through the aforementioned communication strategies. Collins and Porras (1996) believe a leader's most important work may be related to aligning the vision to its enactment.

Several researchers have discussed the element of a 'plan' with regards to leaders who enact a vision within the context of a high-performance sports team (Din et al., 2015; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2014; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Specifically, scholars identified vision as one of several elements that contributes to the success of high-performance sport coaches (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Specifically, Vallée and Bloom (2005) identified vision as an essential component in understanding how Canadian university intercollegiate coaches built successful programs.

While Vallée and Bloom (2016) and Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) determined that the head coach's enactment of a vision was closely tied to an actionable strategic plan (i.e., that which included strategies related to, but not limited to, recruitment, training, education, fundraising) to enact the vision, these scholars discussed vision insofar only as being one of the elements related to effective coaching. While this is a valuable finding, further discussion on the head coach's actual process of creating and enacting the vision may have contributed more specifically to understanding the dynamic processes the head coach as a leader makes to enact vision into a reality among all team members. Given the gap in the research, further empirical study is needed to better understand the process by which a leader—and specifically, a sport coach as a leader—conceives, develops and enacts a vision into an actionable reality toward their desired goals and outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Given this identified gap in research, the purpose of this study was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals. In this study, the focus was on studying head coaches within the context of large team sports, including U SPORTS football, Canadian university male rugby teams, and U SPORTS female rugby teams. U SPORTS is the leading Canadian University intercollegiate sport organization, in which more than 14,000 student-athletes and 700 coaches from 56-member universities compete every year for 21 national championships in 12 different sports (U SPORTS, 2019).

In Canada, U SPORTS football is the highest rank of amateur football played, where athletes on teams representing 27 universities compete for the Vanier Cup National Championship. Additionally, U SPORTS female rugby is the highest rank of amateur rugby

played, where athletes on teams representing 27 universities compete for the National Championship. Canadian university male rugby teams compete in two distinct conferences, where ten teams compete in the Ontario University Athletics (OUA) conference, and seven teams compete in the Réseau du Sport Étudiant du Québec (RSEQ) conference. Although university male rugby teams do not officially compete in the U SPORTS league, they represent one of the highest ranks of amateur male rugby played in Canada. Leading these 73-university large team sport teams are head coaches. Among this group of head coaches, the researcher assumed that each possesses, to some degree, both the common goal of winning their respective National Championship, and an intended vision on how to achieve this goal. Furthermore, Canadian university large team sport head coaches are leaders of sport organizations, comprised of specialized student-athletes, coaches, and supporting staff.

In the current study, the researcher chose to study football and rugby head coaches, as both unique team sports necessitate robust leadership from a head coach given their high-contact nature (i.e., players engage in frequent collisions with other players as a central part of the game), position specialization, and short in-season schedules. Additionally, both sports centralize around a team with large roster sizes. In Canadian football, 12 athletes each playing a specific position from two teams take the field at any given time, and the average size of a Canadian University football team roster is approximately 88 individuals, whereas in rugby, 15 players from each team take the field at any given time, and the average roster size of a Canadian University male rugby team is approximately 43 individuals, whereas the average roster size of a Canadian University female rugby team is approximately 36 individuals.

Three research questions were developed to fulfill on the study's purpose. These research questions were based upon both an extensive review of the literature on the concepts of vision,

visionary leadership and effective sport coaching and the researcher's curiosities, and include: first, what elements comprise the vision of a Canadian university large team sport head coach? (Caldwell, 2019; Collins & Porras, 1996; Conger, 1989; Schroeder, 2010); second, what actionable processes do Canadian university large team sport head coaches employ to effectively project their vision, such that players and support staff are inspired to pursue that vision? (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sashkin, 1988; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989); and third, how do Canadian university large team sport head coaches ensure that their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project/communicate? (Collins & Porras, 1996; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sashkin, 1988; Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

In a further effort to fulfill upon the study's purpose, the researcher used a pragmatic qualitative research design, defined as "an approach that draws upon the most sensible and practical methods available in order to answer a given research question" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 171). Participants provided descriptions in their own words that include facts, feelings and experiences, such that researcher interpreted those words (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) defined pragmatism as "a philosophical tradition that asserts that truth may be interpreted in terms of the practical effects of what is believed, and in particular, the usefulness of these effects" (p. 60). The researcher's use of a pragmatic research design was appropriate for this study, given his personal identification of being a pragmatic individual and his pragmatic experiences in the sports of football and rugby; the researcher believed that this philosophical tradition to qualitative research was best suited for gleaning descriptive information that would advise professional practices in the study's context of U SPORTS (Savin-

Baden & Major, 2013); and, more specifically, would advise the professional practices of Canadian university large team sport head coaches.

Salkind (2010) stated that a pragmatic study focuses on individual decision makers within actual real-world situations. In this study, the Canadian university large team sport head coaches represented the individual decision makers who influenced players to engage competitively in the playing (and winning) of games that comprised the real-world situations of competitive football or rugby games that comprised a competitive football or rugby season. Furthermore, through undertaking a pragmatic paradigm, the researcher first identified a problem and then placed the problem within its broadest context; and, in so doing, he sought to better understand and ultimately attempt to solve the problem (Salkind, 2010).

As such, the researcher identified the gap in the literature relating to the limited understanding of if and how a large team sport coach conceives, develops and enacts their vision to achieve desired goals. The researcher further contextualized and highlighted this gap in the following literature review. Finally, Salkind (2010) stated that the research findings within a pragmatic study often result in some form of recommendations that may be implemented within programs and organizations (e.g., social change, policy suggestions, training programs) in the future as a means of solving the identified problem. The researcher's goal was to provide a pragmatic contribution in order to enhance head coaches' ability to conceive, develop and enact a vision.

### **Theoretical and Managerial Justification**

Conducting the research study was both theoretically and managerially significant for several reasons. For example, one of the main theoretical contributions of the findings was to the literature base on coaching performance, specifically related to coaches who have developed and

maintained success among sports teams (Cruickshank et al., 2013; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Becker and Wrisberg (2008) stated that although contemporary books, articles, and documentaries provide insight into the practices of many exceptional high-performance sport coaches, research studies in which scholars systematically examine head coaches are less common. The researcher thus created this study to examine the practices of Canadian university large team sport head coaches to address this identified gap, thereby contributing to the literature.

Moreover, Yukelson and Rose (2014) asserted the need for continued investigation of the role that psychosocial influences have on building and sustaining championship teams. Green (2005) stated that although we conceptually know a great deal about the social and psychological parameters of sport participation, we know less about how effective sport coaches and leaders engage with program planning, implementation, or evaluation and need to learn more about their applications. The researcher worked towards addressing this gap in the literature by pragmatically exploring how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact a vision.

More broadly, Bryman (2004) argued for a greater development of the exploration of leadership using qualitative research design and methods, stating that the results of qualitative studies on leadership can facilitate innovative ways of thinking about the complex, shifting dynamics of leadership. Furthermore, Osborn et al. (2002) and Côté and Gilbert (2009) issued a call for increased attention to the context in which leadership plays itself out, as contextual grounding is necessary for a better understanding the meaning of leadership behaviours. Furthermore, the findings of this study provided a managerial contribution, given the researcher's primary pragmatic goal of using the findings to further educate sport coaches and

leaders on how to enact their intended and developed vision to achieve their desired goals (e.g., guidebook development, workshop facilitation). In the following chapter, the constructs of vision, visionary leadership and sport coaching, as they relate to Canadian university large team sport head coaches, are reviewed and discussed, relative to the purpose of the current study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals. Fulfilling upon this purpose was guided by the following three research questions, including: first, what elements comprise the vision of a Canadian university large team sport head coach?; second, what actionable processes do Canadian university large team sport head coaches employ to effectively project their vision, such that players and support staff are inspired to pursue that vision?; and third, how do Canadian university large team sport head coaches ensure that their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project/communicate?

In this chapter, the literature is reviewed to more deeply understand theoretical frameworks and past research findings related to the concept of vision, the concept of visionary leadership, and effective sport coaching. Vision, visionary leadership and effective sport coaching are important concepts to review as they provided the overarching theoretical framework that guided the research. In the first section, the concept of vision is reviewed as a central element to this study. In the second section, the concept of visionary leadership is outlined and is related to vision and effective leadership. Finally, in the third section, the literature on effective sport coaching is explored, as the sample in this study was comprised of large team sport head coaches in Canada.

#### **The Concept of Vision**

The ability of high-performance coaches to articulate a clear vision is known to be central to their success (Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), as this ability allows coaches to engage in proactive and iterative planning and goal setting processes

(Côté & Sedgwick, 2003). These processes are fueled by the coach's analytic tenacity, defined as a "relentless engagement in analysis [...] the conscientious pursuit of incremental improvements" (Din et al., 2015, p. 598).

Schroeder (2010) stated that a leader's vision represents symbolic and idyllic statements for the future condition of an organization and is a vital element of both organizational and team cultures, for four primary reasons, including: 1) a vision can provide organizational members with *psychological safety* (as seen in Schein, 2004) that enables members to overcome the fear of change initiated with culture change; 2) a vision can help people understand the purpose, objectives and priorities of the organization (as seen in Yukl, 2013); 3) a vision can increase members' motivation and commitment by providing a common purpose and sense of importance to work; and, 4) a vision can promote organizational members' consistent actions and decision making.

Mallett and Lara-Bercial's (2016) study of Serial Winning Coaches (SWC) both confirmed Schroeder's (2010) findings and expanded on the knowledge of the leader's process of creating a vision. According to Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016), SWCs are those who meet two key criteria, including: 1) they have won multiple championships at the Olympics, World Championships, and/or coach in highly recognised professional leagues; and 2) they have become SWC's having coached and led multiple teams or many individual athletes over a period of time. These SWC's discussed how they engage in an exercise of "seeing into the future" (p. 234) to help them understand the elements of performance necessary to succeed in their respective high-performance sport. Furthermore, the SWCs stated that this imagined future can be highly complex and a central element to the creation of a vision. Mallet and Lara-Bercial (2016) refer to this as the capacity to "simplify complexity" (p. 234), which they defined as the

act of choosing from numerous options, the key modifications to the way things are currently done that will ensure the biggest return on investment from the limited resources available to the coach and athlete(s).

As Vallée (2002) previously stated, effective leadership is associated with individuals who cast a vision of the future and inspire people to pursue that vision. Collins and Porras (1996) stated that vision included two components: including *core ideology* and *envisioned future*. These scholars defined *core ideology* as “the glue that holds an organization together as it grows” (p. 66) and is a mixture of core values (i.e., a handful of guiding principles by which a company navigates) and core purpose (i.e., an organization’s most fundamental reason for being). These scholars noted *envisioned future* as also consisting of two parts, including: first, a 10-to-30-year big hairy audacious goal (BHAG), and second, a vivid description of what it will take to achieve the chosen goal. Collins and Porras (1996) described the BHAG as a clear and compelling, yet huge and daunting challenge that serves as a unifying focal point of effort and acts as a catalyst for team spirit, whereas they described the vivid description as a vibrant, engaging, and specific description of what it will take to accomplish the BHAG. This description aids in translating the words of the BHAG into a picture that people can carry in their minds about what the accomplished goal looks like (Collins & Porras, 1996).

Vallée and Bloom (2016) defined vision as the “coach’s full perspective of the program, which encompassed their long-term goals and direction, as well as the selling of their coaching philosophy to their athletes” (p. 171). Their definition is similar to Collins and Porras’ (1996) definition, such that the components of the full perspective of the program, and the encompassing of long-term goals and direction relates to the full perspective of core values and purpose. Furthermore, Collins and Porras’ (1996) definition of the *vivid description* relates to the

coach selling their philosophy to athletes. Specifically, as the vivid description concept only influences members of the organization when they buy into the overall vision (Collins & Porras, 1996), a coach's ability to influence athletes about their philosophy and program is related to their ability to articulate a vivid description of their BHAG, core values, and core purpose.

Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) found through their study of SWCs that their "clearly articulated vision of what is necessary to win was central to success" (p. 225). They also found that SWCs held equal importance about their ability to simplify the complex environment in which the organization exists and to align their vision with actionable processes. Supporting the importance of aligning the vision with processes and of a leadership style that envisions the future, Martens (1987) stated that, "leadership is simply to give others direction by having a vision [...] to achieve the goals the leader charted. Excellent coaches [and] leaders give the team vision and know how to translate this vision into reality" (p. 33).

### **The Concept of Visionary Leadership**

Sashkin (1988) notes that visionary leadership incorporates the leader, the leader's behaviours as well as the leadership context. Additionally, Sashkin (1988) defined visionary leadership as involving the leader's creation of a vision. The leader's created vision both fits and moulds organizational conditions and requirements such that he or she is designing the organizational future and is typically seen as a visionary by organizational members and by outside observers. Westley and Mintzberg (1989) similarly defined visionary leadership as a process where the leader engages in the specific steps of creating a vision, communicating the vision and empowering others to 'own' the vision for themselves.

Sashkin (1988) stated that visionary leaders create vision by taking advantage of opportunities within the organization (i.e., identifying challenging areas within the

organization and including a resolution within the vision statement), as well by constructing opportunities where they “create the future as much as they adapt to it” (p. 128). Sashkin (1988) proposed that a leader’s capacity to demonstrate visionary leadership includes three critical elements of: 1) *personality prerequisites* and *cognitive skills*; 2) understanding the *key content dimensions* of an organizational vision (i.e., elements included in successful visions); and 3) an ability *to articulate the vision* to organizational members in compelling and inspiring ways. Each of these three critical elements of visionary leadership are next discussed.

### **Personality prerequisites and cognitive skills**

McClelland (1975) developed the term ‘socialized’ power to identify the type of power that visionary leaders seek and used the term to define a leader oriented toward obtaining power to empower others to carry out the vision. Without a focus on power and empowerment, the leader cannot manifest the vision to become a reality. Followers empowered by visionary leaders internalize the leader’s vision and values, such that they appear as autonomous and self-directed in terms of then realizing the vision themselves (Conger, 1989; Sashkin, 1988).

Jaques (1986) and Sashkin (1988) identified four cognitive skills that leaders apply in a developmental sequence over longer timeframes to realize their vision. First, leaders *express the vision* using behaviours including maintaining composure in moments of stress and through professionalism, physically behaving in a myriad of ways that advances the vision step-by-step in a professional manner across all situations. Second, leaders *explain the vision to others* through verbal and written communication, in which they articulate the vision clearly and describe how the requisite actions for the vision link

to goal achievement. Third, leaders *extend the vision* to various situations such as unexpected failures and obstacles, such that they creatively adapt the vision through thinking to different circumstances and change situations to better fit with the goals of the vision. Fourth, leaders *expand the vision* in novel versus similar ways through using different verbal communication strategies and symbols and themes, such that they may apply the vision in a wide range of circumstances and to a broader context.

### **Key content dimensions of an organizational vision**

Moreover, Sashkin (1988) identified three major themes that a leader must include when developing a vision, if the vision is to have substantial impact or ‘transform’ an organization. First, leaders must be *dealing with change, where their* vision must address help the organization deal with change through empowering organizational members to autonomously take on and resolve problems as they arise. Second, leaders must include *ideal goals* within the vision, such that they must outline goals linked to ideal conditions or processes so organizational members may become attached to goals and feel they are critically important to organizational success. Third, leaders must address the dimension of *people working together* within the vision, outlining roles to occupy or ways to become involved and assume responsibility so all organizational members can ‘own’ the vision. Sashkin (1988) shared that the “effective management of change and the attainment of goals can only be achieved through the committed and coordinated activity of the organization’s members” (p. 133).

### **The leader’s articulation of the vision**

Here, how a leader articulates a vision to organizational members through *strategic, tactical* and *personal* actions (Sashkin, 1988) is discussed. First, visionary

leaders develop clear and concise statements of organizational philosophy grounded in the specific elements of their visions as strategic actions (Sashkin, 1988). In developing the organizational philosophy, the leader should include organizational functions (e.g., marketing, human resources, operations, finance and accounting) and define values that support the organizational function (Sashkin, 1988), which can in turn offer the visionary leader options for strategic actions with which to directly design and change organizational culture and therefore transform the organization (Sashkin, 1985a). All or most of the top managers in the organization should be involved in the development of the organizational philosophy in order to maximize its utility.

Second, Sashkin (1988) stated that “no matter how clear, straightforward, and inclusive the statement of philosophy is, it means nothing unless it is coupled with actions” (p. 139). The tactical action of implementing policies and programs that represent the vision and organizational philosophy is critical to the enactment of the vision within an organization. Leaders must also implement measurable processes in order to assess the degree to which the organizational members have taken action to adopt the vision (Sashkin, 1988).

Third, regarding personal actions, “leaders must communicate their visions in ways that reach out to organizational members, gripping them and making them want to get involved in carrying out the vision” (Sashkin, 1988, p. 142). Scholars (Bennis, 1984; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Sashkin, 1988) have identified five major effective personal actions among leaders that support them in carrying out their vision, including: 1) *focusing attention* (i.e., getting others’ attention to focus upon specific key issues); 2) *communicating personally* (e.g., demonstrating one-to-one communication, active

listening, giving feedback effectively, questioning and probing skillfully, summarizing appropriately); 3) *demonstrating trustworthiness* (i.e., demonstrating consistent and trustworthy behaviour such that others can believe they say what they mean and mean what they say); 4) *displaying respect* (i.e., paying attention, showing trust, sharing ideas and being clear about the importance and value of organizational members); and 5) *taking risks* (i.e., creating and taking calculated risks and being responsible with what arises from such risks, once decided upon). These scholars assert that a visionary leader will display a general amalgam of these personal actions.

As stated, scholars have noted that a vision is meaningless unless it is coupled with an actionable and measurable ‘plan’ and an effective communication strategy (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Donoso-Morales, Bloom, & Caron, 2017; Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sashkin, 1988; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). An overview on the literature that discusses the alignment of vision to a plan is next reviewed.

### **Alignment**

Collins and Porras (1996) outlined that the concept of vision has become overused and misunderstood, given it engenders different meanings for different people (e.g., as deeply held values, outstanding achievement, societal bonds, exhilarating goals, motivating forces, *raison d’être*). Furthermore, Collins and Porras (1996) stated that a leader’s construction of a visionary organization requires 1% vision and 99% alignment, where further, creating alignment may be the leader’s most important work related to enacting a vision. Vallée and Bloom (2016) agreed and stated that a leader needs to put a plan in place to enact their vision, such as the 5-year written plan Coach Vallée created on how she would take the Windsor Lancer women’s

basketball team to the national championship game. Din et al. (2015) stated that “vision [is] synonymous with the plan” (p. 596), rather than a separate and preceding component.

Din et al. (2015) also stated that the ‘plan’ is essentially a highly tailored and individualized entity for each athlete in preparing for major competition. Din et al. (2015) wrote about one coach who likened creating and tailoring such plans to creating an elaborate house, where in building the house, much like the plan, is a long process that requires many adaptations and changes, through which the coach or even the athletes can direct.

According to Vallée and Bloom (2016), coaches who achieved sustainable success had both a vision and a plan to enact their vision, resulting from effective organizational and recruiting skills. Donoso-Morales et al. (2017) demonstrated that the ability to foster a culture of excellence “demanded a high level of commitment and excellence during all parts of their program to prepare athletes for the pressure and stress of the national championship tournaments” (p. 506). Although Donoso-Morales et al. (2017) did not specifically discuss coaches’ written plans, they noted having instilled daily habits and behaviours among their athletes to prepare them to accomplish their BHAG of winning national championship tournaments.

Similarly, Hodge et al.’s (2014) study of the New Zealand All Blacks national team further supported fostering a culture of excellence to align a leader’s vision with a plan (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014), where participant coaches and players “expected excellence on a daily basis” (p. 68), which ultimately contributed to their extraordinary international success.

Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) noted that coaches and athletes stressed both the vast amount of time needed to develop a plan and the deep levels of thinking that was necessary

within the planning process to account for any eventuality and furthermore, the need to develop subsequent contingency plans. Also, coaches and athletes described the plan as being action-led and process-driven, such that for every objective, relevant actions are in place to fulfill the objective. Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) also discussed coaches' willingness to adapt and change their plans as challenges occurred. Although the process of change was recognized as painstaking, coaches and athletes stressed its contribution to the culture of accountability and responsibility. Athletes felt as though their training regiments were customized to their needs, which enhanced their intrinsic motivation.

In their study of SWCs, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) emphasized five actionable processes that coaches demonstrated that supported the alignment between the vision and the environment, including: 1) espousing and enforcing high expectations (i.e., where every member of the organization becomes personally accountable to the high expectations and 'lived' culture); 2) leaving 'no stone unturned' when maximizing performance (i.e., finding innovative 'world class' coaching, support staff, and athletes who fit the organizational culture); 3) developing a healthy, open, and internally competitive environment (i.e., making practices as (or more) challenging than the real competition and constantly setting new and higher goals to reach); 4) building a stable and dependable culture that allows everyone involved to thrive (i.e., keeping personnel, resources, schedules, relationships, and the motivational climate stable); 5) influencing organizational decision makers (e.g., administrators, executives, board of governors/directors, governing bodies, international federations, equipment manufacturers) to align with their vision. The relationship between effective leaders and organizational members is next discussed, in addition to the concept of organizational culture as an outcome of this relationship.

### **Literature on Effective Sport Coaching**

In this section, effective sport coaching is defined and discussed thoroughly upon a review of both leadership and coaching literatures, given the sample for this study is a group of high-performance large team sport head coaches in Canada. Peters and Austin (1985) stated, coaching is face-to-face leadership that pulls together people with diverse backgrounds, talents, experiences and interests. [Treating] them as full-scale partners and contributors. Coaching is not about memorizing techniques or devising the perfect game plan. It is about really paying attention to people, really believing in them, really caring about them, really involving them. (p. 326)

Within a sport context, the coach is generally regarded as the most influential, significant-other in athletes' experience (Hodge et al., 2014). According to Vallée (2002), superior leadership by those who create and cast a vision of the future and inspire people to pursue that future results in an outcome of team excellence. Bloom (2002) also stated that great leadership is tantamount to success, which can be subjectively defined by each leader(s) in each specific context and is one of the most desired and expected characteristics of coaches.

According to Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016), the misalignment between an organization's need to be coached and a potential coach's ability to coach and can lead to underachievement in both coaching and team performance outcomes, as well as significant disruption and cost if the coach is released before the completion of the contract. Additionally, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) identified that the process of recruiting and developing coaches of elite athletes and teams is problematic, given elite athletes generally require elite level coaches who can be difficult to find and successfully recruit. Moreover, no such framework that guarantees successful recruitment and development of coaches exists. Typically, coaches are

chosen and employed in many sports more due to their success as players and less due to their coach training or effectiveness; however, a coach's success as an athlete does not guarantee their success as a coach, as both roles require different skills and traits to be effective (Gilbert et al., 2006). Understanding that effective sport coaching is of utmost importance for organizations is crucial on both operational and financial levels.

### **Elements of effective sport coaching**

According to Côté and Gilbert (2009) coaching effectiveness is defined as “the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts” (p. 316). This definition considers the interaction of both a coach's knowledge and athletes' outcomes in different and specific coaching contexts. Additionally, coaching effectiveness or expertise has traditionally been characterized by athletes' level of measurable achievements (i.e., win-loss percentage), athletes' personal attributes of the coach (i.e., their stated enjoyment and satisfaction of the coach) or even by a coach's years of experience (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Furthermore, Donoso-Morales et al. (2017) noted that effective coaching occurs both on- and off- the field of play. Specifically, effective on-the-field-of-play coaching is considered to have occurred when coaches use their knowledge, organizational and teaching skills to influence athletes' performance and satisfaction during competition (Gould et al., 2002), whereas effective off-the-field-of-play coaching is considered to have occurred when coaches use sport to teach and instill life skills while athletes are not engaged in competition (Bloom et al., 2014; Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

Specifically, a coach's knowledge is a culmination of their personal behaviours, experiences, and strategies to successfully meet the various demands of coaching. Moreover,

athletes' outcomes reflect the unique variations in athletes' attitudes, behaviours, or performance that can result from the influence of different types of coaching. Lastly, coaching contexts refers to the overall situation in which the coach works and how differing contextual influences can impact how a coach behaves. Within any coaching context, the coach must consider factors including any athlete's age, developmental level, needs and goals (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

The way in which a coach engages with personal growth and developmental interventions may positively support various coaching outcomes. Vallée and Bloom (2016) noted that the effective coaches they studied engaged in personal development through lifelong learning (i.e., a constant desire to acquire knowledge and engaging in personal reflection). Specifically, these coaches constantly exhibited desire to acquire knowledge through various means, including reading books, developing relationships with key individuals, and engaging in mentorship relationships.

### **Sport coaching**

In their study of NCAA Division I basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian's coaching style, as related to instructional, tactical, technical, and general training aspects, Bloom et al. (1999) suggested that Coach Tarkanian primarily emphasized tactical training, finding such training represented nearly one third of his behaviours. Bloom et al. (1999) shared that at the elite level of Division I NCAA collegiate basketball, athletes should already be physically conditioned, mentally prepared, and experienced in the technical aspect of their sport. With such preparation, a coach may put more time towards strategy and tactics and less on developing physical and mental skills specific to the sport. Din et al. (2015) identified that the coaches in their sample were demanding, decisive and direct in communicating with athletes and staff (i.e., pointed

instruction) and that such ways of communication were key parts of the leadership necessary for Olympic medal winning coaches and athletes.

While important, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) argued that verbal and pointed instructions are not defining traits of effective coaches, given their finding that athletes put greater emphasis on the coach's interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (i.e., empathy, persuasiveness, open-mindedness, self-awareness) than on the coach's professional or technical skills. Hodge et al. (2014) stated that "high-performance coaches require qualities beyond technical and tactical skills, such as leadership and the ability to facilitate a functional leader-follower relationship" (p. 65).

Athletes in Mallett and Lara-Bercial's (2016) study stated that in the future, coaches will need to be both athlete-centered, such that they will need to know their athletes personally and foster player and team empowerment. Furthermore, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) speculated that this cooperative partnership between coach and athlete will replace a past, traditional coach-driven power relationship. It is important to note that no two coaches are the same and each coach's success lies within their individual characteristics, as well as with their unique developmental pathway such that they continuously demonstrate self-improvement and self-reflection. In turn, the coach's unique approach to coach-athlete relationships impacts the overall development of their respective athletes, as the coach's success is often tied to the athlete's success and vice-versa (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). As such, effective coaches are those who can create and articulate a clear vision that allows them to engage in proactive and iterative planning and goal setting processes that can reflect an athlete-centered model of coaching (Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

### **Summary and Connection to Research Purpose**

The purpose of the current study was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals. In order to successfully lead a Canadian university large team sport team, a head coach must create and maintain a team culture, which is built from the enactment of an organizational vision, so that the organizational members (i.e., players, assistant coaches, support staff) are inspired to pursue the vision. In order to effectively create and enact an organizational vision, a leader must reflect visionary leadership behaviours. Visionary leaders behave authentically and remain consistent with the actionable processes in place to enact the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Sashkin, 1988), such that organizational members believe in and want to enact the vision (Sashkin, 1988). Furthermore, the most relevant indicators of leadership effectiveness are the extent to which both the performance of the organization is enhanced and to which all goals are reached (Bass, 2008; Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008; Yukl, 2013). In the next chapter, the research context of U SPORTS is discussed, specific to interuniversity Canadian football, female rugby, male rugby and the position of head coach as is the research design and methodologies used within the current research.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals. To fulfill on this purpose, the pragmatic paradigm was utilized as a central part of the research design, which is “a philosophical tradition that asserts that truth may be interpreted in terms of the practical effects of what is believed, and in particular, the usefulness of these effects” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 60). In this chapter, the research design and methodologies are detailed over four sections, specific to: i) the utilization of a qualitative research design; ii) the research context of Canadian universities; iii) data collection and analyses strategies; iv) data trustworthiness elements.

#### **Qualitative Research Design**

This research was conducted utilizing a qualitative research design, which Savin-Baden and Major (2013) defined as “social research that is aimed at investigating the way in which people make sense of their ideas and experiences” (p. 11). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) defined qualitative research as a formal method of inquiry that emphasizes the individual and the role that context and relationships play in forming participants’ thoughts and behaviours and assumes that the answer to any single research question lies within a host of related questions or issues “pertaining to deeply seeded aspects of humanity” (p. 1).

Regarding pragmatic qualitative research design, Creswell (2007) stated that pragmatic researchers are “free” to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that are relevant to the overall purpose of the study. As the most important aspects of this research were the central research questions (Creswell, 2007), the researcher focused on the practical research

implications as outcomes of the analysis and interpretation of these data. In focusing as such, the researcher took the role of the ‘interviewer’ to engage with participants in conversational, in-depth semi-structured interviews. Specifically, by using a qualitative pragmatic research design in this study, the researcher gained insights about how a large team sport head coach conceives, develops and enacts a vision within the context of a Canadian university large team sport.

### **Researcher’s Positionality**

Jones et al. (2006) stated that how a researcher positions themselves within a study is critical to understanding the lens with which they choose to interpret data. Furthermore, Shaw (2016) stated that qualitative researchers must be highly aware of their position to conduct trustworthy research. Additionally, Caelli et al. (2003) argued that the researcher should make disciplinary affiliations clear and identify what led them to the research question and articulate the assumptions they have made about the topic. As my personal experiences influence the choices made about what to study and how to study a particular phenomenon (Jones et al., 2006), my positionality with both the sports of football and rugby and with leadership practice and theory is next discussed.

### ***Positionality with football and rugby***

The desire to study head coaches of football and rugby teams in Canadian universities emerged from my experience participating in football (i.e., as athlete, coach, fan) and in rugby (i.e., athlete) and with my practical and theoretical experiences with leadership. As an athlete, I played football on five teams from 2006 to 2009. Beginning as a back-up player on my junior high school team in 2006, I progressed to become a starter on several teams, including: my high school team (in (when?)), the Ottawa Cumberland Panthers in the Ontario Varsity Football League (OVFL) and on team East Ontario in the 2008 Canada Cup from 2007 to 2008. In 2009, I

was elected to be captain of the senior team at my high school. Beyond graduating from high school, I chose to attend Bishop's University as a walk-on non-scholarship student-athlete. I then chose to end my athletic career after one year on the Bishop's University football team, due to both lingering injuries and a desire to save myself from the time commitment required to perform at the interuniversity sport level.

Additionally, I played on two different high school rugby teams from 2007 to 2008. Beginning as a back-up player in 2007, I elected as a team captain in 2008, winning the city championship that same year. I ended my rugby playing experiences to specialize in playing football and to limit the risk of any injury. With rugby, I maintained a passive role as a fan and spectator of the sport when possible and was able to sustain a bond with rugby through playing recreationally.

In 2012, I chose to return to engage with the sport of football as a volunteer coach for youth programs with the Ottawa Cumberland Panthers. There, I was an assistant offensive line coach on eight different boys' u15 and u17 football teams with the Panthers from 2012 to 2016. Through these years, I coached under the leadership of five different head coaches in two leagues (i.e., National Capital Amateur Football Association (NCAFA), OVFL). I chose to pause my coaching experience after moving from Ottawa to St. Catharines to study within the Bachelor of Sport Management (B.S.M.) program at Brock University in 2016.

I began watching professional American football in 2007 and over time, the sport of football became a passion and a part of my identity as a fan of the sport. As a former amateur athlete, volunteer coach, and passionate fan, I consider myself to be highly knowledgeable about, and invested in, the sport of football. Indeed, I have committed many hours throughout the calendar year to research and to assess the different professional football teams in both the

National Football League (NFL) and the Canadian Football League (CFL). From my past and present positions relative to the sport, I have particular interests in understanding how coaching and administrative personnel lead the team. In committing significant time to learn more about this sport, I have been specifically curious about individual coaches and how they lead and align their personnel and programs to success.

### ***Positionality with leadership***

I have also been interested in learning about leadership concepts since enrolling as an undergraduate student at the William's School of Business at Bishop's University. There, I studied leadership concepts academically at both Bishop's University and Brock University as an undergraduate student and then later, as a graduate student at Brock University. Furthermore, on a pragmatic level, I also occupied many professional leadership positions. Among these positions, I occupied the position as a Sales Leadership Associate and District Sales Manager at Coca-Cola Refreshments Canada. As mentioned, I also held a volunteer leadership position as a coach for the Ottawa Cumberland Panthers. I studied leadership from different contemporary sources (e.g., books, movies, interviews, presentations, articles) and applied concepts from such study to many different professional and academic sport leaders. Furthermore, I participated in leadership development and training courses, specifically with Landmark Education in 2015 and 2016.

### ***Positionality with vision***

While engaged in the process of developing a topic for this research, I developed a strong interest in the concept of vision. I read and studied academic articles (Collins & Porras, 1996; Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005), within each of which scholars

discussed the concept of vision in the context of sport coaching. From such reading, I became fascinated to further understand the process by which a leader conceives of and develops a vision in their mind and subsequently enacts the vision to achieve their desired goals through their behaviour. From my fascination, I chose the construct of vision and the theoretical framework of visionary leadership to engage in this current research of Canadian university large team sport head coaches and to explore if and how they conceive, develop and enact a vision to achieve desired goals.

### ***Intersectionality of football, rugby and leadership***

The idea for the proposed research arose as an intersection between my interest in, passion with and positionality within, the sporting realms of both football and rugby and the topic of leadership. Further, this intersection occurs within the context of the leadership position of head coach, a position in which a single individual assumes the responsibility for team members and all outcomes. It is within this context that I sought to more deeply understand how head football and rugby coaches are able to build a program through the conception and development of vision to be aligned and enacted among individuals within a large program such as a football team or rugby team, such that the team works towards successfully achieving that vision.

### **Pragmatic Research Paradigm**

A researcher's philosophical paradigm suggests their view of reality and degree of knowledge informs their perspectives, approaches, and methods, as well as guides their behaviours during the implementation of a study. In other words, one's philosophical paradigm influences what they will discover (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Through the researcher's pragmatic paradigm, he recognizes that "truth of an idea is dependent upon its workability; ideas

or principles are true insofar as they work” (p. 60). Specifically, in this study, the researcher recognized useful knowledge as that which will support leadership scholars and sport coaches.

The purpose of pragmatic qualitative research is to link theory and practice (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Further, Creswell (2007) explained that individuals aligned with this worldview focus on research outcomes (e.g., actions, situations, consequences of inquiry) versus antecedent conditions (e.g., cause and effect relationships). Additionally, Creswell (2007) stated that pragmatic qualitative researchers focus on the problem being studied and the questions being asked about that problem versus on the methods they use. In other words, pragmatic qualitative researchers “focus on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the research problem [...] placing the research problem as central and is willing to apply all approaches to understanding the problem” (p. 11).

As such, in this study, the researcher linked the theories of vision (Collins & Porras, 1996; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), visionary leadership (Conger, 1989; Gomes et al., 2006; Jaques, 1986; McClelland, 1975; Sashkin, 1988; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989), and effective coaching (Côté & Gilbert, 2009) to pragmatically study the practice of large team sport head coaches in high performance amateur sport. Consequently, the researcher acknowledged that by understanding the study through a pragmatic paradigm, he would recognize ‘truth’ by the practicality and the usefulness of the knowledge generated from the study for coaching and leadership academics and practitioners. To gain such truth, the researcher used research methods that allowed him to understand how Canadian university large team sport head coaches enact their developed and intended vision to achieve their desired goals and to generate insight about their practical and useful nature of this knowledge and its potential effects for other coaches and leaders.

## **Research Context of Canadian Universities**

U SPORTS is the leading organization of Canadian University intercollegiate sports with an organizational goal of giving “student-athletes and national championships the visibility, appreciation and reward they deserve” (U SPORTS, 2019). The vision of U SPORTS is to “inspire Canada’s next generation of leaders through excellence in sport and academics” (U SPORTS, 2013). U SPORTS is organized around four core values, including: 1) being student-athlete centered; 2) achieving excellence, 3) teamwork, and 4) being ethically driven (U SPORTS, 2013). U SPORTS is represented by an “engagement-first social media philosophy” (U SPORTS, 2019), focused on both promoting student-athletes and increasing viewership through digital streaming.

As noted, more than 14,000 student-athletes and 700 coaches from 56-member universities compete each year for 21 national championships in 12 different sports (U SPORTS, 2019). For this study, the focus was on the football division and female rugby division of U SPORTS as well as the Canadian university male rugby divisions and the representative head coaches. As the Canadian university male rugby divisions are not members of U SPORTS, the researcher utilized the inclusive term “Canadian university” to represent U SPORTS football, U SPORTS female rugby and Canadian university male rugby.

### **U SPORTS football division**

In Canada, U SPORTS football is the highest performance rank of amateur football. Throughout the country, 27 universities (i.e., of 56 total eligible Canadian universities) have football teams that compete within four regional conferences, including: the Canada West Universities Athletic Association (CWUAA) (six teams); the Ontario University Athletics (OUA) (11 teams); the Réseau du Sport Étudiant du Québec (RSEQ) (five teams); and the

Atlantic University Sport (AUS) (five teams). At the completion of the 8-game regular season (i.e., teams play from early September to end of October each year), the top-ranking teams from each conference compete in a single-game elimination playoff tournament. Specifically, top teams are selected based upon their regular season record, and include four OUA teams, four RSEQ teams, two AUS teams, and four CWUAA teams. The playoffs begin in early November and culminate at the end of November, at which time the winning team is named national champion at the annual Vanier Cup (U SPORTS, 2019).

### **U SPORTS female rugby division**

In Canada, U SPORTS female rugby is the highest performance rank of amateur female rugby. Throughout the country, 27 universities (i.e., of 56 eligible Canadian universities) have female rugby teams that compete within four regional conferences, including: Canada West (5 teams); the OUA (10 teams); the RSEQ (8 teams); and the AUS (4 teams). At the completion of the 6-game regular season (i.e., teams play from early September to mid-October each year), the top-ranking teams from each conference compete in a double elimination tournament in which teams compete for the gold, silver and bronze medals (U SPORTS, 2020).

### **Canadian university male rugby division**

In Canada, university male rugby is among the highest performance rank of amateur male rugby. Among all universities, 17 have varsity male rugby teams that compete within two regional conferences, including: OUA (10 teams); and the RSEQ (7 teams). Notably, male rugby university teams exist outside of these divisions, but are classified as ‘clubs’ as opposed to being classified as interuniversity varsity teams. To remain as standardized with football and women’s rugby divisions as possible, only interuniversity varsity teams within the OUA and the RSEQ were considered for inclusion in this study. At the completion of the 6-game regular season (i.e.,

teams play from early September to mid-October each year), the top-ranking teams from each conference compete in a double elimination tournament where teams compete for the gold, silver and bronze medals (OUA, 2020).

### **Position of head coach**

The head coach is the individual who creates a team culture (Martens, 1987). In other words, the head coach is one who creates “a social and a psychological environment that maximizes a team’s ability to achieve success” (Schroeder, 2010, p. 64). Many coaches have identified team culture as a key to their team’s success (Anderson, 2007; Din et al., 2015; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Thamel, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Voight & Carroll, 2006), as within the team culture, an environment develops, in which all members “think alike, talk alike, and act alike so they can support and reinforce the best in one another” is created (Voight & Carroll, 2006, p. 324). According to Schein (1992), neither leadership nor culture can be understood in isolation, such that “the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and change cultures” (p. 5).

Furthermore, Schroeder (2010) identified that the coaches he studied were able to enact culture change by clearly establishing the direction and values of their team, and subsequently, orient all organizational actions and symbols toward these values. If alignment occurred consistently through the organizational actions and symbols, the culture change occurred rapidly. In other words, by simply reframing the meaning of team membership, the coaches created championship-level teams (Schroeder, 2010).

### ***Canadian University Head Coaching Positions***

Head coaches of Canadian university football, male rugby and female rugby teams are fully responsible for the many different facets of their respective university program, beginning

with the on-field performance and overall competition for their respective national championships on a yearly basis. An examination of four Canadian university football, and two Canadian university female rugby job postings for the position of head coach (i.e., University of Guelph, 2016; Laurier University, 2017; University of Regina, 2016; University of Waterloo, 2014; University of Waterloo, 2019; Varsity Blues Football, 2017) available on the internet, revealed head coaches' accountabilities that extend beyond the technical and tactical elements of their sport.

Across these aforementioned job positions, the qualifications for acquiring a head coaching position commonly included: possessing an undergraduate degree (i.e., possessing a Master's degree was preferred); holding Level III National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) certification; possessing a minimum of three to five years experience as a head coach (or an equivalent combination of education and experience); possessing a leadership philosophy consistent with the desire to develop the student-athlete as a well rounded individual; a proven ability to recruit and retain quality student-athletes; demonstrated record of superior organization, communication, administration, and interpersonal skills; and, a commitment to excellence both on- and off- the-field-of-play. These requirements did not vary between written position descriptions, perhaps suggesting that head football coaches, head male rugby coaches, and head female rugby coaches in Canadian Universities perform similar roles and are accountable for similar outcomes.

### **Data Collection and Analyses Strategies**

In the following section, details regarding both participant recruitment methodologies and second data collection and analyses strategies used in the current study are outlined. In this study, the researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy to collect data, defined by Patton

(2002) as focusing on selecting information-rich cases, upon which further study of the identified individuals illuminated the research questions. The chosen groups for this proposed research study are U SPORTS football head coaches (n=27), U SPORTS female rugby head coaches (n=27) and Canadian university varsity male rugby head coaches (n=17). A representative sample of these groups was thought to satisfy the purpose of the study, which was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals.

### **Participant Recruitment Methods**

Participant recruitment for this research began in March 2020 to coincide with both Brock University Research Ethics Board's (REB) clearance of the study, the researcher's availability and the conclusion of all Canadian university regular football and rugby seasons, respective of playoff tournament schedules. The researcher used two primary strategies to recruit participants for this study, including: first, sending an invitation to gatekeepers and key informants to assist in recruitment; and second, sending electronic mail (email) invitations to proposed participants. These two recruitment strategies are next discussed, as related to the qualitative research design and the pragmatic paradigm.

#### ***Gatekeepers and key informants***

Gatekeepers are those “who know individuals and/or settings that meet the sampling criteria determined by the researcher” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 74), whereas key informants are less likely to “have authority to grant access, but once access is gained, key informants are integral to identifying the most suitable participants for a study because of their insider status” (p. 74). Related to these two groups of individuals, the researcher first recruited gatekeepers and key informants as a means of linking to and building rapport with potential participants.

For this research, the researcher solicited the assistance of two gatekeepers to recruit U SPORTS head football coaches as he had no contacts within his network to recruit and solicit head rugby coaches. The chosen gatekeepers were individuals who were already connected to the researcher within his network who had established direct connections to some included in the selected sample of 27 USPORTS head football coaches. Through their connection, the researcher learned that these gatekeepers had played, coached and/or worked with these head football coaches and had developed a personal relationship with them such that they were comfortable connecting the researcher with these head coaches. As a result, the researcher successfully recruited three head football coaches through the assistance of these two gatekeepers.

### *Email invitation*

The researcher used a secondary strategy to recruit potential participants by sending them a personalized electronic e-mail invitation. Specifically, the researcher sent an email directly to respective Canadian university large team sport head coaches, given coaches' email addresses are publicly listed on each respective team website. In this personalized email message, the researcher attached a letter of invitation (see Appendix A) to participate in the study, within which the researcher outlined the purpose of the study, information related to the interview process, potential participant benefits of being involved in the research project, information on the ethical considerations of the study (e.g., informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity) and contact information for both the researcher and the Brock University Research Ethics Office.

The researcher also attached a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) to solicit consent from each coach, thereby ensuring participation. In this particular letter, the researcher detailed participant requirements in order to participate, potential participant benefits and risks, assurance of confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation and details on withdrawing

from the study if desired at any time, information on the publication of results, contact information and ethics clearance, as well as information on accepting or declining participation for the current research. In using e-mail to communicate with potential participants, the researcher could freely engage in responding to any arising questions and concerns when respectively convenient for any potential participant and the researcher.

The researcher used two rounds of email invitations to recruit participants. After garnering interest from coaches in the first round of invitations, receiving responses from two head football coaches, the researcher waited two weeks and resent the email invitation to the coaches who did not respond to the first round of email invitations.

### **Alterations to participant recruitment**

From the initial solicitation for recruitment through the assistance of two gate keepers and two rounds of email invitations, the researcher successfully recruited five football head coaches out of a possible 27. As a result, the researcher deeply reflected upon recruitment strategies toward increasing the number of study participants. Initially, the researcher thought it would be a good strategy to invite coaches from other amateur football leagues in Canada to participate, thereby remaining in the sport of football. After conducting interviews and after reviewing respective transcripts, the researcher realized that the ‘student-athlete’ dynamic of these U SPORTS football teams were core elements to the coaches’ visions and enactment strategies; and concluded that extending an invitation to include a participation population of another Canadian university team sport would otherwise provide a best alternative to increase participation. As such, the researcher chose to remain researching within the context of Canadian interuniversity varsity sports, and expanded research to include both male and female rugby head coaches. Rugby is another contact based large team sport that resembles football in some ways.

The researcher discussed this change with his supervisor and once establishing logistics, he received further approval and guidance from committee members. The researcher then submitted modifications to the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB) to ensure such changes were appropriate for the study and were formally tracked. Once he received clearance from the REB, the researcher enacted the same methodologies with the participant population of 44 Canadian university male and female rugby head coaches. In this case, the researcher had no gatekeepers to support him in contacting rugby coaches, and so relied solely on email invitation when initially soliciting recruitment of this population.

In response, the researcher heard from eight coaches, five of whom further agreed to participate, whereas the other three chose not to participate. The researcher proceeded to conduct semi-structured interviews with the five rugby coaches in the following two weeks. At the end of the two weeks, the researcher sent a second round of invitations to the remaining 36 rugby head coaches by email, to which none responded. In total, ten football and rugby head coaches (i.e., five football, five rugby) agreed to participate in this study. Following each participant's semi-structured interview, the researcher transcribed the interview verbatim to reduce and characterize these data. The researcher stored these data, including all audio recordings, transcriptions, and participant information, in a password protected folder on his personal computer to which only he had access. Upon completion of the research, all audio and visually recorded interviews, completed transcriptions and participant data were permanently destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

### ***Confidentiality***

Confidentiality is an information security goal, aimed at preventing unauthorized disclosure of personal information (Anderson & Goodman, 2002) and requires the researcher

guarantee to participants that all names and other identifying information associated with interviewees will be kept completely confidential (Klenke, 2016). To maintain confidentiality for this research, the researcher kept names and identifying information of consenting participants in a password protected excel document stored in a password protected folder on his personal computer. The researcher assigned a unique pseudonym to each participant, differentiating them by highlighting a unique aspect of their personality and leadership style. The researcher then permanently destroyed the file that included all personal and identifying participant information upon completion of the research. As such, all participants have been subsequently referred by their pseudonym through data analyses and discussion portions of this research document.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) stated that interviews are the most common method of data collection for a qualitative research study and are an integral part of most research traditions. These scholars defined interviews as a “conversation between two individuals, in which the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee responds” (p. 357). From conducting interviews, recruited participants provided the researcher with in-depth, complex information (Wengraf, 2001) from which the researcher could focus upon understanding and interpreting head coaches and their leadership strategies as they related to conceiving and enacting a vision (Tierney & Dilley, 2002).

As the primary data collection source in this proposed research study, interviews formed a “central data collection method for exploring data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like, that people have in common” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 2). As such, interviews were an appropriate data collection method to use in this study, as they allowed the researcher to engage in one-to-one communication with each

participant such that he deeply probed about participants' respective experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

The researcher formulated interview questions (see Appendix C) with reference to the guiding theoretical frameworks of vision, visionary leadership and effective coaching to ensure the development of effective, targeted and theoretically grounded questions toward a complete semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was structured into six sections, wherein the first section, questions were included with the purpose to build rapport and learn about the coach's experience and leadership style according to the effective sport coaching literature (Bloom et al., 2014; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). In the second section, questions were directly related to research question one (i.e., what elements comprise the vision of a Canadian university large team sport head coach?), while other questions were related to the coach's vision for the team. In the third section, questions were meant to elicit data relevant to actions and processes employed by the coach to enact their vision and also addressed research question two (i.e., what actionable processes do Canadian university large team sport head coaches employ to effectively project their vision, such that players and support staff are inspired to pursue that vision?).

In the fourth section, questions were included to understand how the coach aligned their personal beliefs and behaviours to their vision and to address research question three (i.e., how do Canadian university large team sport head coaches ensure that their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project/communicate?) In the fifth section, included questions were meant to be asked only of rugby coaches, and were meant to explore any potential gender differences between coaches within the sample in enacting a vision, given male and female participants were recruited in the study. Lastly, in the sixth section questions

pertaining to possible pragmatic outcomes of this study were included, given the paradigm through which the researcher viewed the researcher.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with ten coaches who agreed to participate. With the development and use of a semi-structured interview guide, the researcher both followed pre-set questions and included additional, impromptu questions in response to participants' answers, comments, and reactions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In using this interview method, the researcher initially asked participants broad based questions and then probed further, asking specifically based questions without following a strict order. This interview method also allowed the interviewer to stray from the interview guide to probe by asking follow-up or clarifying questions. Given the nature of semi-structured interviews, the researcher also asked each participant follow-up questions when appropriate, to elicit more detail or clarity from the participant (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Prior to conducting interviews with Canadian university large team sport head coaches as consenting participants, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a volunteer participant. While this individual did not fit the criteria of participation for this study (i.e., they were a head coach of a high school football team), they had accrued large team sport head coaching experience, and could thus engage with the questioning and provide valuable feedback to the researcher. The researcher recruited this individual by inviting his past coaching colleagues to participate (i.e., those from 2012 to 2016). By engaging in this pilot interview, the researcher could practice both asking the questions and actively listening to the answers and thereby test the quality of interview questions.

Given how the Canadian university large team sport head coaches are geographically dispersed throughout Canada, the researcher used video chat technology (e.g., Zoom video

conferencing) to conduct these interviews. Zoom video conferencing offered the ability to record the conversations directly to the user's computer so that the files were saved and easily accessible for transcription at a later date. The researcher additionally recorded every interview with the use of a digital audio recording device (e.g., cell phone with a voice recording application) that had capacity to record and save lengthy conversations (i.e., over two hours). The researcher used two recording devices to capture each interview conversation to minimize the risk of losing respective recorded interview files.

### **Data Saturation**

Saturation is used as a criterion for discontinuing data collection and/or analysis within qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2017). While scholars articulate different perspectives and definitions of data saturation (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryman, 2012; Dey, 1999; Given, 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Grady, 1998; Olshansky, 2015; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Urquhart, 2013), the researcher adopted Grady's (1998) perspective that saturation occurs at the point where new data becomes redundant of data already collected. For example, when the researcher began to repeatedly hear similar concepts or the same comments, he determined that the point of data saturation had been reached (Grady, 1998).

The term 'saturation' may also be problematic as it lends itself to thinking in terms of reaching a fixed point and a sense of 'completeness', and a term similar to 'conceptual depth' may be more appropriate (Dey, 1999; Nelson, 2016). Additionally, researchers discuss saturation as a "matter of degree, arguing that there will always be the potential for 'the "new" to emerge'" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136), such that reaching the point of saturation should actually be concerned with further data collection becoming counter-productive, and where the 'new' does

not necessarily add anything of value to the overall story or theory (Mason, 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Specifically, for this study, the researcher utilized the model of “inductive thematic saturation” (Saunders et al., 2017, p. 1897) to relate to the emergence of new codes or themes within these collected data in the analysis phase. After the eighth interview, the researcher began to experience a level of saturation such that no new codes or themes were emerging from conducted interviews. Further, no new relevant codes emerged from these collected data upon conducting the next two interviews; upon reflection, the researcher considered that the point of saturation had been reached in alignment to supporting literature on the concept of data saturation (Dey, 1999; Grady, 1998; Mason, 2010; Nelson, 2016; Saunders et al., 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### ***Member checking***

The researcher conducted member checks to assess the usefulness of the interpreted knowledge in this study by using participants’ feedback to gauge what information he would consider as useful. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) stated that member checking involves the researcher checking with any participant for either feedback or for verification of data interpretation once thematic analysis is complete for their respective transcript. Once thematic analysis was completed, the researcher sent a document to each participant which included a general overview of the thematic analysis, research notes and relevant quotes to each participant approximately 5 to 6 weeks after the interview was conducted.

In addition, the researcher provided a 2-week review period during which the participant could respond with feedback. In return, the researcher received six responses from a total of ten coaches with whom he had interviewed; all six coaches approved the researcher’s interpretation.

Furthermore, one coach requested a slight modification in the wording of the researcher's interpretation of the coach's values. The researcher accepted this modification and proceeded to initiate the in-depth data analysis phase. After conducting semi-structured interviews with the ten coaches, reaching data saturation according to Grady's (1998) standards, transcribing interviews verbatim over a period of two weeks, and conducting member checking, the researcher initiated the data analysis phase of the research process, outlined in the following section.

### **Data Analyses Strategies**

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) shared that data analysis involves breaking data down into meaningful parts for examination in order to make sense of these data to ultimately answer the research questions. For this study, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommended steps of thematic analysis, including: 1) becoming familiar with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and, 6) producing the report. At its fundamental level, thematic analysis is "the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Additionally, according to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), it is through the researcher's degree of intuitive immersion in these data and through the process of connecting all codes, themes and concepts that the researcher may discover themes. In engaging in these steps, the researcher was guided by the chosen pragmatic paradigm, such that the themes and knowledge he elicited from these data appeared to be most useful in answering the research questions and in fulfilling the study's purpose.

#### ***Becoming familiar with the data***

The researcher immersed himself in these data, such that he became familiar with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher first transcribed audio

recordings of the individual interviews verbatim, omitting as many ‘ums’ and ‘ahs,’ as doing so allowed the data to both remain true to its original nature and remove anything that was superfluous to the study’s purpose. The researcher then engaged in three separate reading sessions with each participant transcript. In the first reading session, the researcher read the entire transcript to become familiar with the interview. In the second session, the researcher read through the entire transcript, using a highlighter to identify what he perceived to be important passages and quotes from the interview, according to the guiding theoretical concepts of vision, visionary leadership and effective coaching. In the third session, the researcher used a pen to note his thoughts in the margins of the transcript, which soon after led to initiate the coding process.

Thereafter, the researcher engaged as needed to remain immersed in these data, by both reviewing transcripts and taking additional notes related to ideas and themes that emerged in his mind. As he progressed, the researcher aggregated data into a chart created on Microsoft OneNote to centralize all research notes and relevant quotes into one document. The chart was formatted with each row representing each interview question and with each column representing pseudonyms to identify each coach. The researcher then included relevant, highlighted quotes and notes in respective cells until the chart was completed.

### ***Generating initial codes***

According to Boyatzis (1998) a code refers to “the most basic segment or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (p. 63). The researcher began the manual coding process in the third reading session of becoming familiar with these data, working systematically through the entire data set and giving full and equal attention to each individual interview transcript. Additionally, he included columns in the

data chart for each head coach to include, organize and generate more codes. Afterwards, the researcher re-read each individual transcript to identify any codes that he may not have recognized within the data chart.

### *Searching for themes*

The researcher first consulted Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis in qualitative research to ensure he followed a reputable structure. Additionally, pragmatism calls for the identification and delivery of useful knowledge, as opposed to providing an overall perspective of the lived experiences of the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). As such, he began to analyze codes and consider how the different codes combined to develop overarching themes, while he used subjective measures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, he determined that for a theme to be present, they then needed to be present in all or a large majority of the interview transcripts. Moreover, for a theme to come into being, the theme must directly answer the researcher questions. Additionally, the researcher identified themes unique to one or a few of the transcriptions that represented an important contribution to the overall research findings (e.g., the theme of assigning tasks and standards).

Further, a latent approach to the thematic analysis was chosen to provide depth and detail in the findings. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a latent approach to thematic analysis allows the researcher to exercise great intuition, so that he may move beyond semantic content (e.g., what is written) to identify and thus more deeply describe underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies. For example, coaches discussed the importance of aligning their behaviour to their beliefs, as such the researcher intuitively identified that authenticity was an underlying concept present. In such case, the researcher provided depth and detail for the reader to best understand the themes.

The researcher established themes by reading through initial codes and identifying trends and commonalities between participants' transcriptions. Additionally, the researcher identified codes and themes that did not appear in each interview but were identified overall as important to the findings (e.g., while only one head coach referred to the experience of leading Generation Z student-athletes, the comment was found to be relevant to all head coaches, as each team is comprised of Generation Z student-athletes), as determined by the guiding theoretical frameworks. The researcher read through the initial codes and research notes and noted all themes into a separate Microsoft Word document.

Initially, the list of themes was based on the researcher's thought patterns, with no discernible organization. Upon completing a first round of searching for themes, the themes were organized vis-à-vis the three research questions, including: 1) what elements comprise the vision of a Canadian university large team sport head coach?; 2) what actionable processes do Canadian university large team sport head coaches employ to effectively project their vision, such that players and support staff are inspired to pursue that vision?; and 3) how do Canadian university large team sport head coaches ensure that their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project and communicate?

### ***Reviewing themes***

The researcher reviewed the identified themes and first combined similar themes and then organized them by each of the three research questions. The researcher also looked for both unique themes and any differing elements among themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) noted, themes must "cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes" (p. 91), such that the reader can clearly define what the themes are and what they are not.

### ***Defining and naming themes***

In this phase of data analysis, the researcher refined all themes to present them as research findings. The purpose of this phase was to ensure that identified themes were not doing too much, having too much overall or were not too diverse and complex (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also noted by these methodologists, it was important that the researcher identified the ‘story’ that each theme told and how these themes and thus stories fit into the broader overall ‘story’ of the data set, in relation to the research questions. Additionally, this phase allowed for the researcher to identify any sub-themes (i.e., themes-within-a-theme) which was useful to give structure to a particularly large and complex theme and to demonstrate a hierarchy of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### ***Producing the Report***

In the final phase, the researcher produced the report that included the research findings and a discussion of those findings. The researcher selected vivid and compelling extracted examples and verbatim quotations to support the themes that emerged in the previous phases of data analysis. The researcher first wrote about the research findings, (see Chapter IV) outlining the emerging themes from this study, which were supported by vivid extracts from research participants. The researcher then discussed the pragmatic value of the findings, as well as notable connections between the findings and the literature (See Chapter V). The researcher also engaged in a posteriori literature review to ensure that the findings were thoroughly connected to the existing literature, notably related to concepts not previously reviewed (e.g., Generation Z (cf. Francis & Hoefel, 2018)). In so doing, the researcher added additional relevant theory, relative to team culture (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Schein, 2004; Schroeder, 2010) and more academic sources to the report.

### **Data Trustworthiness Elements**

The researcher used strategies to ensure the respective markers or standards of trustworthiness were established in this research, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity. First, to ensure credibility, the researcher engaged in conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with each recruited participant, a method used in qualitative studies profiling leadership and sport coaching research (Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Fletcher & Arnold, 2011; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Given scholars have utilized semi-structured interview methodology in similarly oriented studies, it was deemed a credible method for use in the current research. Second, to ensure dependability and confirmability, the researcher kept an audit trail within his reflexive journal, in which he detailed the decisions, thought processes and relevant observations as the analyses progressed (Connelly, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher scheduled research-debriefing sessions with his supervisor as necessary to review to discuss both decisions made and the research process.

Third, to ensure transferability, the researcher provided a rich and detailed description of the participants' stories (Connelly, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is a "direct function of the similarity between two contexts" (p. 124) and as Merriam (1995) noted, it is the reader's responsibility of any research to determine if and how results might be applied (transferred) to other contexts. To that end, the researcher provided thick description and a vivid picture to inform and resonate with the reader (Amankwaa, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), for them to determine what information would be transferable between their specific context and the context of the current research. Moreover, the researcher connected the findings to existing leadership theory to demonstrate how the findings may be transferable. Regarding

pragmatic qualitative research, the researcher strived to provide a descriptive and accurate accounting of the meanings interpreted from these data, with which participants would approve (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Member checking also allowed participants to have a voice in the interpretation of the findings.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

A delimitation of this research was that interviewer focused solely on coaches' perceptions. As such, viewpoints from athletes, support staff and university administrators were not examined in the current research. A second delimitation of this research was to only study Canadian university large team sport head coaches, given the responsibilities associated with leading such a large sport team composed of highly specialized individuals and the time constraints associated with this research study. This particular delimitation may have resulted in four limitations.

Specifically and first, only 73 head coaches were eligible to be recruited as participants for this study, given the position of head sport coach, 62 of whom were male coaches employed at Canadian universities in the sport of football and rugby. Second, the results gleaned were specific to head coaches working at a Canadian university, as the specific contexts within Canadian universities may differ from other post secondary institutions in other countries. Third, the results may only be specific to large team sport head coaches, since football and rugby are uniquely different team sports, findings may not be transferrable to other large team sport head coaches. Fourth, given the researcher's use of a pragmatic paradigm, the theoretical contributions of the findings may be limited, as pragmatism is primarily oriented in the world of practicality rather than theory (Creswell, 2007).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

In the following chapter, findings from an analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with Canadian university large team sport head coaches are presented through four sections. In the first section, findings relative to coaches' visions and their descriptions of the origins of such visions are outlined, as are pragmatic examples of vision statements possessed by large team sport head coaches. In each of the subsequent three sections in this chapter, findings are respectively outlined according to the three research questions that guide this research.

#### **Coach Pseudonyms and Profile**

In the current study, the use of unique pseudonyms (see Table 1) represents each participant instead of the use of a generic name or a numbering system, given the researcher's interpretation that each coach demonstrated unique aspects of their personalities and leadership styles while being interviewed. The researcher's move to use unique pseudonyms in this way was aligned with one participant's comment; specifically, the Motivator stated, "the personality of the coach is going to be engrained in the way the program is run." Through the use of unique pseudonyms, the researcher could honour the engrained respective connection between each coach's personality and program, could represent study participants and could meet confidentiality requirements. In Table 1, the unique pseudonym, the number of years of head coaching experience, the overall winning percentage, the essential quality and a supporting quote that inspired the chosen unique pseudonym is outlined for each participant.

**Table 1***Coach pseudonyms, years of experience and overall winning percentage*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Win %</b>	<b>Essential Quality</b>	<b>Supporting Quote</b>
The Shepherd	4 years	23%	This coach self-identified himself as a practicing Christian and a guide for student-athletes.	“Serve as a guide [...] I really try to be there for my guys and help them, like a guide”
The Teacher	2 years	13%	This coach has teaching experience and prioritizes student-athletes’ academic success.	“I’m overseeing study hall [...] anytime the head coach is involved, now it’s really important”
The Young Gun	8 years	53%	The young gun is a football term that describes a younger quarterback with a fiery personality. This younger coach discussed his game-day energy.	“Not that long ago I was a player [...] I would say my competitive spirit on game days, I think my players really realize how badly I want it”
The Builder	12 years	45%	This coach discussed how he orients his leadership philosophy around building a sustainable culture of growth.	“it’s got to be about growth, [...] coming a long a journey together”
The General	13 years	86%	This coach discussed that he is an authoritarian leader and reads military history books in his free time.	“I’m probably an authoritarian [leader], I believe in what I do [...]I make the decisions”
The Professional	6 years	48%	This coach discussed the central element of his vision was to instill professionalism in student-athletes’ approach to varsity sports.	“One of the things I wanted to start off right off the bat was to treat ourselves seriously, to act as professionals”
The Supporter	5 years	Data not available	This coach discussed his role as primarily supporting players in identifying and achieving their personal goals.	“I see my role as you know really supporting them to get to that place [they want to be]”
The Comedian	3 years	7%	This coach was humorous during the interview, noting he uses humour to build rapport with players to create an effective team culture.	“it’s all about being humble and sort of being able to laugh at yourself, [...] it’s part of who I am [...] you just feel more comfortable [...] it’s more human”
The Innovator	8 years	85%	This coach discussed many times how her leadership philosophy orients around generating growth and change.	“if you’re not ahead and changing you’re falling behind in sport [...] what are you going to do that no one else is doing?”
The Motivator	3 years	0%	This coach described his belief that motivating athletes is a central element to his coaching philosophy	“everything we’re going to deliver has to come with some sort of motivation”

*Note.* Participants’ data for years’ of experience includes the cancelled 2020 season due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

## Visions of U SPORTS Large Team Sport Head Coaches

In this section, participants' articulated visions are presented and are organized into three sub-sections, including: first, coaches who were found to have articulated a clear vision and vision statement (see Table 2); second, coaches who were found to have articulated the essence of their vision but who did not articulate a supporting vision statement (see Table 3); and third, coaches who were found to have an unclear sense of vision and who did not articulate a clear vision or vision statement (see Table 4). The researcher organized the coaches in these three sub-sections according to first, the literature on vision (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), and second, the way in which the head coaches' articulated and *sold* these statements (i.e., verbally shared the vision in a persuasive and compelling manner) during the semi-structured interviews (Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

**Table 2**

*Coaches with a clearly articulated vision and vision statement*

Coach	Visions shared by Participants
The Innovator	"We will become the greatest U SPORTS program in the country"
The Builder	"To provide a championship experience to all of our players, one that helps them reach their full athletic and academic potential"

The two coaches listed in Table 2 effectively articulated and sold (Vallée & Bloom, 2016) their vision, having stated a vision statement during the semi-structured interviews. Additionally, both the Innovator's and the Builder's vision statements encapsulated their full perspective of their respective programs (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). For both, their statements included symbolic and idyllic statements for the future condition of their team and the statements were vital elements of their respective team cultures (Schroeder, 2010). Both vision statements

illustrate the coaches imagined future, such that they simplified the complexity of their sporting environment (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016), and help team members understand the common purpose, objectives and priorities of the organization (Schroeder, 2010).

Additionally, both coaches discussed within their respective interview that their articulated vision influenced their team's on-field success (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). For example, the Innovator's vision statement to "become the greatest U SPORTS program in the country" is represented in her 85% winning percentage as a U SPORTS head coach. Furthermore, the Builder's vision of providing a championship experience is also represented in his winning percentage (e.g., 45%). He shared that he "started to create the framework for culture and vision [...] in the 2013 year and carried it through 13-14 we started to reap the benefits and then 15-16 we were successful." Where the Builder had a 25% winning percentage prior to 2013, averaging two wins per season, and improved to a 57% winning percentage during the following 6 years, averaging five wins per season. This improvement in overall on-field success was a direct result of adopting his vision and articulating a vision statement during the 2013 season.

Both of these coaches' visions were also found to include elements of a core ideology and envisioned future (Collins & Porras, 1996). For example, the Innovator's vision statement of "We will become the greatest U SPORTS program in the country" is both a core ideology of the program and also an envisioned future of the ideal state of the program in the long-term future. Moreover, the Builder's vision of "providing a championship experience to all of our players, one that helps them reach their full athletic and academic potential" also includes a core ideology of providing a championship experience and an envisioned future of student athletes reaching their full athletic and academic potential.

Both the Innovator and the Builder discussed how they constantly seek new knowledge and improvement, which reflects Din et al.'s (2015) that the ability to articulate a vision is fueled by a coaches "conscientious pursuit of incremental improvements" (p. 598). Both coaches mentioned that they developed their current vision and vision statement after experiencing moments of failure and that it was through their pursuit of improvement they were able to create a new vision and direction for their team. The Innovator mentioned "I don't need a reminder, I just get up every day to be better," emphasizing her ingrained mindset on seeking constant incremental improvements. Similarly, the Builder emphasized the importance of being open to new knowledge, when he shared that "the more you get involved with things, the more you know you don't know [...] having that openness is the most important thing."

Through an analysis of the data as aligned to the literature, the researcher subjectively determined that the Innovator and the Builder were the only coaches in this study that possessed a clear vision and vision statement, according to the aforementioned criteria on the construct of vision. The remaining eight coaches did mention that they had a vision for their team, but the researcher determined that these coaches' visions did not meet the necessary criteria of a vision or a vision statement (see Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 3**

*Coaches that articulated the essence of their vision*

<b>Coach</b>	<b>Visions shared by Participants</b>
The Shepherd	"We want to graduate as many players as we can, we want to graduate all of them. Socially we want to make them better husbands, fathers, and employees or bosses. We want to win our conference, [...] we want to compete on the national stage, [...] then we want to be a perennial participant to the Vanier Cup, becoming the Beast of the East."
The Teacher	"I want us to be self-sufficient academically, [...] from a team aspect, we want to make sure that we're competing for provincial titles and [...] we want to be able to feed the monster."
The Comedian	"We aim to be a consistent competitive team, constantly aiming to make playoffs, utilizing a physical and disciplined defence, alongside an exciting fun brand of attacking rugby. We strive to reach all our personal potential by supporting one another as family, we out work others as a team through commitment, enjoyment and accountability, building character and leadership"

While the three coaches listed in Table 3 were found to have a clear sense of their vision for their team, they did not articulate a clearly developed vision statement. These coaches clearly articulated the full perspectives of their program, which encompassed their long-term goals and direction, as well as their coaching philosophy (Vallée & Bloom, 2016) and a core ideology and envisioned future for their team (Collins & Porras, 1996). Additionally, all three of these coaches detailed symbolic and idyllic statements for the future condition of their team as well as the purpose, objectives and priorities of their team (Schroeder, 2010). These coaches however lacked clarity, as they shared lengthy and broadly themed statements and each did not articulate their vision in that they did not *sell* the vision in a persuasive and compelling manner during the semi-structured interviews (Vallée & Bloom, 2016).

These respective visions of these three coaches were considered to be broad based and refer to different elements such as a high graduation rate, being self-sufficient academically, competing for national championships and achieving personal potential. Specifically, the Shepherd refers to his desire to graduate all his student-athletes and developing them into positive contributors to society, as well as his desire to be perennial competitors to the national championship. As such, it is difficult to understand the coaches' specific imagined future, given that they did not simplify the complexity of their vision (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

It is possible that these three coaches are in fact enacting a conceived and developed vision for their teams but may either lack the necessary knowledge to articulate this phenomenon or have simply not had enough time to fully enact their vision. As the Shepherd, the Teacher and the Comedian each have less than five years of U SPORTS head coaching experience, these coaches may be working towards creating a clear and concise vision and vision statement. For example, the Teacher mentioned that he is attempting to find a way to summarize his coaching

philosophy and vision “within 2-3 minutes versus a 25 to 30-minute explanation,” potentially demonstrating that he is working towards developing a clear and concise vision statement. The Shepherd discussed how he is confident in the vision he has for his team, and given more time, he will be able to enact his vision. The Shepherd shared that while he only won two games in his first two years as a head coach, his team won four games and appeared in the provincial championship game in his third season. With more time, this coach noted his belief that his vision of becoming a perennial contender in the national championship will be enacted.

**Table 4**

*Coaches with an unclear sense of vision*

<b>Coach</b>	<b>Visions shared by Participants</b>
The General	“The vision is a culture of hard work and respect [...] I just want to be better today, and I want our players to get better tomorrow [...] I’m trying to win, one game at a time.”
The Young Gun	“Win every day in everything you do”
The Professional	“Taking yourself seriously [...] the highest level that they’re going to play at and to really embrace an opportunity to treat themselves as professionals”
The Supporter	“I think it’s really about helping guys understand what can they achieve and what they want to achieve and then what are some of the pitfalls they have to be aware of and then just really starting to take pride in the way they live their lives”
The Motivator	“Striving towards [being] a top-end, respectable, competitive team”

The five coaches listed in table 4 struggled to share either a vision or vision statement, wherein they only discussed vision as being an important element of coaching but lacked a clear articulation of a vision or vision statement. Ultimately, these coaches were found to have communicated their coaching philosophies that guided their behaviours and choices while leading as head coaches and elements of their desired team culture (Schein, 2004). These statements lack the necessary elements of a vision and vision statement (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Although these coaches were found to reference symbolic and idyllic statements (Schroeder, 2010) and mention their core ideologies (Collins & Porras, 1996), they

lacked the perspective of an ideal future for their respective teams (Collins & Porras, 1996; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), given these perceived visions emphasized the present condition of the team culture.

Although only two head coaches possessed a clear vision and vision statement, all ten coaches stated they believed they had a vision for their team. In the following section, the origins of these visions are discussed to explore how a vision may be conceived and developed.

### **Origins of Visions of Canadian University Large Team Sport Head Coaches**

According to participants, they believed their visions originated from three sources, including: first, through maturation and experiencing failure over time; second, through a medley of experiences and influences; and third, through an alignment to one's personal values and leadership style. Each of these three sources is next described.

#### ***Through maturation and experiencing failure over time***

Coaches mentioned their own process of maturation was an initial source for created and then continuously molding their vision. For instance, the Shepherd shared “my first years coaching, I wasn't like this, [...] it would be more like, [...] getting it done and winning championships and installing discipline, you know, you kind of mature.” The Builder further shared that “when you're a young coach you measure success on winning and losing [...] but as you mature and you're in it long enough, you start to understand that that can't be the only measurement, it's got to be about growth.” The General similarly stated “when you're a young coach, you think it's all about winning football games [...] every time you line up to play somebody's going to win, somebody's going to lose, so if it was only about winning or losing, then why are we doing it?”

Some coaches expressed that their experience of failure sourced the origins of their respective vision. While coaches did not believe the vision itself magically appeared through moments of failure, such failure was thought to move them to a state of reflection and research that influenced the ultimate re-invention of their vision. For example, the Builder shared that from experiencing consecutive unsuccessful seasons years ago, he recognized his team lacked the foundational culture and framework to sustain success through the ever-changing cohorts of student-athletes, stating “it sort of evolved from that sort of negative experience of not getting that success, our goal was to win, win a championship, to no, our goal is to reach our potential as a team and as an individual.”

Similarly, the Innovator shared that she recognized the lack of leadership on her team through the experience of losing a playoff game. Responding to this experience, she began to research ‘how to teach leadership’ on her own time and subsequently created a ‘leadership-development and character-education’ program with a purpose to teach leadership skills to her senior student-athletes from her belief that “great leadership means creating other leaders.” Following a successful first year of her leadership-development and character-education program, she began to see positive results from players who engaged in leadership development. From such results, she expanded players’ participation to include all student-athletes on her team and then empowered these student-athletes to create the program’s vision without her influence, trusting they would ultimately create a vision that would both work for them and remain relevant for the future cohorts through the program for years to come.

As a result, her student-athletes created the vision of “we will become the greatest U SPORTS program in the country.” The Innovator emphasized that this vision was “not about rugby;” evidence to her that investing in developing and facilitating the leadership-development

and character-education program paid off, as student-athletes appeared to understand that their overall experience as varsity athletes was about both the sport itself and the overall holistic experience of growing as a human being. In experiencing failure and subsequent success of developing this leadership-development and character-education program, the Innovator also transformed her own vision for her personal life, stating “I actually want to do [the leadership-development and character-education program] for all the athletes at [the university], like that’s actually my vision.” Over time she invited alumni, community leaders and assistant coaches to participate in the program, during which time her approach to coaching and leadership philosophy shifted toward investing the majority of her time to developing and supporting lower-year and incoming student-athletes.

The Young Gun shared that the team’s failure to maintain on-field success led him to revise his vision and leadership processes. He used the metaphor of climbing a mountain to describe the journey of trying to win a national championship and ultimately achieving both individual and team goals. He shared “I was a little naïve in assuming everyone knew how to get to the top of that mountain, [...] half the locker room was recruited to a team that won it, they didn’t realize that the guys that won it grinded up that mountain and scratched and clawed to get there.” He explained how experiencing failure transformed his messaging and coaching strategy, where “the new 50% of the locker room didn’t realize the steps necessary, and I was naïve thinking they should have known.” In addressing failures, he shifted his vision and messaging from being predominantly goal oriented to being more process based in order to achieve team goals. For example, he shifted to focus more time on “the steps of the workouts, every meeting, every practice” and attend to day-to-day efforts, as opposed to focus solely on end results.

### *Medley of experiences and influences*

Some coaches discussed how they pieced together both their vision and approaches to enact their vision from a medley of experiences and influences (e.g., other coaches, mentors, books, videos, personal experiences). The Motivator explicitly pointed to this method, saying “I think [it’s] a bastardized version of what I’ve been exposed to, taken part of in life, early on as a coach, you’re constantly told to [...] ‘do things your way, and do things the way that you believe’ and you don’t know what your way is.” He shared it took him time to develop ‘his way,’ where “I’ve been able to steal stuff that I like and adapt it to my situation [...], like this thing from the Culture Code, this thing from athletic training, and things from this coach over here, yeah just stealing as much as possible.”

The Shepherd shared he used various external sources (e.g., books, podcast, the Bible, campus leadership groups) to build a plan to support him enacting his vision. Notably, he shared that the book “Above the Line” by Urban Meyer, as well as the company Focus 3 were primary influences on the development of his plan to enact his vision. Additionally, he referenced his Christian faith as a central source for him as a person and for serving as a guide to lead and coach his student-athletes. He also referenced childhood experiences of travelling through the United States with his parents to how he viewed working within the football season as travelling on a trip. He explained that “when you take a football program, [...] you have to realize it’s a trip, it’s like a voyage [...] now, while it’s a voyage, it’s super important to have small milestones.” He referred to his parents using a ‘triptik’ (i.e., a step-by-step map guiding them to their final destination) to navigate different milestones of a road trip as a metaphor to explain how he navigates different milestones of a football season stating, “well, we win the first game [...] let’s get our first back-to-back win of the season [...] it’s always about small little

milestones that we can reach and then go forward.” These various influences and experiences shaped The Shepherd’s leadership and coaching styles, as well as his plan for enacting his vision of the program.

### ***Alignment to personal values and leadership style***

Coaches’ visions were found to be sourced from an alignment between the vision itself and their personal values and leadership style. For instance, The Teacher expressed his values to include family, love, caring, servant leadership and credibility. Additionally, before becoming a U SPORTS football head coach, he was employed in a job within the education sector, which also influenced his approach to coaching. The Teacher explicitly shared how, in addition to education, his value of family was central to his vision for his program, stating he is trying to “establish this great family community where people are well connected [...] if you care and love the individual player, [...] treat him like your own family member, I think ultimately when you do that, the scoreboard’s going to take care of itself.” Throughout the interview, the Teacher referred to the different ways in which he incorporates family within this team such as being influenced by his immediate family, prioritizing the development of the whole person, and to his creation of a parent club (i.e., a group of selected parents that support the team through fundraising, organizing team meals, billeting student-athletes, and creating and distributing regular newsletters). The purpose of the parent club was to include family members from some of the student-athletes into the team environment, as to demonstrate the importance of family to the program.

The General listed his personal values as including work ethic, perseverance, respect and integrity. Notably, he specifically articulated that he does not possess a clear vision statement, nor does he believe in using a vision statement to lead his team. He shared instead that “vision is

what I want our culture to be [...] the vision is a culture of hard work and respect.” The Supporter clearly stated his top value as pride, explaining that what mattered to him is to “[help] guys develop a sense of pride,” such that the student-athletes are proud of themselves as individuals and of their accomplishments. He explained that his vision is to “[help] guys understand what they can achieve and what they want to achieve and then what are some of the pitfalls they have to be aware of and then just really starting to take pride in the way they live their lives.”

The Innovator shared her values include accountability, excellence and passion. Additionally, she shared that her leadership style is “very, very player centered, [...] really [involving] the players in a lot of the decision-making processes [...] any major decision that is made goes through a leadership group.” The Comedian was found to approach student-athletes similarly, by allowing his ‘executive officers’ (i.e., term for members of his leadership group) to create the vision and mission statement under his supervision and with his final approval. Allowing his executive officers create the vision demonstrates his trust to his student-athletes and uses the vision as a tool of accountability. The Comedian believes that the student-athlete involvement enhances the student-athlete loyalty to the vision and the team-members, reasoning that “it’s easy when they’ve created it, like that saves half the battle of me trying to get the ideals, the vision across.” Additionally, he shared that he is player-centered as a head coach, and that his values include loyalty, trust, honesty and accountability.

The Professional discussed how his vision of instilling a sense of professionalism with his student-athletes is aligned with how he personally carries himself in his daily life. He explained that he is both employed as the head coach of the male rugby team and within a professional role at the university. He shared that his top personal values as including

accountability, organization, emphasizing the whole person and awareness. He explained that he wants to ensure that “there’s a professional attitude and really holding athletes accountable to that is very important” and that organization is “something I can bring to the table really well, I’m in the building five days a week, if not more.” Ultimately, he explained that “I lived and breathed [the vision] and I think that people recognized it and responded to it.”

Lastly, the Shepherd shared that when he was hired as the head coach of the football team, he used the metaphor of “opening a restaurant with one recipe” to describe how his leadership, coaching style and vision were aligned to his personal values. He shared that “this is my spaghetti sauce, this is what I believe, a ‘how-you-win food bowl,’ this is what you’re getting, [...] I believe in it, there’s nothing else on the menu.” With this metaphor, the Shepherd’s spaghetti sauce includes such ingredients (i.e., his personal values) as love, community, purpose and wisdom.

### **RQ1: Elements Comprising Visions of a Canadian University**

#### **Large Team Sport Head Coach**

From an analysis of these data, two major themes emerged to directly answer the first research question of “what elements comprise the vision of a Canadian university large team sport head coach?” These two major themes included: first, the holistic development of the student-athletes; and second, building and sustaining a team culture that supports the holistic development of the student-athletes. See Table 5, in which these two major themes are outlined. These coaches unanimously shared that their visions are grounded in the holistic development of their student-athletes. Although some coaches mentioned their desire to compete for and eventually win their respective national championships, they all prioritized the holistic

development of their student-athletes before their desire to win games and championships.

Findings related to this first major theme are next outlined.

**Table 5**

*Emerging themes relating from RQ1*

<b>Major Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	<b>Supporting Quote</b>
Holistic Development of the Student-Athlete	Individual Growth	Coaches prioritized the holistic development of student-athletes	“My big thing is I really believe in developing the whole person” (the Teacher)
	On-field Experiences	Coaches used on-field experiences to provide holistic developmental opportunities for student-athletes	“It’s about competing, it’s about pushing yourself, it’s about teaching some of the most important life lessons that our student-athletes will learn” (the General)
	Off-field Experiences	Coaches emphasized the importance of providing valuable off-field experiences for student-athletes.	“you’re going to get all the aspects of how you’re going to get better” (the Builder)
Building a Sustainable Culture		Coaches viewed vision as closely related to the overall team culture	“For me vision is what I want our culture to be, [...] we use the word culture a lot and culture is who we are” (the General)

**Holistic development of the student athletes**

A first major theme of holistic development of the student-athlete emerged from each of the ten coaches during their respective interview. Holistic development considers the interrelationship between the body, the mind and the spirit of an individual while “promoting physiological, psychological and fostering socio-cultural relationships in an ever-changing environment” (McEvoy & Duffy, 2008, p. 414). The Builder clearly stated his vision for his team as “our vision of our program is to provide a championship experience to all of our players, one that helps them reach their full athletic and academic potential.” Similarly, The Teacher shared his vision was “let’s give our student-athletes the best possible athletic and academic experience over their four to five years with us.” The Shepherd expressed his vision through his desire to see the student-athletes on his team grow as individuals, stating “we want to graduate as many players as we can, we want to graduate all of them. Socially we want to make them better husbands, fathers, and employees, or bosses.”

Additionally, coaches' desire to holistically develop student-athletes was closely aligned to how they defined and perceived success. For instance, The Professional stated that "success for me, or part of success I think is kind of that individual, holistic development, it's hard to put a grade on it but it's something that you can sit back and see." The Comedian expressed the importance of the university life experience when he said "you just want them to come out of university having had a really good experience, and as a really well rounded person, as most people want from their experience from university, so I guess in terms of like that for me would be success." According to coaches, holistic development was specifically thought to occur through three distinct ways, including: first, through individual growth experiences; second, through on-field experiences; and third, through off-field experiences.

### ***Individual growth experiences***

Coaches described their genuine desire to help the individual student-athletes grow and reach their potential as human beings from the moment they enter their respective program. For coaches, each student-athlete's growth is also future focused, such that they support their growth to being self-sufficient adults as they leave the university experience and enter the next chapter of their lives. Coaches were found to teach life lessons, instill habits, and provide perspectives to student-athletes so they could connect their sporting experience to the larger experience of life.

For example, The General stated

yes, we're trying to win football games, but at the end of the day what are we trying to do? We're trying to teach them life lessons about things that are going to make them good people, good community people, good husbands and good fathers, and I think that starts with you know, having integrity and trusting and so that comes from the coach.

The General further explained that “in some small way, we just teach about being resilient, about persevering,” because

you lose a championship football game, and you know what, you feel the next morning, how poorly you feel and you have to get out of bed and go to school and do your classes [...] something way worse than losing a football game is going to happen to you down the road and you’re going to have to get out of bed and go to work and be a dad and be a husband [...] we think it’s a big deal losing a football game, but in the big scheme of things it’s not.

Similarly, The Innovator shared that “what I’m trying to teach them is to take more risks right, [...] so a lot of it is about taking risks and trusting your gut because your gut is going to be right, so these are the kind of subliminal messages that I’m trying to teach them.” She additionally provided an example that “women tend to, for example, not apply for the job unless they meet every single criteria and as a result don’t climb as quickly as maybe men do because men will apply for a job even if he only qualifies for half of it.” She added that sometimes she will outwardly state to her student-athletes what she is trying to teach, such as “take your space, just own your space, you’re here and just own it, don’t shy away from it.”

### ***On-field experiences***

Coaches included the on-field experience (i.e., practicing, playing and competing in the sport) of their respective sports as part of the context in which they holistically develop their student-athletes. Coaches shifted the perspective of what it means to win or lose such that they placed more emphasis on the processes leading up to the competitions, rather than the results of competitions (i.e., wins, losses). They considered the processes leading up to competitions (e.g., practices, meetings, workouts) along with the experience of winning and losing, as necessary

experiences that support the holistic development of student-athletes. Ultimately, it was found from coaches that it is more about the effort, enthusiasm, and engagement in the sport that really matters to these coaches rather than about winning or losing.

Coaches acknowledged that the overall win-loss record is an important element of the experience and of their job performance. For instance, the Shepherd stated that “at the end of the day we are in a performance and results driven business [...] wins and losses do count,” and the Professional shared that “it’s hard to get away from wins and losses as success, it is part of what we do in sport, we are relatively high level of sport, we want to win games, we want to win medals we want to win championships.” The Young Gun explained that those external to the team (i.e., stakeholders, critics operating outside the team environment) held perspectives that success is mostly defined by wins and losses. He shared that “the outside world is going to let us know whether we’re successful or we’re a failure based on 24 hours” such that “there are eight football games guaranteed, and every game is about three hours long, so one day’s worth of games, we’re being judged by.” However, to those internal to or within the team environment, the win-loss record is not the quintessential element considered as success. For instance, the Supporter shared that he “would rather have a poor season of results but have all the guys come out feeling like it was worth it” as opposed to a “great season and you know, I got this medal but I don’t feel great.” Additionally, the Builder shared

it’s always great when you win but some of the most times or the best times I’ve had as a coach are teams that not necessarily won but they grew together into one group, into one cohesive unit and if you see them walk away, whether they have basically won or not, if they come away with coming together, and they come away with improvement as an

individual, I think that's a successful year, and if you add winning on top of that it's a really successful year.

Coaches' perspectives on the inherent importance of wins and losses were similar for those who have won many games – including national championships – as well as for those who have not experienced as much on-field wins. The General, with extensive football head coaching experience and a record of many wins and multiple championships, explained that “persevering, being a good teammate, getting along with people, that's the success.” He expanded on this notion of success, sharing

Yeah, trying to win football games, when you're young you think that's what it is [...] some people would say 'losing does that to you, if you lose a lot, you start looking for other things that define success' but I think we've won a lot of football games, but I think more importantly we've created a lot of great relationships and some outstanding young men who have gone on to be great people.

Coaches are those who mostly teach these life lessons; moreover, student-athletes reflect upon their on-field experiences and are further influenced from the coach making explicit connections between elements of the vision and on-field circumstances. The Teacher explained that he “feels like for a majority of coaches in Canada, it's 'we need to use you for football,' whereas I want our athletes to use football to get what you need later in life.” In this instance, the Teacher expressed how the on-field context of the sport helps student-athletes learn necessary skills and lessons to support their overall development. As a specific example of a coach connecting elements of the vision an on-field circumstances, the Shepherd stated “[we] talk about 'control the controllable', you can't control the field, just practice,” where the phrase 'control the controllable' is a key element in his vision and culture that he communicates to his

student-athletes such that they focus on what is in their direct control when extraneous circumstances may appear as challenges in their day to day routine.

### *Off-field experiences*

In both football and rugby, the actual on-field, in-season occurs in a short time span of approximately two to three months, leaving nine to ten months without in-season activities for the coaches and student-athletes. As such, coaches emphasized the off-field, off-season period as essential to enacting their vision. During this time period, the coach heightens the focus on the student-athlete's academic success and encourages them to maximize the experiences available in the university context. For instance, the Builder specifically noted that during the off-season, he provides student-athletes with a program that includes aspects of what it takes to reach their potential, including: academic support, strength and conditioning, speed development, nutritional education, mental health support (e.g., yoga, meditation, counselling).

The Innovator shared that she redesigned the structure of her calendar year to improve holistic developmental experiences for student-athletes. She originally conceived her season as starting in September to coincide with the beginning of the school year and as ending in November. Upon redesigning her season, programming began in January and ended in November, as she now perceives that the regular in-game season is “the end, it's the product, and then within itself there's a process and a product.” She explained that the off-season experience has now become a core element of her program, in that the time between January and September is now primarily focused on developing the student-athletes through her ‘leadership-development and character-education program’ in order for her team to enter the in-game season as a more cohesive and prepared unit. She additionally shared that her recruits now enter the program at an

earlier date and “when they arrive it will be the end of our season [...] they arrive understanding [...] it’s like they’re old friends.”

Furthermore, academic success is critical to participating in university sports as a student-athlete and as such, coaches described the importance of supporting student-athletes’ academic progress and success as a part of their holistic development. The Comedian stated that “our real goal with academics is we want to push and be one of the smartest if not the smartest teams on campus, we’re currently, I want to say we’re #1, I think we’re #2.” Additionally, the Teacher stated that “[being] self-sufficient academically [...] that’s something I envision, seeing these guys graduate and move on” and discussed that through mandatory study halls for those student-athletes who have an academic average of below 80% “we saw an overall 5% [GPA] increase [...], not have anyone in an academic suspension or jeopardy at this point is a big part of that.”

The Builder discussed that an important element of his program and vision of providing a championship experience is to encourage the student athletes to “meet other people from other sports, other areas of school, get connected in the residences, get connected in classes with different people, even if they’re not athletes [...] get the most out of the experience.” The emphasis on encouraging student-athletes to build relationships and to make the most of their experience during their time as student-athletes is aligned with the Builder’s vision of having student-athletes reach their full potential. Similarly, the Comedian spoke about the importance of growing as individuals and human beings, he shared that he “want[s] them to explore life,” adding that “I want them to make mistakes and I want them to do stupid things because if you can’t do it now while you’re at university like, you’re probably going to suffer a lot later in life.” Additionally, he stated that “you just want them to come out of university having a had a really good experience and as a really well-rounded person.”

These coaches conceived that off-field experiences for student-athletes could be incorporated in their enacting the vision for their program. As they seek to holistically develop student-athletes, they were found to not limit their programs to only the on-field sport experience; rather, they were found to include student-athletes' entire university experience as part of the program and therefore, within the scope of their vision.

### **Building a sustainable culture**

Another key element that was found to comprise the Coaches' vision was their desire to build a sustainable culture. The General explicitly stated that vision is culture, stating "for me, vision is what I want our culture to be, [...] we use the word culture a lot and culture is who we are." For example, "when you look at film, that's who we are, when you walk into our weight room, that's who we are, when you see our players in the classroom, that's our culture." The Teacher also stated that vision is closely tied to the culture of the team, noting "when I think of vision [...] it's can you get your culture put out there that everyone within the organization understands it."

The Builder stated that his vision orients around providing a championship experience to student athletes, such that they will be exposed to "all the aspects of how [they're] going to get better." He further explained that the culture of his team is focused on the student-athletes reaching their full potential. Similarly, the Professional worked to instill a culture of professionalism within his team, as professionalism is closely tied to who he is as an individual. He would mention to student-athletes that since others (e.g., trainers, sponsors, officials) treat them as professionals, they should thus consider themselves as professionals.

The Motivator's vision was found to be directly tied to creating a culture. He spoke to his desire to build the program into a "top-end, respectable, competitive team," where student-

athletes are “enjoying themselves in the program, they’re being developed to the point they promote the program and it becomes known as a place that people want to be.” He added “the by-product would be to have some on-field success as well.” This coach was focused on creating an environment that is attractive to new recruits, and that current student-athletes enrolled on the team are enjoying their experience without prioritizing on-field success.

Building a culture in a university sporting environment is a challenging task as there is a high degree of turnover from one season to the next, as noted by some coaches. For example, the Young Gun explained that “every single year, 25 guys leave, and 25 new guys arrive, so very quickly in a 2-year span, 50% of the locker room is different, so vision for me is something that can go on classes, generations and so on.” He shared that “graduating players, time management, all of those things will stay consistent but slight things are changing with the times.” Therefore, according to these coaches, the vision and subsequently the culture must be both sustainable over time and malleable to new cohorts that enter the program every year.

## **RQ2: Actionable Processes Employed by Canadian university**

### **Large Team Sport Head Coaches**

Coaches discussed ways they monitored student-athlete buy-in into the program and vision, unanimously stating that student-athletes’ behaviour is a clear indicator of buy-in, and as such, the actionable processes they employ to effectively project their vision orient towards instilling and monitoring certain behaviours and beliefs among student-athletes (see Table 6). Coaches were found to employ three actionable processes to instill and monitor behaviours and beliefs in the student-athletes, which included: first, frequent communication of a simplified version of the vision to the team through formal communication strategies and diverse forms and moments of informal communication; second, assigning tasks and standards to student-athletes

such that the head coach is able to measure buy-in to the vision; and third, empowering student athletes to be involved in decision making processes and overall creation and enactment of the vision. Each actionable process is next described.

**Table 6**

*Emerging themes from RQ2*

<b>Major Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	<b>Supporting Quote</b>
Frequent Communication	Formal Communication	Coaches formally communicate the vision as a way to have student-athletes buy-in	“During training camp I take 20-30 minutes a day and I go through the power point like if they were having class” (the Shepherd)
	Hierarchy of Communication	Coaches rely on a hierarchy of communication of disseminate the information to the student-athletes	“I get it reiterated through other people [...] I want to make sure our staff use the same kind of language, [...] through small goals or big goals” (the Comedian)
	Informal communication	Coaches engage in informal communication to team members and find opportunities to connect the vision to day-to-day moments	“what I like to call corridor conversations [...] it’s not realistic for me to always be like ‘guys let’s get together in a room and sit down’” (the Motivator)
	One-to-one communication	Coaches discussed the significance of one-to-one communication to build relationships with student-athletes	“it happens one player at a time, one moment at time” (the General)
Assigning tasks and standards		Coaches assign tasks and standards of to provide direction and opportunities for student-athletes to align to the vision	“they were not allowed to wear red in the facility, during our season, so that was the commitment you have to make when you play for us” (the Builder)
Empowerment	Student-athlete involvement	Coaches discussed how they create leadership groups and rely on selected individuals to lead the team	“it’s not just me coming up with it, [...] I’ve met with our team captains [...] we all agree this is what it’s going to take this week” (the Young Gun)
	Teaching life skills	Coaches use their respective sport as a platform to teach important life skills and life lessons to their student athletes	“we coach them for 3 months in football, but the rest of the year I’m there for them, I coach them on a little bit on football but a lot about life” (the General)

**Frequent Communication**

Coaches were found to communicate their vision daily through different strategies, through use of formal and informal communication strategies. Formal communication refers to documents, prepared scripts and other tools to convey a standard message to all team members.

Informal communication refers to connecting certain elements of the vision to specific moments and experiences the team encounters.

### ***Formal Communication***

Coaches formally communicate their vision and plan to achieve the vision. Notably, the Shepherd, the Teacher, and the Builder were found to create a detailed plan, which outlines their respective vision, values, and overall expected culture of the team. Further, Coaches present these plans to respective student-athletes and assistant coaches frequently before the start of the in-game season. For instance, the Shepherd, who disclosed how he formally presents his plan every day during the 14-day training camp explained that he will take up to 30 minutes per day to present the plan to all team members through power point, stating “like, if they were having class, you know, usually it’s a 14-day training camp, so this power point is presented on them on 14 days.” He added that “it allows us to reinforce throughout training camp [...] it’s like putting all that continuously in their face, until they start using those words.” Similarly, the Teacher noted how he communicates his ‘standard of performance’ to his student-athletes every day during the 14-day training camp. He stated that “even though some have heard the message before, like I said, it’s got to get to the point where everyone believes in it and can preach the same thing.”

The Builder shared how he created a team handbook for all student-athletes and assistant coaches that encapsulated all the important information about the football program. He stated that every student-athlete gets a copy, including incoming recruits before they arrive on campus, such that every student-athlete is “on the same page” when it comes to team expectations and standards. The Builder noted how he presents the material in the handbook during three key

moments in the calendar year, including: recruitment visits to potentially incoming student-athletes, the beginning of training camp, and the beginning of the off-season program.

### *Hierarchy of communication*

Coaches were found to both construct and depend upon a hierarchy of leadership to disseminate and communicate their vision. Essentially, the head coach requires all other leaders on the team to communicate the vision using the same language and messaging for student-athletes to buy-into the vision. To achieve this, coaches were found that they establish a hierarchy of leaders, based on the structure of the team. In football, the team structure and hierarchy are well established and standardized across teams, based upon the high degree of specialization of the sport (See Appendix D). The head coach represents the top leader, and is followed by the offensive, defensive and special-teams coordinators, followed by positional coaches, and then by student-athlete team captains. Head coaches demand that coordinators and position coaches share the same messaging and language so that players can experience unity and direction on the team. Furthermore, coaches create player leadership groups composed of team leaders, respected team veterans and other notable athletes on the team. Some leadership groups are hand selected by the coaching staff, others are democratically elected by the players. Either way, these leadership groups are essential for the creation and dissemination of messaging throughout the team.

Every coach spoke about the crucial importance of using a hierarchy of communication to disseminate information to their respective student-athletes. As the head coach works directly with assistant coaches in delivering the program, assistant coaches' alignment to the vision's messaging is crucial. The Shepherd stated that "if the assistant coaches don't buy in then we're doomed." Similarly, the Motivator shared that "the assistant coaches are first, I always tell them

‘you’re the big brothers’ so they’ve got to be bought in.” Each coach discussed the use of a leadership group as a key element of their ability to lead the team. The Motivator mentioned that the leadership group has their “finger on the pulse of the team, they’re [the] window into the team.” The Young Gun stated he includes his leadership group when communicating important decisions to his student-athletes, stating that through his experience, a higher level of buy-in occurs when decisions appear to come from multiple leaders on the team versus coming only from the head-coach. He said “it makes even you know that 99<sup>th</sup> player on the roster think ‘you know what, it’s not just Coach, it’s guys I look up to on the team and the other coaches, everyone’s agreeing with this’.”

These coaches discussed a variety of strategies that contributed to selecting members of student-athlete leadership groups. Both the Shepherd and the Motivator shared their respective leadership groups of student-athletes are democratically elected on the team by student-athletes themselves. The Teacher shared that these student-athletes are hand-picked and “have to have some of the characteristics that you believe in [...] sometimes it’s got to be people that are well respected [...] people that have their own lives in better shape than maybe others.” Further, the Comedian detailed that he named his leadership group ‘executive officers’ and that “you don’t want two of the same, everyone in the group is different [...] we picked different positions for nearly everybody [...] so we have somebody kind of responsible for almost every area of our team.” Additionally, he shared that he selects players who are both talented on the field of play and have the ability to teach and lead others. The Innovator explained that her leadership group changes yearly and the method of selecting the leadership group changes, based on team needs and the type of leaders on the team. She stated that her current leadership group was “selected based on their on-field rugby abilities.”

### ***Informal communication***

Coaches discussed their use of informal communication in connecting the vision and team culture to various moments or events in the team environment was crucial in generating buy-in with team-members. For example, the Builder noted his use of themes and symbols to connect seemingly random moments occurring during the course of a season to his vision. He stated that at the beginning of the season, he will create a theme of the year, such as “empty the tank” where “we have a gas tank [...] each week we would put a word on that tank that symbolizes where we’re going that week and quite often those are the same words that are part of our core values, our vision.” The Shepherd spoke to how he consciously makes the effort to connect circumstances to elements of his vision. For example, he said that “days where we’re working more on an assignment-based day, it’s going to be ‘do your job’ that you’re going to keep hearing.” The Motivator explicitly stated that most of his communication occurs through informal means; or, as he stated, “corridor conversations” because “it’s not realistic for me to always be like ‘guys let’s get together in a room and sit down.’”

### ***One-to-one communication***

All coaches noted that one-to-one communications was a key strategy to project their vision and generate engagement and buy-in from student-athletes. For instance, the Innovator mentioned how she makes a point to have one-on-one connections with all her student-athletes on a regular basis, sharing that she uses a Microsoft Word document to track each time she has a one-to-one connection with a student-athlete so she can remain accountable to her desire of building and maintaining strong relationships with student-athletes. Additionally, when she shared this strategy with her senior student-athletes, they took it upon themselves to recreate this strategy to further build and maintain strong one-to-one relationships with their teammates.

The General spoke about the importance of building trust and credibility with all student-athletes and the significant effort, integrity and time for those relationships to be created. He shared

it happens one player at a time, one moment at a time, it happens when you know something happens with that individual player and he needs your help for something, and it's about sitting down with him and having talks [...], but those things happen and you build trust with them, that happens over long periods of time.

All coaches discussed how their use of one-to-one conversations is a way to speak with student-athletes who appear to be straying from the program or who are not aligning well to the vision. All coaches further mentioned taking the time to understand the underlying reasons why any student-athlete may be straying from the vision through such individually based, private conversations. The Motivator said he purposefully “think[s] about them as a person, not as a rugby player,” such that he will “[reach] out for a conversation. The first part would be to find out the why, why are you acting this way? Why does it seem like you're not into it?” The Young Gun was found to take this strategy a step further, as he focuses on transforming the student-athlete's perspective, stating that “the thing I always try to do is put myself in the other person's shoes and I ask them to do the same,” and one of the tactics he uses if a student-athlete has really gone awry is “to say okay ‘you're standing tomorrow at 4pm in front of the whole team, what would you say?’” He added this makes the student-athlete think “‘it's not just about me, you know it's about the whole program and the whole team,’ so putting yourself in someone else's shoes usually makes you take a step back and realize okay there's a big picture here,” such that the ‘big picture’ is a representation of the team vision.

Notably, the Comedian and the Innovator discussed the importance of honouring the feelings of the student-athlete, after taking the time to understand their perspective through one-to-one conversations. The Innovator said that “sometimes letting them go is the best decision for the kid and the best decision for the program, they won’t leave if this is right for them.”

Additionally, the Comedian shared an anecdote about one student athlete who was falling out of love with rugby and so he offered her the opportunity to take a few months off to be away from the sport as a strategy to gauge her desire to be involved in the team, stating that “sometimes that’s what you need, you need a mental release.”

Ultimately, coaches discussed the importance of knowing the individual student-athlete and giving them what they need, which can only be determined through building one-to-one relationships between the coach and the student-athlete. The Professional shared “some people I know might need kind of a slap in the face, the stern talking to,” adding that “hopefully over the course of a couple years I get to know them and I can do that,” whereas “some players [...] you’ve got to reach out to them in a different way.” The Comedian shared similar feelings when he stated “it goes back to reading the person, understanding what they’re like, if they’re a person that needs a kick up the ass, then they’re a person that needs a kick up the ass.”

### **Assigning tasks and standards**

Coaches discussed how they assign measurable tasks and standards of behaviour in order to both communicate and generate student-athlete engagement and buy-in to the vision. For example, the Builder was found to require all team members avoid wearing any red coloured clothing during the in-game season, as most of their opponents have the colour red within their uniform design, stating that the goal was to “create something where our players had [...] a sense of belonging [...] so they were not allowed to wear red in the facility, during our season, that was

the commitment you have to make when you play for us.” The Builder also shared while it was originally supposed to be a ‘fun’ element of being on the team, student-athletes began to take it very seriously such that they wouldn’t use red plates and cups in the dining hall. Additionally, he shared he was able to monitor student-athlete engagement and dedication to the team based on how they responded to this particular task. He was even able to predict which student athlete would choose to leave the team through their engagement with this assigned task.

The Comedian discussed how singing is an important, general element of the rugby culture and as such, he would make student-athletes sing during road trips or other team events. He used this strategy to get student-athletes to “loosen up and [be] a bit more themselves” to bond together and deepen the strength of the team culture. Over time, he observed his student-athletes assumed this task on their own, starting to sing as a group without his initiation.

The Teacher was found to use academic standards as a way of measuring student-athlete buy-in. He set a high standard for every member of the team where players with a grade point average (GPA) of lower than 80% was mandated to attend six hours of study hall per week. He discussed that the team’s overall GPA increased by 5% during his first year as head coach, and no student-athletes were in academic probation or at risk of failing their classes. He assumed the responsibility of leading study hall because “anytime the head coach is involved, now it’s really important.” He shared he would take the time to teach his student-athletes during study hall from his belief that for them to succeed academically, they must be taught proper learning, writing, and study strategies. He also noted how he involved Graduate students from different faculties as tutors for student-athletes as another measure to support their academic success.

## **Empowerment**

These coaches were found to empower their student-athletes as an actionable strategy to communicate and enact their vision. Coaches discussed how they involve student-athletes in the creation and enactment of the organizational vision. Coaches also focused on teaching life skills such as leadership, accountability and integrity as ways to support the players buy-in and to show the coach's focus on players' well-being.

### ***Student-Athlete involvement***

Some coaches discussed how they involve their student-athletes in creating the team vision. This finding was more common among rugby head coach participants and less common among football coaches. The Comedian shared he involved his players in vision creation because "it's easy when they've created it, like that saves half the battle of me trying to get the ideals, the vision across." Similarly, the Innovator allowed her leadership group to develop the team vision of "we will become the greatest U SPORT program in the country" while not being present at the meeting. She noted her absence is an indication of the trust she put in her student-athletes and her desire to empower them to be their best. The Supporter discussed how he prioritizes student-athlete involvement in creating and sustaining team culture as well as vision, stating that "I want you to get engaged in this process because the more you're into this, the more you're going to get out of it." These coaches involved their student-athletes to increase engagement and also to ensure all team members are aligned with the vision.

### ***Teaching life skills***

These coaches were found to behave above and beyond the expected standard of just coaching the sport, as they were also found to serve as life coaches for these student-athletes. Given that both the football and rugby seasons occur between September and November of any

given year, coaches engage with student-athletes through the respective sport for three to four months through any calendar year. During the remaining months, coaches were found to engage in teaching life lessons to student-athletes. The General explicitly discussed this dynamic, stating “we coach them for three months in football, but then the rest of the year I’m there for them, I coach them on a little bit on football but a lot about life” and “at the end of the day what are trying to do? We’re trying to teach them life lessons about things that are going to make them good people.”

The Innovator formalized her strategy to develop her student-athletes and teach them life skills through a ‘leadership-development and character-building program.’ This program was found to expose student-athletes to leadership principles and theories through books, articles, TED talks, podcasts, and guest speakers. This program is geared towards teaching all the student-athletes leadership skills, reflection skills, and exposing them to opportunities outside of the sport. The Teacher spoke to having a mandatory year-round study hall for student-athletes with an academic average of lower than 80%. He shared that “ultimately, we need to make sure our student-athletes have the best marks moving forward because they’re going to need additional schooling, and it can’t just be about the football.”

### **RQ3: Alignment Between Beliefs, Behaviours and Vision**

Participating coaches discussed different ways they ensured, for themselves, that their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project and communicate. Two main themes and practices emerged from the research data, including: first, coaches’ role-modeled expected behaviour among student-athletes; and second, coaches identified themselves as life-long learners.

**Table 7***Emerging themes relating from RQ3*

<b>Major Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	<b>Supporting Quote</b>
Role-modeling	Authenticity	Coaches discussed the critical importance of being authentic as a head coach	“I would say 100% you’ve got to be yourself [...] you can’t try and act like somebody else, people are going to find that out” (the Comedian)
	Living the vision	Coaches discussed how they act as role-models of the vision for their student-athletes	“like I’m living what I’m asking them to do, and they would see me all the time [...] I’m not doing anything less than I ask of them” (the Professional)
	Accountability and Integrity	Coaches discussed how they act as role-models of the vision for their student-athletes	“do things the right way and do what you say you’re going to do” (the Motivator)
Life-long learning	Self-reflection	Coaches discussed self-reflection as a critical part of their strategies to ensure they are consistently aligned with the vision they project	“I keep a very consistent journal, just after every session I’ve done, [...] like what’s the best coach I could be look like?” (the Supporter)
	Self-directed learning	All Coaches all discussed purposefully seeking learning opportunities through formal or informal formats	“[I’m] always trying to improve and find new ideas” (the Young Gun)

### **Role-Modeling**

Coaches’ identified role-modeling behaviour as an important strategy to enroll student-athletes to buy-in to the vision. The General stated, “I say that’s who we are, we have to live it, we have to teach it, we have to role model it, we have to positively reinforce it.” On a broad scale, such role-modeling occurs seamlessly for these coaches as they created visions and plans closely aligned to who they are as individuals.

### ***Authenticity***

One of the most frequently emerging sub-themes within the concept of role-modeling from this study was found to be the importance coaches place on authenticity, as it relates to creating and enacting a vision. The General directly referred to authenticity when stating “at the end of the day, you just have to be yourself, you’ve got to decide what your vision is.” In his experience, he shared that what’s most important is to “have fun, [...] if it’s just drudgery and

work and we don't enjoy it, no matter what, we're not going to keep kids playing, you got to have fun." Additionally, he shared "you've got to enjoy this whole process and find time in this work ethic to practice that, so you enjoy being together, so be who you are, continue to grow." Similarly, The Comedian shared authenticity is essential, stating "I would say 100% you've got to be yourself, [...] like you can't try and act like somebody else, [...] people are going to find that out really-really quick."

The Shepherd discussed how he is authentic and highly confident in himself while being interviewed for the position of football head coach, using a metaphor when telling the hiring committee, he is "opening a restaurant with one recipe, this is my spaghetti sauce, this is what I believe, a how you win food bowl [...] I believe in it, there's nothing else on the menu." He shared his vision and the way in which he leads his team is directly tied to who he is as an individual, and that he will only serve his "spaghetti sauce" as the coach of this team. Additionally, The Professional discussed that his vision of instilling a culture of professionalism is correlated to who he is as a person, sharing "I'm living what I'm asking them to do, [...] my life is in front of them all the time, [...] and they know the efforts I'm making and I'm not doing anything less than I ask of them." He provided examples of how he takes time out of his busy day to visit student-athletes in the gym and to organize logistical aspects of a Canadian university varsity team. He ultimately believed that to successfully instill a culture of professionalism, he must behave professionally.

The Young Gun expressed how his coaching and leadership strategies are closely aligned with who he is as a person. He shared that "what you don't want to be seen as a coach is fake," adding that he purposefully presents himself as a "walking billboard" for his university football team and also engages in behaviours that represent his way of life. The Motivator shared that

when it comes to matters of commitment and accountability, he is “pretty black and white [...] I think that’s very much with my personality, [...] if I feel like somebody isn’t putting in the effort, then I’m not going to match that effort and give more of mine.”

The Innovator shared her belief that “great leadership means creating other leaders.” From this belief, she continuously finds opportunities to help student-athletes develop their leadership abilities. She expanded on her philosophy, sharing she constantly changes her coaching methods, on and off the field from year to year and from moment to moment. She emphasized that her innovative mindset extends past the sport itself, where “I’ll change, you know obviously what book we’re reading, I’ll change training camp plans based on what I think the team needs.” The Innovator stated that change is an opportunity for growth, from her belief that innovation is a key to success in sport and coaches who don’t innovate will fall behind. As a demonstration of her belief in the value of constant innovation, she noted how she adapts coaching methods regularly through several initiatives, including: creating and offering an ever evolving ‘leadership-development and character-education’ program to different cohorts on her team; adapting her approach to recruiting based on the generational traits of the student-athletes; and responding to social justice initiatives such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and to issues brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Living the vision*

The Professional spoke to how he is “living what I’m asking them to do” through his behaviour at the university. As he wants to instill a sense of professionalism in student-athletes, he acts in ways he wants student-athletes to act. The Young Gun provided the example that “it’s not like I’m up at 6am when our guys have a team lift, I’m up at that time every day,” adding that “it’s not uncommon for them to see an email from me on a Saturday at 5:30am just to let

everyone know [...] this is a way of life’.” Similarly, the Supporter shared he active models behaviours he wants to see from student-athletes by “doing everything that you ask them to do, and try to do that and a little bit more,” adding that role-modeling also keeps him accountable to his own personal development as a coach “because it just feels disingenuous to stand up there and ask that of them before I do it.” The Teacher explained that family is his most important value; and as such, he continuously creates a family environment on this team. He shared that “just knowing how important the family aspect is, the fact that it’s okay to say I love you, being able to care for people.” Similarly, the Shepherd shared that “I want to act out of love, [...] instead of yelling at the kid, I’m going to say no, I’m going to teach him [...] I’m going to control my controllable and I’m going to teach him.”

### ***Accountability and Integrity***

Accountability and integrity emerged as sub-themes in this study. All coaches mentioned either accountability, integrity and credibility are crucial behaviours and values in coaching large team sports. The Teacher shared that “do what you say you’re going to do, you have to follow through and that to me is the most important leadership value.” Similarly, the Motivator shared that he defines integrity with his team in that “you do things the right way and you what you say you’re going to do.” The General explained that integrity is critical as “you can’t say one thing and do another, [...] it’s about being a good role model for them and making sure you have those same things.” The General also recognized the importance of integrity in creating a strong relationship between himself and players, feeling that players can recognize a lack of integrity and may view that as disingenuous.

Regarding accountability, the Innovator stated it is her top value such that “if you ask any athlete on my team, probably any athlete I’ve ever coached, they’ll say you’ll be held

accountable on this team [...] you are what you do, not what you say you will do.” Similarly, the Comedian shared that accountability was key as “if you say you’re going to do something, then you’re going to do it [...] I think you should be doing that without having to say that.” The Young Gun expressed that he wants to ensure that as the head coach he is visibly involved with everything in the program, “we’re not just making expectations that only the players have to live by [...] I want them to think ‘okay, we’re all in this together.’”

### **Life-long learning**

Coaches were found to ensure their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project or communicate by engaging in different forms of learning, including self-reflection, self-directed learning, mentorship and seeking feedback from others. For example, the Young Gun shared that “just always living with the mindset of knowing that you don’t know it all” was a central part of his coaching philosophy. Similarly, the Builder stated “the key is the mindset, the more you get involved with things, [...] the more you realize you don’t know as much as you should, having that openness is the most important thing to learning, you’re always a life-long learner.” The Shepherd listed ‘wisdom’ as one of his core values, defining it as “learning, moving forward, always being a student.” The Professional expressed he is “still a student basically, so any opportunity I’ve got to read, to watch online, to go to workshops, things like that, I will jump on.” The Teacher discussed how his father had inspired his own philosophy on growth and learning, stating his father “always preached ‘just when you think you’ve arrived or made it, disaster is right around the corner’ [...] as soon as you get comfortable, that’s when things are going to get tough, you always have to be learning and do the best.”

### ***Self-Reflection***

Coaches described ways in which they engage in self-reflection as a strategy for self-development. Specifically, the Motivator expressed the structure of the rugby game schedule allowed him to engage in self-reflection regularly, given the team plays “one game a week, so it’s like every week there’s a hard evaluation, re-evaluation, re-focus, how can we better attack this how can we better develop.” Similarly, the Supporter spoke to regularly practicing self-reflection, stating “I keep a very consistent journal, making sure I go through and think, what are the moments I really liked? What are some things I would do differently? [...] what’s the best coach I could be look like?”

Generally, these coaches engaged in either journaling or asking themselves and reflecting on important questions and experiences. The Professional highly endorsed critical self-reflection as an effective strategy for him to consistently improve and align his behaviours and beliefs to the vision, stating that as coach, he carried a notebook and “if you have that notebook in your back pocket and you crack it out and you write down your thoughts [...] sometimes it’s just the act of articulating those ideas [...] I always find really-really constructive.”

### ***Self-directed learning***

These coaches all engage in self-directed learning practices that do not require an external presence to guide them in their learning and development. For example, the Shepherd noted he regularly seeks knowledge through various sources, such as reaching out to other more experienced U SPORTS football coaches, engaging in regular Bible studies, and “anytime I can read or watch something that’s going to help me better lead my team, or become a better leader myself I will watch it.” Similarly, the Builder spoke to the benefits of participating and creating learning opportunities, saying that “you do clinics in the off-season [...] and you’re looking for

those one or two nuggets each time you go, that just keep adding to sort of your overall pile of information.” The Motivator stated he frequently engages in independent study, sharing that if there is something he would ever like to learn about “[I] seek out the knowledge, seek out the research from people who have done it [...] study and go to workshops.”

The Comedian explained that he engages in very informal kinds of self-directed learning, which are more conversationally based. He shared that he takes the time to ask other individuals questions; to those people he perceives are ‘successful’ to learn more about their different strategies and experiences. He noted he does not limit himself to individuals in rugby; rather, he seeks knowledge from anyone he considers could add value to him. He shared “that would be the biggest way I try to develop, just talk to as many people as I can, especially with coaches, asking as many questions as possible that might directly link to what I’m trying to do.” Similarly, the Teacher explained how he is a big proponent of the National Coaching Certificate Program (NCCP), especially the multi-sport modules from which he has learned from coaches of other sports. He shared he is a big believer in that he can learn a lot from many different people and from many different areas of life and sport, stating “I remember taking one with the trampoline coach from the Olympics, [...] yes it’s not the same technical aspects, but there’s so many nuggets and pieces of information to do things differently.”

The General, with over 2 decades of head coaching experience, discussed how he still continuously strives to improve himself as an individual, sharing that he constantly asks himself “how can I be a better technical football coach? How can I be a better organization and administrative football coach? [...] and then you know the other things, the personal things.” He primarily learns through reading (i.e., military history books in particular), observing other coaches and watching football film. Furthermore, the Young Gun shared how his self-directed

learning practices are fueled by his competitive drive, sharing that “always trying to improve and find new ideas, because you know your competition is finding new ideas, and the other thing is just trying to stay up and in tune with the times.” Similarly, the Innovator shared her belief that innovation is a key to success in sport, noting “if you’re not ahead and changing than you’re falling behind in sport [...] how can you expect to have success in sport.”

Notably, the Innovator chooses to focus her self-directed learning outside of the sport, stating that “I spend 10% of my day on rugby, I haven’t watched a rugby game in four months.” She noted a potential gender difference related to coaching strategies, where while her male counterparts in U SPORTS watch a lot of game film, they are still not able to defeat her team in important games. She stated that “guys watch so much video and [they’re] like ‘fuck [university name] is so young, we’re fucked’ I was like ‘yeah you are, because like, you’re spending time doing rugby, it’s not about rugby’.”

### **Summary of the Findings**

While study participants shared that they believed to possess a vision for their respective teams, only two participants were found to possess a clear vision and articulate a clear vision statement, according to the literature on vision (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), notably that vision encapsulates a coach’s full perspective of the program (Vallée & Bloom, 2016) and that a leader’s vision represents symbolic and idyllic statements for the future condition of a team and is vital element of team culture (Schroeder, 2010), and the way in which the coaches discussed their vision and vision statement during the semi-structured interviews. The remaining eight participants were found to possess varying degrees of clarity related to their vision and vision statements. Participants’ visions for their respective teams originated through a

combination of three main sources, including: first, maturation and experiencing failure over time; second, through a medley of experiences and influences; and third, through an alignment to one's personal values and leadership style. The two major emerging elements that comprise participants' visions were found to include: first, the holistic development of the student athletes through individual growth, as well as on- and off- the field experiences; and second, building a sustainable culture.

Participants discussed three main actionable processes in which they engage to effectively project and communicate their vision, including: first, frequent communication through formal, informal and one-to-one methods and through using a hierarchy of communication; second, they assign tasks and standards to student athletes to monitor their level of buy-in to the vision; and third, they empower student-athletes by involving them in decision making and by teaching them life skills. Lastly, participants were found that they ensure their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project and communicate through two primary methods, including: first, role-modelling desired behaviours through being authentic, living the vision and demonstrating high integrity and accountability; and second, identifying as life-long learners such that they regularly engage in self-reflection and self-directed learning practices. In the following chapter, a discussion related to the value of these findings and their relevance to the literature based on vision, visionary leadership and effective sport coaching is provided.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, findings gleaned from participants' qualitative data and described in the previous chapter are synthesized and discussed within four sections. In the first section, the degree to which these coaches have a vision is discussed, where in the second section, the pragmatic value of the identified research findings, as they relate to the research questions are considered. In the third section, the findings are connected to the relevant theoretical concepts, including vision (Collins & Porras, 1996; Conger, 1989; Din et al., 2015; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), visionary leadership (Gomes et al., 2006; Sashkin, 1988; Schwahn & Spady, 1998; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989) and effective sport coaching (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2014; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Martens, 1987; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). In the fourth section, a discussion on important takeaways of this research study concludes this chapter.

#### **Vision and Visionary Leadership**

As previously mentioned, both the Innovator and the Builder were found to have developed and effectively communicated a clear and concise vision statement. Although both head coaches have achieved on-field success, they were also found to have developed plans and programs within their team to enact their respective visions that move beyond a winning percentage. As the Builder's vision is "to provide a championship experience to all of our players, one that helps them reach their full athletic and academic potential," he mentioned how he provides student-athletes with all the elements he believes represent a championship experience including strength and conditioning, academic support, mental health support, nutritional support and leadership development. To secure the necessary resources and funds to

provide such elements, he works closely with the university's administration, alumni donors, and team sponsors.

As the Innovator's vision is "we will become the greatest U SPORTS program in the country," she further connected her enactment of this vision mainly through the delivery of her 'leadership-development and character-education' program. The Innovator discussed that to her, becoming the greatest U SPORTS program "isn't about rugby" and so she puts the majority of her attention towards developing her student-athletes leadership and life skills. To these two coaches, the successful enactment of their vision is more about emphasizing the off-field experiences as being core elements of their program than achieving on-field success through a high winning percentage. These coaches viewed on-field success as an outcome of an effective team culture and vision versus a driving team goal.

The Shepherd, the Teacher, and the Comedian all clearly expressed the essence of their vision, but they lacked articulating a clear and concise vision statement. These coaches mentioned they are working towards developing a vision statement that effectively encapsulates the vision for their program, however they had not achieved this goal at the time of their respective interviews. As a lengthy period of time is needed to enact a vision (Vallée & Bloom, 2016), it is possible that these coaches are in fact enacting a vision; however, these coaches may be lacking the necessary required knowledge to properly articulate a vision and vision statement, but are leading their team through a conceived vision, nonetheless. Giving these coaches more time and further research on these individuals may be needed to understand if they are or are not truly enacting a vision.

Lastly, when they were asked questions about vision or their vision statement, the General, the Young Gun, the Professional, the Supporter and the Motivator were found to both

lack clarity in articulating a vision statement and articulating the essence to their vision. When asked, these coaches instead discussed their guiding coaching philosophy and their desired team culture (Schein, 2004). Although these coaches discussed having vision, these coaches may have misconceptions about vision and the visioning process given their responses did not align with the literature on concepts about vision or visionary leadership. As such, it may be possible that these coaches are enacting a vision but lack the knowledge or capacity to articulate the process. Again, further research on these individuals may be needed to understand if they are or are not truly enacting a vision.

Interestingly, the two most successful head coaches in this study according to overall win percentages, the Innovator (85%) and the General (86%), were found to hold contrasting perspectives on vision. Although both coaches were found to possess similarities (i.e., they both emphasized the importance of holistically developing their student-athletes and achieving on-field success is not their priority), the Innovator was found to possess a clear vision and had clearly articulated a vision statement, whereas the General was found to neither possess a clear vision nor had clearly articulated such a statement. Moreover, the Innovator herself stated “you have to have a clear vision,” whereas the General mentioned his belief that a vision or a vision statement is not necessary to achieve team success.

Rather, the General believed that creating a team culture of hard work and respect were more important elements towards achieving both on-field and off-field success. He mentioned that he “[doesn’t] care about some mythical season next year, or 2 years or 4 years down the road” and “leadership drives culture and culture drives [...] the results,” such that the role of the leader is to “set what your culture is and get your people to follow it.” The General’s opposing perspectives to both the Innovator’s beliefs and to the literature on vision add a worthy

contribution to understanding if vision is in fact a necessary element to team success, which would indeed contradict the line of research in this area (Caldwell, 2019; Collins & Porras, 1996; Conger, 1989; Fullan, 2012; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sashkin, 1988; Schein, 2004; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée, 2002; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukl, 2013). As such, more research on how successful coaches engage with the process of conceiving, developing and enacting a vision may be necessary to better understand the importance of vision towards achieving success.

### ***Visionary Leadership***

According to Westley and Mintzberg's (1989), visionary leadership is defined as leaders who create a vision, communicate the vision and empower others to 'own' the vision for themselves. As well, Sashkin's (1988) asserted that a leader's visionary leadership capacity includes first, personality prerequisites (McClelland, 1975) (e.g., desire for socialized power) and cognitive skills (e.g., expressing, explaining, extending and expanding the vision); second, the ability to include key content dimensions to the vision; and third, the ability to articulate the vision through personal, strategic and tactical strategies. In the current research, the Innovator was the sole participant to be identified as a visionary leader, according to these theoretical criteria. For example, the Innovator demonstrated her desire to seek socialized power by focusing significant time as a head coach to empower her student athletes, mainly through the delivery of her 'leadership-development and character-education' program.

The Innovator initially included student-athlete leaders in this program but expanded the program over time to include all student-athletes. Additionally, from an analysis of data, the Innovator was found to capably express, explain, extend and expand the vision of "becoming the greatest U SPORTS program in the country" by exposing student athletes to development work and providing them with a platform to becoming leaders on the team and in their community.

Additionally, the Innovator discussed her ability to articulate the vision through an amalgam of personal actions, including focusing her attention, communicating personally, demonstrating trustworthiness, displaying respect and taking risk (Bennis, 1984; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Sashkin, 1988).

While all head coaches discussed how they seek to empower student-athletes to ‘own’ the vision for themselves and discussed the cognitive skills they use to communicate the vision, only the Innovator met the criteria of visionary leadership, as outlined by Sashkin (1988). Although the majority of the head coaches were found to lack a clear and concise vision and did not articulate a vision statement, it may be possible that while these coaches are enacting a vision, they simply lack the knowledge and awareness to clearly articulate their engagement in the visioning process.

### **Pragmatic Value of the Research Findings in Relation to the Research Questions**

In this section, the researcher discusses the pragmatic value of notable findings outlined in the previous chapter, according to each of the three research questions (i.e., elements comprising visions of Canadian university large team sport head coaches (RQ#1); actionable processes employed by Canadian university large team sport head coaches (RQ#2); and the alignment between beliefs, behaviours and vision (RQ#3)).

#### **RQ1: Elements comprising visions of Canadian university Large Team Sport Head Coach**

The theme of student-athletes’ holistic development, through both on- and off- field experiences and focusing on individual’s growth, emerged as a key element comprising the visions of Canadian university large team sport head coaches. Contrary to an a priori assumption that these coaches have visions to win the National Championship, these coaches were found to be primarily focused on developing successful human beings. As the Builder stated “it has

nothing to do with winning or losing, it's providing a championship experience, [...] one that you feel like you have an opportunity to grow in, one that you feel where you're being supported in."

Conger (1989) stated that a leader's vision requires a deep understanding of the environment's current reality and of potential external future threats to this reality. Similarly, Côté and Gilbert (2009) noted that contextual grounding is necessary for a better understanding of the meaning behind leadership behaviours. Specifically, the context in which these coaches operate must be considered when understanding why their respective visions generally orient more towards the holistic development of student-athletes versus winning a national championship. As the Teacher noted "all the universities are at different areas, and there are some that have bigger advantages than others [...] we're not talking apples to apples with every place." Here, the Teacher's perspective illuminates the importance of having a vision that is appropriate for the team's context; where specifically, The Teacher explained that as his team does not have access to as many financial resources and given the most sought-after recruits often choose to attend other universities, it is difficult to compete on the field with other universities. Thus, he created a vision aimed at improving his current student-athletes' lives and providing them with an experience meant to support them well after their time as student-athletes.

Understanding the context of the generation of student-athletes may be important in creating and enacting a vision as a Canadian university large team sport head coach. In accord with Armstrong's (2001) notion that effective coaches are "skilled at choosing the best leadership style for their sport and their individual athletes" (p. 44), the Innovator expressed that when she began coaching, her communication strategy was "just about hammer-hammer-

hammer, drive-drive-drive, win-win-win.” As she began to notice the differences in new student-athletes compared to previous cohorts, she realized that “it’s not working, it’s got to change, they’re going to keep coming this way, so I really wanted adjustments.” The Innovator thus focused on changing her coaching strategies to achieve her vision, while staying true to her core values as a head coach.

Here, the Innovator is referring Generation Z (i.e., individuals born approximately between 1995-2010) as the post-millennial cohort of student-athletes entering her program (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Generation Z represents the most diverse generation yet (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), and the generation most influenced by technology throughout their development (Talmon, 2019). Further, individuals in Generation Z are considered to have a more pragmatic view of the world, compared to previous generations (Talmon, 2019). In a study conducted by Seemiller and Grace (2016), individuals from Generation Z self-described themselves as loyal, thoughtful, compassionate, open-minded and responsible. Francis and Hoefel (2018) have noted that Generation Z individuals are grounded in one common element: the search for truth, both in personal and communal form.

According to Francis and Hoefel (2018) Generation Z individuals highly value individual expression, they avoid labels, they are likely to mobilize themselves for a variety of causes, they believe in the efficacy of dialogue to solve conflicts and improve the world, and they make decisions and relate to institutions in a highly analytical and pragmatic way. Strong (2016) noted however, that individuals in Generation Z may also suffer more from the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and according to Talmon (2019), Generation Z individuals may have a “reduced ability to form conceptual connections and greater difficulty distinguishing fact from opinion online” (p. 10). Mohr and Mohr (2017) discussed how although individuals in Generation Z identify as

being responsible, open-minded, thoughtful, loyal, entrepreneurial, and compassionate, they struggle with being spontaneous, focused, competitiveness, and creativity.

The Innovator discussed how she adapted her vision and coaching strategies to be primarily focused on developing the leadership skills of her student-athletes. As she recognized the positive and challenging traits of Generation Z student-athletes, she began to refocus her efforts on providing her student-athletes with a meaningful experience anchored in self-development. The Innovator recognized that a Canadian university sport context is not about the sport itself, but about the individual's experience of growth.

In addition to having a vision of holistically developing their student-athletes, head coaches discussed the development of a sustainable and attractive culture within their team by instilling shared values and standards of performance as part of their visions. As noted by Martens (1987), the head coach is the individual who creates a team culture. For example, the General stated that although he doesn't have a clear vision or vision statement, he strives towards creating "a culture of hard work and respect," such that the student-athletes on his team develop the traits and skills that will translate to their lives outside of football. While Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) stated that creating a vision can be considered as an exercise of "seeing into the future" (p. 234), the General's focuses on creating and sustaining a culture that is grounded in the present and enacted through his values. He stated that "I just want to be better today, and I want our players to get better tomorrow, [...] I don't care about what is going to happen down the road." Perceiving vision as based in the present as opposed to the future is an interesting finding, potentially illuminating a theoretical gap in fully understanding the timeframe necessary to conceive, develop and enact a vision.

Additionally, the Professional also emphasized he desired to create a culture of professionalism among his team, such that student-athletes recognized that they had access to many amenities not available in club rugby or provincial rugby (i.e., regular practices, film sessions, athletic therapy, nutritionists). From such access, he experienced that his student-athletes would thus take their roles of more seriously on- and off- the field of play. For example, student-athletes would prioritize rest and nutrition because of their access and exposure to athletic trainers and nutritionists. Moreover, the Motivator spoke about creating a “top-end, respectable, competitive” team culture in which his student-athletes would enjoy their experience and reach their potential as rugby players. He stated that he is striving towards creating a team culture that would be attractive to new recruits.

The two notable themes or elements of the development of individuals and culture demonstrated that coaching in large team sports is about more than achieving on-field success (e.g., winning games, championships, medals). These coaches illustrated that creating a student-athlete experience focused on development is a far more important aspect of their respective roles as head coaches. Both groups of coaches with significant coaching experience and those newer to the role shared this perspective on development. Coaches discussed their desire to create healthy, happy and empowered human beings as being a priority and a reason for engaging in the demanding role of a head coach.

## **RQ2: Actionable Processes Employed by Canadian University Large Team Sport Head Coaches**

As noted by Bennis (1984), one’s leadership is representative of their capacity to translate vision into reality. The coaches were found to employ three actionable processes through which they communicate and enact their visions into reality, including: first, frequent communication;

second, assigning tasks and standards; and third, empowerment. These actionable processes are next discussed. First, frequent communication through formal, informal, and one-to-one conversation methods were identified as coaches' key actionable processes that allowed them to effectively communicate their respective visions. The coaches discussed formally communicating important information to the entire team such that every individual involved in the team hears the same message. Further, the two other methods of informal and one-to-one communication were found to be potentially more effective methods of communicating the vision than formal methods.

Coaches discussed how they were better able to communicate and relate the vision to their student-athletes through moments of on-the-go informal conversations, thereby both communicating and building trust and rapport with student athletes in this particular process of communication. The Motivator called these moments "corridor conversations," such that they were "very informal, on the fly, as needed." The coaches explained that the informal nature allowed for a more open dialogue to take place, through which they could build relationships with student-athletes and best connect the vision to the immediate situation. Communicating a vision effectively may best occur through moments of authentic informal communication, during which times the coach can develop meaningful relationships with student-athletes.

The General discussed that student-athletes do not follow visions as much as they follow leaders. Specifically, he believed student-athletes are more likely follow a leader they trust; and, if the leader possesses a certain vision, student-athletes are further willing to follow and work to enact that vision from such trust. According to the General, trust is foremost in the relationship and building trusting relationships with his student-athletes supports his ability to lead them towards achieving the team goals, more than having a vision or articulating a vision statement.

The Teacher discussed how to him, building positive trusting relationships with student-athletes can lead a team to on-field success, stating that “if you genuinely care about people then the score will take care of itself.” Similar to the General, the Teacher emphasized that in order to achieve on-field success and generate buy-in from the student-athletes towards the program, the head coach must first create genuine relationships with their individual student-athletes.

Furthermore, coaches discussed relying on a hierarchy of communication on their teams. As the Comedian noted “I get [the vision] reiterated through other people, not just myself [...] after awhile it just falls on deaf ears, so I want to make sure our support staff use the same kind of language.” Additionally, the Young Gun shared that disseminating the information “starts with the coordinators [...] positional coaches [...] then team captains and senior leaders” when discussing the importance of having the coaching staff align with the vision and messaging. If this hierarchy of communication is misaligned, student-athletes risk avoiding buy-in to the overall vision of the program or relating to certain messaging.

This particular finding is valuable, in that it reflects the importance of buy-in from the top level of leadership of the team as it relates to effectively communicating and enacting the vision. The Young Gun emphasized the importance of communicating through a hierarchy of leaders in that “letting [the student-athletes] know that it’s not just me coming up with [the message], others have agreed with this.” For example, “I’ve met with our coordinators, I’ve met with our team captains [...] we all agree this is what it’s going to take this week.” In the Young Gun’s mind, this approach has the potential to make “that 99<sup>th</sup> player on the roster think ‘you know what, it’s not just Coach, it’s guys I look up to on the team and the other coaches, everyone’s agreeing with this.’”

Coaches discussed assigning tasks and standards as strategies to develop and monitor the behaviour they wish to see among all student-athletes. The coaches all discussed how student-athletes will mainly demonstrate their engagement through their behaviour, rather than through their words. The Builder provided a unique example, as he explained that “by giving them tasks you can learn about their commitment level and their buy-in level.” Here, he required his student-athletes to avoid wearing any red coloured clothing during the in-game season, with a purpose to create “something where our players had a loyalty thing, a sense of belonging.” From such belonging, he wanted his student-athletes to understand that they are “a part of a family [...] and so every day we wake up you have to make a decision ‘are you in or are you not?’”

The Motivator, the Young Gun, the Shepherd, the Builder and the Professional commonly shared the example of scheduling early morning, off-season workout sessions for the entire team. The Young Gun discussed that he would personally take attendance at the beginning of the work-out to generate a sense of importance for the workout. He shared that he hopes his presence demonstrates the importance of the task and that “it brings a little bit of extra energy for the players to want to work harder in the gym, knowing that they’re being watched.” In contrast, the Professional mentioned working with the university athletic facilities to organize the time and space of the work-out but not being present at the work out. To the Professional, it was an “opportunity to hold them accountable, if only four guys show up [...] you can get the message out to [the team].” He believed that the lack of an authority figure present forced the student-athletes to develop self-motivation skills, such that they engaged in the workout out of their own volition, not because they were being watched.

These examples of assigning tasks and standards are valuable in that they show how the head coach can monitor student-athletes’ behaviour toward identifying levels of buy-in to the

program and vision. When student-athletes' behaviour do not reflect coaches' expectations, they quickly address issues with these student-athletes. The coaches believed that any issues that emerge as a response to assigned tasks and standards that are further identified as detrimental to the team must be addressed rapidly by team leaders to maintain a healthy environment.

The coaches discussed they believe that empowerment is a necessary actionable process for both holistically developing their student-athletes, as well as building a sustainable culture. One primary method of empowerment discussed by these coaches was the creation of leadership groups comprised of specially selected student-athletes, who act as team leaders throughout both in-game and off-season programming. Coaches either personally select these individuals to be in the leadership group, or they are democratically elected through votes tendered by the entire team. The level of involvement of the leadership groups differed for each team and the level of involvement of the leadership groups differed between the football and rugby teams. For example, the rugby coaches expressed that their leadership groups were more involved in day-to-day decision making as well as in creating the overall direction for the team. Notably, the Comedian and the Innovator commented they allowed their respective leadership groups to create the team vision and mission statements.

The football coaches discussed that their leadership groups were in place to support and enact decisions made by the coaching staff and to disseminate information to remaining student-athletes. The Young Gun discussed that he uses his leadership group to measure the "pulse of the team," such that he can get a sense of any lingering issues, general emotions and overall energy level of the team, without having to meet with every player. The Teacher discussed how his leadership group is "there for support [...] with mental health as prevalent as it is now, we need a support system in place, and we feel our players committee gives it to our players." He discussed

how he specifically selects student-athletes who have more life experience and who are open to support other athletes to his leadership group to create this system of support. Although differences have emerged between how football and rugby head coaches utilize their leadership groups, what is clear among coaches from both sports is that the purpose of the leadership groups is to alleviate pressure from head and assistant coaches and to bridge the gap between the coaching staff and the student-athletes.

The coaches also focused on teaching life skills and disseminating lessons to all student-athletes. As noted by Hodge et al. (2014), within a sporting context, the head coach can be regarded as the most important and influential significant-other in an athlete's experiences. The General stated that "that's the unique thing about coaching university football [...] for three months, I'm coaching football, but for the rest of the year, we're coaching young men." Every coach explained that they emphasize teaching life skills to their student-athletes throughout the course of a season. For example, the Innovator shared that "I really try to create an environment where I empower young women" and the Supporter shared that he "[tries] to care about the students as people before players."

The Supporter additionally shared that he thinks it is "a missed opportunity not to develop them in terms of those professional pieces [...] willingness to contribute ideas [...] taking initiative [...] taking ownership." Similarly, the Professional expressed that "you've got them in a window from when they're 18 to when they're maybe 24," adding that "I think I had an opportunity to have a nice little role in that window in someone's life [...] a little guidance during a critical period." The Teacher expressed that his role as a head coach is ensuring that he is "accountable to [the student-athletes] as well [...] we're asking them to move away from home for four or five years, we have to take care of you, and again, it's not just about football."

These examples demonstrated that coaches believed they have the ability to impact and transform student-athletes' lives by teaching them skills and lessons that will help them in living into their future lives. This finding is important, as it demonstrates that a head coach can see themselves as playing a primary role in the enhancement of student-athletes' lives. More than sport coaches, these individuals see themselves as mentors, guides and teachers of young adults.

### **RQ3: Alignment Between Beliefs, Behaviours and Vision**

Coaches discussed engaging in two main practices to maintain alignment between their beliefs, behaviours and their vision, including: first, acting as role models (i.e., living their projected vision through authentic communication, behaving with integrity and accountability); and second, they engage in life-long learning through self-reflection practices and self-directed learning practices.

First, coaches discussed how they role model the same behaviours they expect from student-athletes by living the vision they are projecting. These coaches discussed demonstrating their work ethic, using appropriate language, and building authentic relationship with student-athletes. Specifically, the General stated “we have to live it, we have to teach it, we have to role model it, we have to positively reinforce it, and nip it in the bud and stop it when it’s wrong [...] they will eventually follow.” These coaches believed that by role-modeling expectations, they lead by their example and thereby clearly establish what they want to see from student-athletes.

Additionally, these coaches emphasized the importance of role-modeling integrity and accountability. For example, the Supporter shared that “doing everything that you ask them to do and try to do that and little bit more; if you’re asking them to be there 15 minutes early, [you should] be there 20 minutes early.” He emphasized that “it just feels disingenuous to stand up there ask that of them before I do it.” The Teacher also shared the importance of role modeling

integrity by stating “it goes back to being the role model, how can I berate players when we have my family, my kids, other kids, in the stands and their listening to that?”

Being authentic as a head coach was discussed as being essential to create trust and demonstrate credibility to student-athletes. Bandura and Kavussanu (2018) found that authentic leaders ‘lead with a purpose’ and prioritize the psychological well-being of followers, which in turn leads to followers’ positive reciprocity and their greater trust for the leader. Coaches discussed how in their experience, student-athletes are able to detect inauthenticity and are less likely to trust a leader or engage in a vision projected by someone who is inauthentic. As such, these coaches strived to demonstrate authenticity by behaving consistently through different circumstances and having a high degree of integrity by ensuring that their actions align with their words. This finding is important, as it emphasizes the importance of role-modeling behaviours conducive to enacting a vision. Additionally, this finding demonstrated that coaches are self-aware of their behaviours and adapt their behaviours based on student-athletes’ responses. These coaches believe that by providing an example themselves, they may influence student-athletes to recreate these same behaviours and beliefs to support the vision’s enactment.

Vallée & Bloom (2016) noted the concept of life-long learning as a key component of building championship cultures. The coaches in this study explicitly discussed this concept as being a core part of who they are as people and as leaders. These coaches all discussed how they are innate life-long learners and have integrated self-reflection and self-directed learning practices into their everyday lives. These coaches engage in workshop participation, watching videos, reading books and articles, and learning from other individuals as means of innovating their coaching strategies.

These coaches discussed that they frequently engage in self-reflection practices primarily through journaling and through conversations with others. The Builder and the Young Gun both discussed how their desire to learn and improve themselves is engrained in their personalities as a “mindset,” where The Builder stated that “the key is the mindset [...] having that openness is the most important thing to learning, you’re always a life long-learner,” and the Young Gun similarly stated “just always living with the mindset of knowing that you don’t know it all.” The Innovator and the Teacher discussed how they avoid comfort and complacency at all costs, where the Teacher shared that a foundational element of his learning mindset is the idea that “just when you think you’ve arrived or made it, disaster is right around the corner” and the Innovator stated that she simply doesn’t “need a reminder, I just get up every day to be better.”

The General discussed how his self-directed learning is about adapting ideas from others to his own context. He stated that “I watch a ton of film and I steal a lot of ideas from a lot of people and then I meld them into mine.” Though he has accrued multiple decades of head coaching experience, he retains the mindset to learn more and innovate his coaching strategies. He shared that “so rarely do we come up with brilliant new ideas, we just borrow from other people, and then make them yours.” This perspective is valuable as it proposes that coaching may not be about generating anything radically new, but rather it is about learning from many different sources, extracting knowledge that can be adapted to another context toward effectiveness. This proposition may need to be tested further with future research to examine how coaching effectiveness is influenced by a coach’s ability to extract and adapt knowledge.

Coaches discussed how the purpose of engaging in constant self-directed learning is to accumulate little pieces of information to continually add to their developed wealth of knowledge. The Builder stated that “you do clinics in the off-season [...] you’re looking for

those one or two nuggets each time you go.” Similarly, the Teacher shared how he purposefully tries to learn from a range of different people, noting “my favourite modules in the NCCP have been multi-sport [...] it’s not the same technical aspects, but there’s so many nuggets and pieces of information to do things differently.” Ultimately, coaches continuously engage in self-directed learning practices in order to continue to grow and improve as head coaches and as individuals.

### **Summary of the Pragmatic Value of the Research Findings**

The themes of the student-athlete’s holistic development, and the development of a sustainable and attractive culture within their team emerged as key elements comprising the visions of Canadian university large team sport head coaches. These coaches were found to engage in three actionable processes through which they communicate and enact their visions, including: frequent communication, assigning tasks and standards, and empowering their student-athletes. To ensure that these coaches align their beliefs and behaviours to their vision, they were found to willingly act as role models and engage in life-long learning practices. These findings are pragmatically important, as they provide actionable strategies and examples of how Canadian university large team sport head coaches enact and communicate their vision. Although each coach operates within various unique contexts, they all demonstrate that coaching in Canadian university large team sports is about more than achieving on-field success.

### **Notable Connections to Literature**

In this section, notable connections between the research findings and the major theoretical concepts that guide this study are discussed, including the concepts of vision, visionary leadership and effective sport coaching.

## The Concept of Vision

Coaches in this study spoke to and defined the concept of vision in different ways, including vision as culture, vision as a voyage, vision as a unifying principle, vision as a mental image of the future, and as an essential element of effective leadership. These different interpretations support Collins and Porras' (1996) notion that the concept of vision can be misunderstood, given it conjures up different meanings or different people. For example, The Motivator expressed that vision is “what the top dog has to have [...] it's really important to have a clear vision that you can articulate to your team or staff” such that “it's absolutely the head coach's responsibility to have the vision, to help set the vision, but definitely to drive it.” The Shepherd discussed how vision is akin to a final destination of a long voyage, but expressed that “while it's a voyage, it's super important to have small milestones.” Here, the Shepherd's meaning is that the final destination is only a piece of the overall vision.

The Professional mentioned that the vision is “a bigger, broader principle that structures your goals and guides your individual decisions.” He additionally mentioned that due to the broad nature of a vision, it can be more difficult to articulate than specific goals. Similarly, the Young Gun shared that “your vision is kind of your identity of what you live by, but you have to be flexible knowing it can slightly change.” Closely linked to the exercise of “seeing into the future” by the Serial Winning Coaches (SWCs) studied by Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016), the Innovator discussed vision as a mental image of five years in the future, where “you can close your eyes and it's a picture of what you want things to look like.”

Sashkin (1998) noted that the visioning process can occur through several ways, where visionary leaders generally create a vision by taking advantage of organizational opportunities (i.e., identifying challenging areas within the organization and including a resolution within the

vision statement), as well as construct opportunities as they adapt to the future into which they are leading. The Builder, the Comedian, the Innovator and the Teacher all discussed this particular visioning process, when they shared how the university context provides them with many different opportunities for development. For example, the Builder shared that although his team does not have the same financial budget as a Division I NCAA football team, the university still offers all the same necessary aspects to building a championship culture, including the nutritional program, the strength and conditioning program, academic support program, the mental health programs and many opportunities for social development (e.g., clubs, student organized events, classes). As such, he has built his vision around taking advantage of these opportunities and integrating them into this football program, simply “without all the bells and whistles.”

The Comedian discussed his unique perspective in how he takes advantage of opportunities within the Canadian university setting to align with his vision for his program. He shared that “I want them to make mistakes and I want them to do stupid things because if you can’t do it now while you’re at university like, you’re probably going to suffer a lot later in life.” For the Comedian, the opportunity for development exists within the university lifestyle of being a student-athlete and the learning opportunities available within that timeframe. He supports his student-athletes through their life experiences when they make mistakes and learn life lessons at a younger age, thereby avoiding potential future suffering. The Comedian understands the context and wants his student-athletes to maximize their time within the context.

The Innovator discussed how she believes that “leadership means creating other leaders” and as such, she creates opportunities for student-athletes to “grow and to lead on this team, lead in the community, lead on campus, [...] there’s an opportunity for everybody.” For example,

during the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, both in the United States and globally, the Innovator acted with urgency to create a platform for leadership on her team. In accordance with Schwahn and Spady (1998), visionary leaders opt more for completely reformulating issues and problems before engaging in a preferred course of action. She discussed how while her team has been very diverse for many years, she still recognized gaps in her understanding of racial injustice. Her own task force challenged her to find books and videos by non-white authors and speakers to be used in her 'leadership-development and character-education program,' at which point she acknowledged how she had presented a lack of diversity in the program and how she acted to rectify this issue. Additionally, she included community members of colour into her program to act as mentors for her student-athletes. Through adapting to circumstances in the team's external environment, the Innovator both honoured her vision of the program and innovated her coaching strategies to best meet student-athletes' needs.

Robbins and Duncan (1988) identified that a leader's vision may originate from the leader becoming aware of a growing problem within the organization or from a misalignment between the organization and its environment, wherein a change is needed. For example, the Shepherd discussed how during his first year with the program he "knew we had a partying problem, and Thursday is a big party night, I put a run at 6:00am on Friday." According to Robbins and Duncan (1988), identifying this problem triggers the vision creation process, making the visioning process a reactionary process that occurs through the exposure and analysis of the organization. As the Shepherd's vision did not align with allowing student-athletes to attend mid-week parties, he reacted by imposing strict measures better aligned to creating a culture to support his vision. Ultimately attempting to redefine the meaning of team memberships and realigning the team to new values (Conger, 1989). Throughout his first season,

approximately 46 players quit the team as a response to the changes in rules and team standards. The Shepherd explained that through reflection, he learned these were not individuals ready to fully commit to the program, and as such, he could recruit student-athletes who would better align with and enact the vision.

Kouzes and Posner (1987) proposed that a leader's vision may originate from their personal values. Such a vision is thought to be proactive, as the leader brings existing values to an existing organizational state and searches for enactment opportunities. For example, the General stated that "the vision is a culture of hard work and respect;" and further listed personal values including work ethic, perseverance, respect, and integrity. According to Zaccaro and Klimoski (2002), neither reactive nor proactive processes of vision creation provide a complete explanation as to from where a vision is derived. The leader's reactive response to vision creation from identifying an organizational problem or misalignment negates inclusion of their values. Moreover, the leader's proactive response to vision creation originating from their core values does not necessarily consider the influence of their process of social construction (i.e., where the leader's vision is derived from being deeply impacted and influenced by experiences).

It is important to note that scholars (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Robbins & Duncan, 1988; Sashkin, 1988; Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2002) discuss vision through the perspective of corporate executive leaders, as such differences in the visioning process may exist with the participants of this study. Additionally, a leader's vision may change over time, as noted by the coaches in this study. For example, the Shepherd, the Builder and the General all discussed how, when they were younger coaches, their vision was to win championships. As they matured and gained more experience however, their vision transformed into including the overarching elements of the holistic development of their respective student-athletes and the creation of a sustainable culture.

The findings of the origins of the visions from these coaches are important, as they illuminate that the process of creating a vision can be highly flexible as each coach gains experience and expands their influence and learning. Here, a coach's vision may be conceived as an ever-changing concept, where they may adapt the vision based on circumstances, changing environments and uncertain futures. The coaches in this study appeared to both have created and continue to create a vision for an environment that supports holistic growth that may be attractive to incoming cohorts of recruits and may be sustainable through the environment of Canadian university large team sports. From the findings, personal glory and accolades (e.g., win-loss record, championships, medals and trophies) for the respective coaches do not appear to influence them in their creation of their team environments; rather, they perceive these accolades as potential results gained from the successful implementation of these cultures and environments.

Collins and Porras (1996) stated that vision included two primary components: core ideology and envisioned future. The component of core ideology is present in all of the articulated visions in Tables 2, 3 and 4 where it was found that each coach included an element of a core value or purpose meant to hold the team together. For example, the Innovator's team vision of "we will become the greatest U SPORTS program in the country" includes the element of 'becoming the greatest,' which illuminates the core purpose of attaining greatness.

Although the coaches discussed having an envisioned future for their team, the findings reveal that their interpretation of an envisioned future may differ from Collins and Porras' (1996) definition of an envisioned future. For example, while these authors explain that an envisioned future includes a 10 to 30-year "big, hairy, audacious goal" or BHAG and a vivid description of how to achieve this BHAG, the coaches in this study did not discuss having set such audacious,

long-term goals. This lack of such audacious, long-term goals may be due to the pace of change and volatility in their respective team's environments (Caldwell, 2019). From the findings, the envisioned futures in the context of Canadian university team sports of football and rugby appear to be more connected to the short term (i.e., three to five years), during which time coaches may enact a realistic plan with more control and clarity. As the Young Gun noted, there is a high degree of turnover in team members in large team sports in the university context. He stated that "very quickly, in a 2-year span, 50% of the locker room is different" and as a result, the envisioned future connected to the vision must be applicable to student-athletes who will be involved in the program for a maximum of 5 years.

These findings should be considered when coaches engage in the process of creating a vision. Coaching large team sports can be about more than just winning. Ultimately, as the General noted "every time you line up to play somebody's going to win, somebody's going to lose, so if it was only about winning or losing then why are we doing it?" This perspective illuminates the reality of any sport, and that ultimately winning and losing is only as important as associated meanings that the coach and coaching staff communicate.

### ***Potential Gender Differences in Conceiving and Enacting a Large Team Sport Vision***

The male rugby coaches in this study (n = 4) did not mention any major differences in male or female head coaches in how they approach the creation and enactment of vision. The coaches discussed how there may be some nuances among all coaches, but overall differences occur more at an individual level versus general gender differences. As the sole female rugby coach participant, however the Innovator shared differently; she primarily has coached with and against male counterparts and stated that males and females approach vision differently. She noted that "women are generally a little bit more organized and more planned [...] so that helps

the long-term process of a vision” and that male coaches are “potentially innately more competitive,” where she questioned if being more competitive might benefit or hinder the efficiency of approaching a vision. This finding illuminates a gap in the literature on vision, and creates a direction for future research, where scholars may examine potential gender differences in conceiving, developing and enacting a large team sport vision.

### **Visionary Leadership**

In this section, research findings related to the literature on visionary leadership, including discussions on the cognitive skills that these coaches apply to enact their vision; the alignment of the vision and a plan; the connection between vision and team culture.

#### ***Cognitive Skills***

The coaches in this study demonstrated basic traits and behaviours of visionary leadership, notably those outlined by Mintzberg (1989), where the leader creates a vision, communicates the vision and empowers others to ‘own’ the vision for themselves. The coaches demonstrated that they seek ‘socialized’ power oriented towards toward their assistant coaches to carry out the vision and towards empowering student-athletes (McClelland, 1975). Such socialized power supports the others’ enactment of the vision, as such socialized power is focused on empowerment rather than on control and direction. The coaches’ goal is for team-members is that they be autonomous and self-directed in terms of realizing and enacting the vision themselves (Conger, 1989; Sashkin, 1988).

Jaques (1986) and Sashkin (1988) identified four cognitive skills that leaders apply in order to realize their vision, including expressing the vision through behaviour (i.e., the leader physically behaves in a myriad of ways that advances their cognitively realized vision step-by-step), explaining the vision to others, extending and applying the vision to a variety of situations,

and expanding the vision in different ways. All coaches discussed the importance of engaging in these cognitive skills. For example, they all discussed the importance of aligning their behaviours with the vision they communicate to their team. Specifically, this theme of behaviourally role-modeling the vision was a key factor in actually realizing the vision. Second, all coaches expressed a belief that they must continuously explain the vision to team members primarily through verbal communication. Third, all coaches shared how they seek situations through which they could extend and apply elements of the vision by continually relating day-to-day events to the overall team vision as a way of keeping team members believing and engaged in the vision. Lastly, the Innovator, the Builder and the Young Gun expressed that they try to expand and relay the vision in different and innovative ways, whether through technology, on-field practices, themes or slogans.

### ***Alignment of the vision and a plan***

Many scholars have agreed that to be enacted, a leader's vision must be supported by an actionable plan (Collins & Porras, 1996; Din et al., 2015; Mallet & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). In this study, four coaches (i.e., the Shepherd, the Teacher, the Builder, and the Motivator) all discussed having developed a formalized plan to support them in enacting their vision. For example, the Shepherd discussed using a highly detailed power point presentation, which he presents to team members every day of the 14-day training camp to begin the in-game season. Within this plan, the Shepherd outlines the team's vision, values, messaging, and reasoning behind all decisions and strategies. The Shepherd shared he includes an outline of everything required of student-athletes in order to be successful within the plan. Moreover, the Teacher's plan is geared towards instilling a culture and a standard of performance for his team. He developed a plan based around five key

components that permeate all program elements, and must be adopted by all team members, including respect, humility, communication, accountability and credibility. He notes that this is more a standard of behaviours to be upheld up by all team members, rather than a set of rules. As the Builder's vision is to provide his team with a championship experience, his plan includes identifying what contributes to a championship experience and including those elements within the team environment. He discussed that student-athletes will be exposed to all aspects necessary to improve as athletes and grow as people, including academic support, strength and conditioning, nutritional support, mental health support and football skill development.

The Motivator explained that when he was hired as a head coach, he articulated a vision of creating a "top-end, respectable, competitive team" and presented a 5-year plan to the athletic department's hiring committee, in which he detailed a step-by-step process that he would enact in order to achieve his vision. He explained that included in this plan were elements of recruitment, communication, branding and training. Additionally, he shared that every year of the plan included a different area of focus. For example, in the first two years of his tenure as head coach, he focused on recruitment and creating a culture in which players could be proud of their role as student-athletes, one which was developing into a highly competitive unit versus focusing on in-game results. He stated that in years three to five, the focus shifted to an emphasis on winning and achieving on-field results towards winning a national championship.

The other six coaches (i.e., the Young Gun, the General, the Professional, the Supporter, the Comedian and the Innovator) did not discuss having a plan oriented towards achieving future success or enacting a vision. Rather, they discussed that their vision was more oriented towards the present time and creating a sustainable culture over a long period of time. Additionally, given the General and the Innovator had already achieved a high degree of on-field success, they

mentioned they did not feel that they needed a plan to achieve their vision; instead, they were living their realized vision.

### ***Team Culture***

Martens (1987) stated that the head coach is the individual who creates a team culture. Given these coaches discussed culture as an outcome to the vision, a brief discussion of team culture is offered as related to the findings. Schein's (2004) integrative, leader-centered model is one most commonly accepted for understanding team culture, where Schein (2004) assumed that organizations are ambiguous and unpredictable entities that exist in open environments and where culture is viewed as a pattern of shared assumptions that guides behaviour in an organization. Furthermore, Schroeder (2010) noted that when leaders enact their visions, they create these patterns of shared assumptions that guide behaviours. Pill (2018) asserted that team culture may be positioned as the result of complex series of social interactions that influence team beliefs and subsequent behaviour. Cruickshank and Collins (2012) defined team culture as the "shared values, beliefs, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group" (p. 340).

While there is no universal definition of team culture, scholars have generally agreed that culture is related to the way in which people make sense of their experiences and the world, through the existence of shared meanings (Barker, 2008). As such, the findings of this study may contribute to scholars who desire to better understand the "active ingredients" that contribute to building highly effective sports teams (Beauchamp et al., 2017). For example, the Teacher, the General, the Young Gun and the Shepherd discussed how vision is directly tied to the overall team culture. Here, the Teacher connected his vision to his standard of performance plan, in

which he outlines what is expected from all team members in order to achieve the overall team goals.

Moreover, the General specifically mentioned that “vision is what I want our culture to be,” while the Young Gun specifically discussed how a vision must be shared amongst all the team members (i.e., players, assistant coaches, support staff) and must be transferrable to incoming team members. The Shepherd included messaging in his vision directly linked to influencing the team culture. He created the tag line ‘What’s Next?’, stating that this tag line “is a huge thing for us, it permeates our culture, it’s a summary of all our culture, [...] so you get the feeling of the milestones, so it’s like a voyage.” These coaches demonstrate that their team cultures and visions are closely connected such that the culture and vision may continuously influence each other over time.

### **Effective Sport Coaching**

In this section, how coaches were found to contribute to understanding effective sport coaching is next discussed. As noted by Côté and Gilbert (2009), sport coaching is an elusive concept and if scholars cannot capture the essence of effective coaching, there may not be a legitimate phenomenon to study. As such, the coaches’ contribution as found in this study may provide scholars with support to existing theories of effective sport coaching and may provide new directions for future research to better understand this elusive phenomenon.

Effective sport coaching scholars (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Sedgwick, 2003) stated that effective coaches articulate a clear vision that allows them to engage in a proactive and iterative planning and goal setting processes that can reflect an athlete-centered model of coaching. Additionally, Hodge et al. (2014) stated that high-performance head coaches are highly influential individuals in student-athletes’ experience and require more than

technical and tactical skills, such as effective leadership skills and the ability to foster a functional leader-follower (i.e., student-athlete) relationship. The coaches in this study demonstrated that the essence of their respective visions reflects an athlete-centered model of coaching (see Table 2). Although only four coaches articulated a clear vision, all coaches clearly articulated their desire to prioritize the well-being and holistic development of their student athletes.

As a direct connection to the literature on effective sport coaching, these coaches aligned with Peters and Austin's (1985) definition, specifically that coaching is "about really paying attention to people, really believing in them, really caring about them, really involving them" (p. 326). Additionally, Donoso-Morales et al. (2017) discussed that effective coaching occurs both on- and off- the field of play. To this point, coaches duly discussed how they must lead their students both on- and off- the field of play, as both areas of coaching elements are intertwined such that one cannot prosper without the other. For example, the Teacher stated that "if you care and love the individual player, treat them like you would want to be treated, treat him like your own family member, [...] the scoreboard's going to take care of itself." The coaches discussed that achieving on-the-field of play success generally results from creating a great off-the-field environment.

Moreover, the Innovator provided a compelling perspective on the relationship between on- and off- the field of play, when sharing that her male counterparts from other universities feared her team's future success, as they had finished with a high national ranking, while fielding one of the youngest rosters. She shared that her team achieved early on-the-field success from her main focus on student-athletes' development and growth as leaders, sharing that other coaches were "spending [too much] time doing rugby; it's not about rugby." By prioritizing the

development of student-athletes' leadership skills, the Innovator explained they become more independent, confident and competent as individuals; but more importantly, they as individuals become closer as a team.

Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) stated that in the future, coaches will need to be athlete-centered and be able to foster player and team empowerment. These coaches universally described how they were athlete-centered in their coaching philosophy. For example, the Professional described that being athlete-centered meant that his focus was on “the well-being of the student-athletes, are they fitting it? Are they learning their skills? [...] do they feel they can come to me if they need anything? Do I feel that I can approach them if I need anything?” The Innovator explained that being ‘athlete-centered’ as a head coach meant that “any major decision usually [goes] through the athletes.” The Shepherd expressed that his purpose as a head coach is to “serve my players and serve the program and to try to get my players to achieve their goals.” The Supporter explained that he sees his role as supporting his athletes “understand what they can achieve [...] to take pride in the way they live their lives.” Similarly, the Motivator shared that the two cornerstones of success are that his student-athletes have “a positive experience and they’re developed, so they’re better when they leave than they were when they arrived.” These coaches put their student-athletes’ well-being as a central element of their respective programs.

Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) also stated that the new cooperative partnership between the coach and the athlete will potentially replace a traditional, coach-driven power relationship, especially with post-Generation Z student-athletes. These coaches identified elements of traditional ways of coaching large team sports that may no longer serve the modern student-athlete. Specifically, the Supporter shared that as a varsity athlete, his own coaches “hurt his ability to perform at a couple of different levels” because of their traditional approaches. He

explained that he is highly athlete-centered in his coaching approach due to his previous, personal negative experiences as a student-athlete. Similarly, Both the Teacher and the Shepherd referred to an old football coaching message of “school is ‘#1’ and football is ‘#2’” where the underlying message conveyed by the coach is that football truly comes first and school comes second. Both the Teacher and the Builder understood this message to be a harmful one to their student-athletes and while opting for non-traditional strategies (Schwahn & Spady, 1998), they have duly changed that narrative on their team to instead focus student-athletes’ attention on prioritizing academics above the sport.

The Shepherd shared that when he played football as a student-athlete, players “were looking for that leader to lead us [...] kids these days, I can’t pinpoint it [...] they believe in their rationale, it’s a reason that gets them to follow, not heart.” The Innovator expressed that through her continuing experiences as a head coach, she understands that the new generation of student-athletes struggle with different challenges than previous generations. She stated that “they really are entitled but why shouldn’t they be? I think you can turn that entitlement into a positive [...] if they really want to feel valued [...] give them responsibility” she adds “when you give young people an opportunity to lead, as long as they can be successful in it, it’s amazing what they can accomplish.”

The Supporter shared that “it doesn’t matter if you’re the best tactician or the best behaviour modifier [...] people will hear what they want to hear from you,” adding that “if you can establish a positive relationship, like they’ll follow you whether you’re right or wrong,” which aligns with Hodge et al.’s (2014) proposition that coaches must develop skills and qualities that go beyond the technical and tactical aspects of their sport. Similarly, the General stated that first “it’s about the proficiency that you can show and demonstrate in what you’re

teaching them, and then it's about building trust and respect and that you actually care for them.” He then explained that it “takes time [...] it happens one player at a time, one moment at a time.” For example, for the General “it's about sitting down with [the student-athlete] and having talks with him because his grandfather just died.” These coaches provided perspectives that support Mallett and Lara-Bercial's (2016) and Hodge et al.'s (2014) claims that future coaches will need to be both athlete-centered and foster player and team empowerment.

A noticeable difference emerged between how the rugby coaches and the football coaches discussed their partnerships with their respective student-athletes. For example, four rugby coaches openly discussed how they involved either their leadership groups or their entire team in the creation of the team culture and in decision-making moments. The Motivator stated, “I want it to be collaborative, if they have ideas or thoughts or questions, I want them to be able to come to me, so I want to have that close, that good rapport.” The Supporter similarly stated his belief, that “the individual connection is really big” and he “really engage[s] the leaders on the team and have them play a big role in driving what outcomes they want to have on the field.”

In contrast, football coaches discussed how while they involve their leadership groups or some student-athletes in certain decision-making moments, they ultimately retain the power to make the final decision. For example, the Teacher shared “I'm a lot more democratic [...] I'm very big on hearing what the players have to say, getting feedback from our coaches, but ultimately I have to make the final choice.” Similarly, the General stated “not that I don't take input from other people, but for the most part I make the decisions.” The Builder discussed he focuses on developing collaborative partnerships with his assistant coaches but to a lesser degree with his student-athletes “because of the sheer number of people there are certain things that are non-negotiable, or you won't move forward together.” As football teams have significantly

larger roster sizes of student-athletes, it may be that such large groups of student-athletes require the head coach to display more centralized power.

Although differences emerged in how these head coaches engage in developing cooperative partnerships with their student-athletes, ultimately these coaches discussed that an athlete focused coach-driven power relationship is possible. In these athlete focused coach-driven power relationships, the coach prioritizes the athlete's well-being and maintains a centralized approach to power and decision making.

### **Summary of Notable Connections to Literature**

The differing visions presented by the coaches in this study support Collins and Porras' (1996) notion that the concept of vision can be misunderstood. Each coach discussed taking advantage of organizational opportunities and constructing opportunities as part of the visioning process, as they adapt to the future they are leading into (Sashkin, 1998). The findings of the origin of the visions from these coaches suggest that the process of creating a vision may be highly flexible as a coach gains experience and expands their knowledge. Each coach included an element of a core value or purpose meant to hold the team together, but the coaches did not discuss setting audacious long-term goals that exceeded five years into the future, differing from Collins and Porras' (1996) assumption that vision includes a 10-to-30-year BHAG. Coaches demonstrated that they create and communicate their vision such that their student-athletes are empowered to 'own' the vision for themselves (Mintzberg, 1989). These coaches express their vision through behaviours, explain the vision to others, extend the vision to a variety of situations and expand the vision in different ways (Jaques, 1986; Sashkin, 1988). Four of the coaches discussed creating a 'plan' to support the enactment of their vision, where the remaining

six did not utilize a plan, but rather discussed that their vision was oriented towards the present time.

In alignment with Donoso-Morales et al. (2017), the coaches in this study demonstrated that effective coaching occurs both on- and off- the field of play, as both contexts of coaching are intertwined such that one cannot prosper independently from the other. Additionally, these coaches discussed how they divert from traditional coach-driven power relationships and are athlete-centered in their coaching philosophy. This finding resonates with Mallett and Lara-Bercial's (2016) and Hodge et al.'s (2014) claim that future coaches will need to be athlete-centered to foster player and team empowerment through cooperative partnerships between the coach and athlete.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

The lingering question of “how do coaches create winning teams?” has existed in my mind since I began participating in sports as an athlete, coach and spectator, yet I have never uncovered an answer that satisfied my curiosity. My journey as a sport management graduate student was guided by this same question and through an initial exploration of literature on leadership and effective sport coaching theories, I discovered the concept of vision as being a core element of a coach’s ability to create a winning team, specifically from Vallée & Bloom’s (2016) work. I began to understand that a relationship existed between a coach clearly articulating a vision and leading a winning team. From there, I recognized a gap existed within scholarly understanding of the concept of vision, such that vision has been generally identified as being one element of effective coaching (Donoso-Morales et al., 2017; Vallée & Bloom, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014).

Although future research is needed to better understand the process of conceiving, developing and enacting a vision, the findings of the current study contribute to a greater understanding of how coaches conceive, develop and enact a vision into an actionable reality. As only two of ten coaches in the sample were found to both possess a clear vision and articulate a concise vision statement, the findings elicit a gap of coach education and training towards vision and the visioning process. Canadian university head coaches may require in-depth education and training on conceiving, developing and enacting a vision to support them in achieving their goals. It was clear from these findings that coaches generally misunderstood the concept of vision (Collins & Porras, 1996), as each coach articulated a different perspective on vision. This

lack of aligned understanding towards the concept of vision may reflect coaches' lack of knowledge and may be limiting them in their ability to achieve their desired goals.

The purpose of this study was to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals. By analyzing data from 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews with coaches, many concepts were explored, including the origins of head coaches' visions, the core elements that they include in their vision, the actionable processes they employ to enact their vision, as well as how they ensure that their beliefs and behaviours are aligned with their vision. Additionally, the discussion of these findings provide valuable lessons from large team sport head coaches that may theoretically support scholars for future research and may pragmatically support coaches in the enactment of their own vision.

These findings illuminated how coaches conceive, develop and enact their visions. It was found that these coaches each had a different understanding of vision, and their vision was highly individualized and tied to their personal values, originating from differing experiences and influences over the course of their life experience. Coaches' visions were primarily focused on the holistic development of respective student-athletes and their building and sustaining a positive culture over time. In order to generate buy-in and alignment to the vision, coaches frequently communicated the vision through an amalgam of different assigned tasks and standards and through empowering their student-athletes. These coaches ensured that they aligned their personal beliefs and behaviours to the vision by acting as role-models for student-athletes and through self-reflection and self-directed learning practices.

Most notably, all coaches discussed that the holistic development of student-athletes acted as a central component of their respective visions. This central component was discussed

by both new head coaches (i.e., working in the head coach position for one to three years) who have not yet experienced much on-field success and experienced head coaches who have previously won championships. Although coaches discussed the importance of winning in Canadian university large team sports, they repeatedly communicated that winning is an outcome generated by teams comprised of well-rounded and empowered individuals.

The way in which a coach defined winning or success impacted the way in which they led their team; and for these coaches, winning and success was about developing their student-athletes such that they become better people, better spouses, better parents, and better citizens. These coaches understood that a student-athlete's athletic career is short and that ultimately, mental acuity, resiliency, and work ethic lasts longer than any physical gifts. As such, they focus on developing the skills that will serve their student-athletes for the rest of their lives.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

In designing this research study, specific choices were made to structure the particular methods used to attempt to answer the three research questions. A first choice related to delimiting the focus solely on head coaches' perceptions of vision, as associated viewpoints of vision from student-athletes, support staff and university administrators were not examined in the current research. The purpose of this delimitation was to explore the perspective of the top leader in these sport team contexts and their experiences of vision within this context. Given these head coaches generally set the vision and work toward its enactment with the support of their teams, how they perceive themselves working in this process was an important element of the entire study as was delimited as such.

A second delimitation of the study was to engage head coaches involved specifically in the sports of football and rugby in the context of Canadian universities, versus head coaches

involved generally in any team sport in the context of Canadian universities. This delimitation was made given that football and rugby teams have a large roster size, and athletes playing both football and rugby incur a higher risk of injury due to their high-contact nature and they are required to be highly specialized in their position of play. These delimitations served to bound the research to a manageable unit of study, while still provide an opportunity to research the phenomenon of a head coach's conceiving, developing and enacting a vision.

Four limitations of this study may have influenced its outcomes, including: first, the participant size of ten head coaches; second, perspectives gathered and analyzed may only be specific to Canadian university large team sport head coaches; third, interpretation of the findings are specific to coaches working in Canadian universities; and fourth, the pragmatic nature of this study may limit the theoretical contributions of the findings, as pragmatism is primarily oriented towards practicality rather than theory (Creswell, 2007).

It is possible that a non-response bias resulted in this study, as ten head coaches out of a possible 73 provided consent to participate in the data collection phase of this study. As such, those coaches who did not participate could have vastly differing experiences in conceiving, developing and enacting a vision. Additionally, only head coaches of football and rugby teams in Canadian universities were contacted to participate in this study. These coaches may engage with vision creation and enactment processes differently than other Canadian university team sport head coaches within Canada or within sport contexts akin to interuniversity competition in other countries.

In this study, head coaches' general lack of understanding of vision and the visioning process is an important theoretical contribution that can lead to future educational and training opportunities for coaches in conceiving, developing and enacting a vision to achieve their desired

goals. This theoretical contribution is important considering the pragmatic approach that centralized this study influenced asking questions including ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ to understand the practicality around conceiving, developing and enacting a vision, rather than ‘why?’, aimed at understanding the underlying reasons behind conceiving, developing and enacting a vision.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings and discussion of this research study revealed directions for potential future research on conceiving, developing and enacting a vision, as further exploration could benefit both scholars and practitioners in the future. Exploring the concept of vision may allow scholars to appreciate the its complexity and elusiveness and may allow practitioners to further engage in the process of conceiving and enacting a vision for their teams. First, future researchers are recommended to conduct ethnographic studies, and embed themselves within the team as an observer for the duration of an entire season, given the coaches’ self-reported, anecdotal accounts can provide only so much information about what it means to conceive and enact a vision. Krane and Baird (2005) stated that more methodological diversity is needed in qualitative research in sport. Additionally, Culver et al. (2003) explained that using interviews as the primary data collection method in qualitative research might not provide a complete examination of the topic of interest. The goal of an ethnographic study is to better understand the culture of a selected group from the perspective of the group members (Krane & Baird, 2006; Tedlock, 2000; Wolcott, 1995).

For instance, Tedlock (2000) stated that ethnographers can gain a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations and behaviours of individuals in a group “by entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people [...] in their everyday lives” (p. 456). Through such research, a better understanding of how a vision can spread from the head coach to the team

members may emerge. In such a research effort, the researcher could utilize a variety of data collection strategies to construct a deeper understanding of conceiving and enacting a vision, including interviews, focus groups, observations, document analysis, surveys, and personal reflexivity (Krane & Baird, 2005). A researcher can understand only so much from the outside of the phenomena; by living within the environment, the possibility exists for a deeper level of understanding.

Second, future researchers are recommended to develop a case study to further understand how vision is enacted. Through exacting such a qualitative methodology, the researcher could interview different organizational members (e.g., coaches, players, support staff) over the duration of a season to ensure trustworthiness among the data collected, thereby ensuring the experiences of the team are representative and credible. This research could be conducted on a team with a head coach who possesses both a clear vision and plan for enactment according to information collected via preliminary interviews with several coaches. Additionally, future researchers are recommended to create comparative case studies in which two or three different teams around the same phenomena are examined. For example, research could be conducted on two to three teams whose coaches operate with three clearly stated, yet different visions or on two to three teams whose coaches operate with varying degrees of clarity in their vision. Perhaps a vision may not be as important to success as one may consider.

Third, future researchers are recommended to examine student-athletes' perspectives on their coaches' creation and enactment of a vision. As in this study, only head coaches' self-reported perspectives of vision were examined, it is important to understand other stakeholders' perspectives (i.e., team members) to possibly evaluate their alignment. Fourth, future researchers are recommended to focus on understanding the origins and the conception of vision, as this

particular element of the visioning process remains a theoretical mystery. Although coaches provided examples from where their visions come (e.g., through maturation and experiencing failure over time, medley of experiences and influences, and alignment to personal values and leadership style), a gap exists regarding further specificity in understanding this phenomenon. As such, researchers should interview leaders who have a clear and concise vision and conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews to further understand their sources.

### **Pragmatic Contribution of the Research Study**

As a pragmatic researcher, I wanted to create a tool that could contribute to head coaches conceiving, developing and enacting their vision. The coaches in this study provided thoughts to the format of this pragmatic contribution, including an academic article, a document, a book, a virtual workshop, and a video presentation of the findings. For example, the Young Gun, the Builder, the Supporter, and the Motivator all suggested that “something with a visual component,” such as a video, would be the most valuable format.

Both the Teacher and the Comedian raised a concern that head coaches may question my credibility and choose not to engage with my contribution. Specifically, as I do not have Canadian university head coaching experience, some coaches may choose to discredit my work. Moreover, the Innovator stated that the format of the contribution is unimportant because “some coaches just don’t want to learn, they think they do, but then when you actually provide opportunities to learn they’re not interested in it [...] if they’re truly interested, whatever format it is, they’ll be engaged.” Similarly, the General explained that to him, the experience of creating and enacting a vision is fundamentally about being passionate about the work and enjoying the role of being a head coach, stating “I just don’t know if reading it in a book, you can get the passion that you’re going to need to be successful in the long haul.” The Comedian added he

would prefer to engage in this knowledge through interactions with other coaches, stating that “I think that interaction of opinion and experience, interaction of process and everything like that is going to be the bigger winner.” He expressed his preferences to ask questions of other coaches, to learn from other head coaches’ experiences and to hear about their stories of failures and successes.

In reflecting on these coaches’ various opinions and suggestions, the best way for coaches to learn how to conceive, develop and enact their vision comes from knowledge transference and from communicating with others. As such, the pragmatic contribution of this study should be about providing sources of information and inspiration (e.g., readings on leadership and effective coaching) that can help a head coach engage in the process of conceiving, developing and enacting their vision.

The Builder and the Innovator both shared anecdotes of reading leadership books in times where they felt that problems existed in their programs. The Shepherd, the Professional, and the Comedian shared stories of engaging with other coaches to receive feedback on bettering their programs. All coaches provided examples of books that have inspired their vision and influenced their coaching strategies (see Appendix E for titles of such sources). From these findings, practitioners are thus recommended to take time to engage in conversations around vision, share stories of successes and failures, and share sources of knowledge with one another.

As a vision was found to be deeply personal to the individual head coach and to vary from one individual to another, it is not possible to create a pragmatic, step-by-step process that supports another individual in creating their own vision. That said, the concept of vision and the process of conceiving, developing and enacting a vision should be a regular addition to coach development work, where ideas are shared and developed over time. As such, a document was

created that outlines potential general questions that a coach may ask of other individuals within the same context, that may elicit conversation around the process of conceiving, developing and enacting a vision (see Appendix F).

### **Moving Forward**

Overall, this research provided a deep and thick description of how Canadian university large team sport head coaches may conceive, develop and enact their visions for their respective teams; and in so doing, contributed to the greater understanding of leadership practices. The discussion generated from this study joins leadership and coaching scholars' greater dialogue on understanding the complex, shifting dynamics of leadership in the realm of effective sport coaching. It is hoped that the findings may inspire a shift in how head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision and perhaps transform from a results-oriented vision to a more developmentally-oriented vision. According to participants, coaching is about having a positive impact in student-athletes' lives.

These coaches work to help their student-athletes develop the necessary skills to become successful in life, both during their time at university and afterwards, upon graduating. To these coaches, winning games, winning championships, winning medals, and receiving accolades appear to be secondary goals and should not be considered as the reason for coaching. Again, as the Innovator stated "it's not about rugby," it is about developing student-athletes and teaching them life lessons and leadership skills that has them reach their potential. It is not about the sport, it is not about the coach, it is about student-athletes and it is about their holistic development as human beings. In conclusion, by continually studying leadership and coaching practices, sport researchers and practitioners may be able to continue to transform how head coaches effectively lead their team towards achieving their desired goals.

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APPENDICIES

## Appendix A

### Participant Letter of Invitation

**Title of Study:** Exploring Vision and Visionary Leadership in Head Coaches of Canadian University Large Team Sports.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Kirsty Spence, Associate Dean, Teaching and Undergraduate Studies, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University

**Student Principal Investigator:** Matthew Milligan, Applied Health Sciences Graduate Student, Sport Management Department, Brock University

I, Matthew Milligan, MA Candidate from the Department of Sport Management at Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled: “Exploring Vision and Visionary Leadership in Head Coaches of Canadian University Large Team Sports.” The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how a Canadian university head coach enacts their developed and intended vision to achieve their desired goals. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to partake in a maximum 60-minute audio recorded minute interview(s) with Zoom video conferencing technology that will involve discussing your personal strategies and processes related to enacting your organizational vision.

This research may benefit coaches and organizational leaders in successfully enacting their organizational vision. Further, it may benefit leadership scholars in understanding the elements that contribute to building highly effective sports teams. You are by no means obligated to participate in this research project. Please note that I (Matthew Milligan) will be responsible for arranging and conducting the interviews and corresponding with you throughout the whole process. I will also retain all consent forms and data, as well as maintain your complete confidentiality. This means that pseudonyms will be used and as such, your name, or organization’s name, and any personal identifiers will not be mentioned in the final report. Your decision to participate is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at anytime without penalty or undue harm.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Matthew Milligan  
[mm15hk@brocku.ca](mailto:mm15hk@brocku.ca)  
613-252-6351

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University’s Research Ethics Board [file: 19-246].

## Appendix B

### Participant Letter of Informed Consent

**Project Title:** Exploring Vision and Visionary Leadership in Head Coaches of Canadian University Large Team Sports

**Principal Investigator (PI):** Dr. Kirsty Spence, Ph.D. & Associate Dean, Teaching and Undergraduate studies, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences (AHSC), Brock University T: 905 688 5550 x1-5027; [kspence@brocku.ca](mailto:kspence@brocku.ca)

#### **Faculty Supervisor**

Kirsty Spence, Ph.D.  
AHSC  
Brock University  
(905) 688-5550 Ext. x1-5027  
[kspence@brocku.ca](mailto:kspence@brocku.ca)

#### **Student Principal Investigator (SPI)**

Matthew Milligan, AHSC Graduate Student  
Department of Sport Management  
Brock University  
(613) 252-6351  
[mm15hk@brocku.ca](mailto:mm15hk@brocku.ca)

#### **INVITATION**

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore vision and visionary leadership in head coaches of large team sports. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to partake in a maximum 60- minute interview(s) that will involve discussing your if and how you engage with the creation and enactment of vision and visionary leadership within your team.

#### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked to partake in a maximum 60-minute interview with Zoom video conferencing technology on a date selected and agreed upon by you (the participant) and myself (student researcher). Participants will be contacted via email and asked to participate in the study. Participants will be recruited using a participant recruitment letter that will be distributed via email communication. Prior to the interview taking place, participants will be asked to give their informed consent. Participation will take a maximum of 60-minutes of your time, depending on the length of the interview. Participation will conclude once a follow-up email has been sent to all participants informing them of the opportunity to review their interview transcripts/quotations. Reviewing your transcript for accuracy should take about 30 minutes. If you fail to return your transcript after two weeks, I will assume you accept these data are fine as is and your interview will be included in study results.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

Possible benefits of participation include a better understanding of a leader's creation and enactment of vision. Further, this research serves as an opportunity to reflect on one's past coaching experience, and future coaching aspirations. Moreover, valuable input from head coaches of large team sports may benefit sport leaders in their efforts to produce successful athletes and teams. There may be assumed risk associated with participation in that the personal nature of the questions asked—as related to one's experience as a head

coach of a large team sport—may possibly constitute a need to disclose important confidential information. If you do feel unwilling to share certain information, or that the required answers may negatively impact your coaching career, you may withdraw your participation.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

It is important to note that anonymity cannot be guaranteed in this study, given that the student researcher will hear your interview responses; however, every attempt will be made to enhance confidentiality. All personal information will be removed from the transcripts of each interview. The name of each interview participant will be replaced with a pseudonym. The interviews will be audio recorded (with the participants' permission), these audio recordings will be destroyed once (1) transcribed and (2) transcriptions have been saved on a secure e-file with back-up files completed. Data collected during this study will be stored on a password-protected USB, and hard copies (surveys, interview transcripts, and consent forms) will be stored in a locked cabinet in an office on the fourth floor of Walker Complex (note that identifiers will be stored separate from deidentified transcripts. Only the SPI will have direct knowledge of which students participated in the study. Data collected during study will be destroyed upon completion of findings/results chapter and finalization of thesis document. Access to this data will be restricted to the student principle investigator. Only the student researcher will have access to the data while the course is ongoing. Upon completion of the course and final grade submission, data will be shared with faculty members.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

Note: If a participant chooses to withdraw participation, please contact the student investigator (Matthew Milligan) and data will be immediately destroyed.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study will be published in the form of a master's thesis and may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available to those who indicate during the session that they want a summary of the study upon completion. If you did not indicate that you would like a summary of the study during one of the sessions, you may contact [mm15hk@brocku.ca](mailto:mm15hk@brocku.ca) at any time and request for one upon completion of the study.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the student researcher using the contact information provided above. No recruitment or consent can happen until ethics clearance has been obtained by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Brock University. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext.

3035, reb@brocku.ca. This study has been reviewed and has received clearance from the REB office [19-246].

### **CONSENT FORM**

I have read the information outlined above regarding the qualitative interview portion of this study. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate in the study at any time without punishment in any sport management course or within the sport management program.

Based on this information, I provide consent to participate in an interview. In consenting, I have also consented to having the interview audio-recorded.

Once this form is signed and dated, a copy will be presented to you at the interview itself, to remind of your rights as a participant and to validate your continued consent through an initial on the form.

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### Verbal Script:

Thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this research project. I have a script that I will read to detail what will be included in this interview. As you may already be aware, the purpose of the study is “*to explore if and how Canadian university large team sport head coaches conceive, develop and enact their vision to achieve their desired goals.*” I have three research questions that guide and structure this study, which include:

- First, what elements comprise the vision of a Canadian university large team sport head coach?;
- Second, what actionable processes do Canadian university large team sport head coaches employ to effectively project their vision, such that players and support staff are inspired to pursue that vision?; and,
- Third, how do Canadian university large team sport head coaches ensure that their beliefs and behaviours consistently align with the organizational vision they project/communicate?

In this interview, I will ask you questions that represent six different sections. For example:

- In section 1, I will ask you questions pertaining to your coaching background, as well as your coaching and leadership style.
- In section 2, I proceed with questions that relate to an envisioned future that you may have for your team.
- In section 3, I continue with asking you questions about the actions and processes you employ to enact an envisioned future for your team.
- In section 4, I will ask you questions pertaining to how you believe your personal beliefs and behaviours align with the envisioned future you may have for your team.
- And in section 5, I will ask you questions related to exploring potential gender differences in creating and enacting a vision as either a male or female head coach.
- Lastly, in section 6, I will ask you questions relating to your thoughts on any pragmatic outcomes of study and I will give you an opportunity to add additional comments.

Please note that the Brock University Research Ethics Board provided clearance to this study upon a review some time ago. Also, I will take measures to ensure your confidentiality by removing your name and any identifying information from the research findings, and by permanently deleting this audio recording of the interview when I complete the study. I also want you to know that your participation is completely voluntary, where you may pass on questions, withdraw your participation and ask me to stop the recording at any time, if you desire. If you choose to withdraw your participation, I will permanently delete the recording. Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### Section 1: Background/Coaching Questions

1. For how many years have you been a U SPORTS large team sport head coach?

- a. And, for how many different organizations have you worked in the position of large team sport head coach leading up to this current position?
2. How would you describe your current leadership style as a large team sport head coach?
  - a. I assume your coaching style would be similar to your leadership style? If it isn't what might you add about your coaching style?
  - b. What would you say in your opinion, makes you unique as a large team sport head coach? How do you know?
3. What would you say are your values as a large team sport head coach?
4. How do you define success as a large team sport head coach?
5. How would you describe the relationship that you have with your players? And, how would you describe the relationship you have with your support staff, if different?
6. What actions do you take to improve or develop yourself as a coach over time, if anything?
  - a. What are some examples of how you practice self-reflection, if at all?
    - i. Furthermore, how does such a practice benefit your leadership, if at all? How do you know?
  - b. What are some examples of how you engage with mentorship, if at all?
    - i. How does such engagement benefit your leadership, if at all? How do you know?

## **Section 2: Elements Comprising the Vision of a Canadian University Large Team Sport Head Coach**

7. What does the concept of 'vision' mean to you?
8. What do you think about when you envision the future of your team?
  - a. How did you develop this envisioned future of your team?
9. Do you currently have a clear and active vision statement for your team?
  - a. If yes, can you articulate your vision for me as you would to members of your team?
  - b. When did you create your vision?
  - c. Did anything or anyone in particular inspire this vision?
10. (if Q#9 is answered yes): How much time has passed between when you first started as a head coach and when you created and started enacting your vision?
  - a. Have you changed this vision over time?
  - b. If so, why did you change it? How has this vision changed? What has resulted given the changes?

### **Section 3: Actions and Processes Employed by Canadian university Large Team Sport Head Coaches**

11. (if Q#9 is answered yes): In what ways (how) do you communicate your vision (the imagined future of your team) to your team members? And, to external stakeholders?
  - a. How often do you communicate your vision (the imagined future of your team) to your team members? And, to external stakeholders?
12. With whom do you draw upon for support to help you have players/staff align with your vision, if any one person or groups of people?
13. How do you know if your players and support staff have positively aligned with your vision (the imagined future of your team)?
  - a. Do you make any specific measurements of such an alignment?
  - b. How do you know if others are inspired to pursue your vision?
  - c. How do you ensure that players and staff members continue to align with your vision (the imagined future of your team) over time, assuming they do initially?
  - d. How do you lead those who do not appear to have aligned with your vision (the imagined future of your team)?

### **Section 4: Aligning Beliefs and Behaviours Consistently with team Vision**

14. What are some examples of how you align your beliefs with your vision?
15. And how do you ensure that you align your behaviours with your beliefs?
16. What behaviours do you demonstrate to all others such as team members and support staff that helps you to stay consistent with your vision (the imagined future of your team)?

### **Section 5: Potential gender differences in creating and enacting a vision for a Canadian University Large Team Sport Head Coach**

17. Have you coached a team of male/female athletes in the past?
18. In your opinion, are there differences in how you approach the coaching of male/female athletes?
19. Would anything from your direct experience as a university rugby head coach inform you that female and male coaches may approach vision differently from one another?

### **Section 6: Pragmatic Contribution and Interview Closure**

20. A goal of my research is to pragmatically contribute something to Canadian university large team sport head coaches create and enact their vision. In your opinion and your

experience, what would you suggest to me that might be an ideal format for such a contribution? (workshop, document, video, etc.)

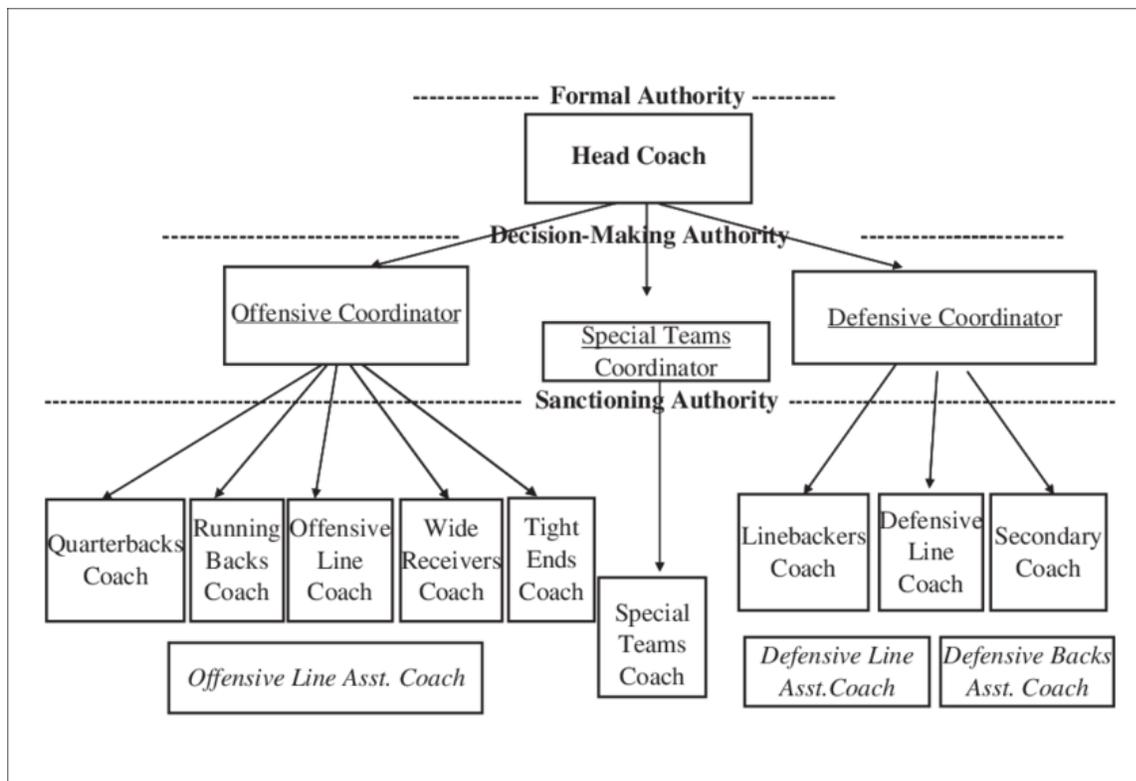
- a. How would you, as a large team sport head coach, like to receive this information?

21. Are there any questions or last comments that you would like to ask or make in this interview?

As a strategy to ensure that I have accurately interpreted your contributions to my study, I will conduct member checking once my thematic analysis of our interview is complete. At that point I will send you a copy of the themes and the interpretation of these themes via email. At which point will I give you a two-week period to review my interpretations, if you agree and approve of my themes and interpretations, I will proceed with my research. If you require amendments or are unsure of the interpretation, I will request a follow up conversation to clarify these issues and make the appropriate changes. If I do not receive a response from you I will assume that you approve of my themes and interpretation and will proceed with my research.

## Appendix D

### General Football Team Coaching Structure



(Braddock et al., 2012)

## Appendix E

### Examples of Books that Inspired the Coaches' Visions

**Table 8**

*Examples of books that inspired the coaches' visions*

<b>Book Title and APA Reference</b>	<b>Book Synopsis</b>
Babcock, M. & Larsen, R. (2012). <i>Leave no doubt: A credo for chasing your dreams</i> . Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.	Mike Babcock is the only professional men's ice hockey coach to lead teams to victory in the NHL Stanley Cup, the IIHF World Championship, and the winter Olympic Games. In this book he provides a roadmap for achieving goals and fulfilling dreams in sport and in life regardless of a person's interests and ambitions. Babcock's "Leave No Doubt," "everyday counts," and "our determination will define us" credos were based on a firm belief in everyday commitment and step by step approach to exceeding expectations.
Brown, B. (2018). <i>Dare to Lead: Brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts</i> . London, UK: Ebury Digital.	In this book, Brown discusses how leaders are people who hold themselves accountable for recognizing the potential in people and ideas, and developing their potential. Based in 7 years of research on leaders in organizations ranging from small start-ups to fortune 500 companies, she provides the frameworks on how to lead with authenticity, vulnerability and courage such that leaders are able to boldly lean into difficult situations and empower others to make a difference.
Carroll, P., Garin, K., & Roth, Y. (2010). <i>Win forever: live, work, and play like a champion</i> . New York, NY: Penguin Group.	Pete Carroll is one of the most successful football head coaches today. In this book, Carroll shares his championship-winning philosophy such that the reader can learn to maximize their potential in every aspect of life. He shares that he got better results by teaching instead of screaming, and helping his players grow as people, not just as athletes.
Coyle, D. (2018). <i>The culture code: The secrets of highly successful groups</i> . New York, NY: Bantam Books.	In this book, Coyle discusses some of the secrets of highly successful groups in many different areas of life. Coyle provides the reader with a toolkit for building effective, cohesive, and innovative organizational cultures.
Coyle, D. (2009). <i>The talent code: unlocking the secret of skill in sports, art, music, math, and just about everything else</i> . New York, NY: Penguin Random House Publishing.	Regardless of what talent an individual wants to cultivate, in this book, Coyle draws from cutting-edge neurology and firsthand research to provide the three key elements that allow anyone to develop their gifts. Deep practice, ignition and master coaching work together in the brain to form a substance called myelin, which may be the "holy grail" of unlocking full potential and talent in any person.
Duckworth, A. (2016). <i>Grit: the power of passion and perseverance</i> . Toronto, ON: Harper Collins.	Grit is a book about what goes through a person's mind when they fail, and how it is not talent or luck that makes the difference. Drawing from many sources ranging from business, the military, sports and life, Duckworth details how success and failure are not dependent on talent, but on other more crucial factors such as a special blend of passion and long-term perseverance.
Gladwell, M. (2008). <i>Outliers: The story of success</i> . New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.	Gladwell tackles the question "what makes high-achievers different?" His findings demonstrate we pay too much attention to what successful people are like when we should rather focus on where successful people come from (i.e., their culture, family, generation, idiosyncratic experiences).
Gordon, J., & Blanchard, K.H. (2007). <i>The energy bus: 10 rules to fuel your life, work and team with positive energy</i> . Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.	This book offers a rare behind the scenes look at one of the most pressure packed leadership roles in sports. Smith, an ex-NFL head coach, provides a step-by-step strategy and a practical framework for building thriving teams. Smith not only details his success stories, but also his failures in order to provide the reader with an all around perspective of what it means to create winning teams.

Hibbert, C. (2015). <i>A brief history of the battle of Agincourt</i> . London, UK: Robinson.	Hibbert draws upon contemporary sources to describe one of the most complete military victories in European history. Hibbert not only focuses on what happened, but on <i>how</i> the Kingdom of France was defeated by Henry V in 1415.
Humphrey, J. (2017). <i>Impromptu: leading in the moment</i> . Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.	In this book, Humphrey focuses on teaching leaders how to think on their feet and respond to difficult situations with grace and efficiency. Strategies provided in this book focus on communication skills and draws from sources ranging from the ancient Greeks, entrepreneurs and improv artists.
Janssen, J. (2004). <i>The team captain's leadership manual: the complete guide to developing team leaders whom coaches respect and teammates</i> . Cary, NC: Winning the Mental Game.	Janssen provides a 10-week leadership development program to build effective team leaders in this unique book. Janssen focuses on creating team captains who can set the tone for the team, hold their teammates accountable to a high standard, confront their less disciplined teammates and can address a lot of team problems so the coach doesn't have to.
Janssen, J. (2018). <i>How to hold people accountable manual</i> . Cary, NC: Winning the Mental Game.	Through a seven step process, leaders will learn strategies for effectively establishing, exemplifying, endorsing and enforcing a high-performance culture both on and off the field of play.
Kerr, J. (2013). <i>Legacy: what the All Blacks can teach us about the business of life</i> . London, UK: Constable.	Kerr discusses 15 powerful and practical leadership and business lessons from one of the most successful sport teams in the world, the New Zealand All Blacks. Kerr addresses common questions, including: what are the secrets of sustained success? How do you handle pressure? What is your legacy?
Lencioni, P. (2002). <i>The five dysfunctions of a team: a leadership fable</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.	Through a leadership fable, Lencioni illustrates how to navigate the complex and fascinating world of teams. As the protagonist navigates uncertainty, Lencioni outlines a powerful model and actionable steps that can be used to overcome hurdles and build a cohesive and effective team.
Meyer, U. & Coffey, W. (2015). <i>Above the line: lessons in leadership and life from a championship season</i> . New York, NY: Penguin Random House.	Meyer provides practical and profound leadership and coaching insights through real-life examples from the 2014 Ohio State football championship season. Meyer, one of the most decorated NCAA football head coaches of all time, shares lessons learned from a season filled with seemingly insurmountable challenges and unforgettable victories.
Pressfield, S. (2005). <i>Gates of fire: an epic novel of the battle of Thermopylae</i> . New York, NY: Bantam Books.	The story of the 6-day long battle where 300 Spartan warriors stood their ground against two million Persians at the pass of Thermopylae.
Rotella, B., & Cullen, B. (2015). <i>How champions think: in sports and in life</i> . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.	Rotella, a renowned sport psychologist, provides a powerful book filled with proven performance principles that can be applied to any competitive area of life. This book focuses on how to commit, persevere, deal with failure, and train for success. Rotella provides real life examples and case studies to share actionable insights towards developing a champion mindset.
Scott, K.M. (2017). <i>Radical candor: be a kickass boss without losing your humanity</i> . New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.	In Radical Candor, Scott delivers a method where leaders can learn how to finding meaning in their job, and create an environment where people love their work and their colleagues. By building strong relationships with their employees, leaders can generate better results and higher job satisfaction, all the while maintaining their humanity.
Sinek, S. (2014). <i>Leaders eat last</i> . New York, NY: Penguin Random House.	Sinek addresses how leaders can inspire deep trust and commitment to the company and to one another. Through a biological perspective of how and when people are at their best, Sinek outlines how leaders can shape their organizations such that employees are motivated to take on bigger risks and generate bigger results.
Willink, J., & Babin, L. (2015). <i>Extreme ownership: how U.S. navy SEALs lead and win</i> . New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.	Willink and Babin deliver a compelling narrative paired with applicable instruction to revolutionize leadership everywhere. Through Willink's direct experience as a Navy SEALs team leader, he provides examples and lessons on how to build high-performance teams and dominate their own personal battlefields.

## Appendix F

### General Probing Questions to Elicit Conversations about Vision

The following questions are meant to be used in conversations between coaches of any level to elicit discussions about vision and leading through vision. These questions are not discipline or sport specific and should be tailored to the context of the conversation. When engaging in a conversation about leadership and vision, it is important to first gain an understanding of the individual behind the vision. As a vision is highly personal and unique to the individual leader, getting to know the individual can help to understand where their vision originates from.

1. Why are you a head coach?
2. What makes you unique as a head coach?
  - a. What separates you from others?
3. What are your values?
4. How do you define success?
5. Who do you try to emulate as a head coach?
6. What do you think about when you envision the future of your team?
7. Do you currently have a clear and active vision statement for your team?
8. How do you communicate this vision to your team?
9. How do you deal with resistance to your vision?
10. How do you adjust your vision when circumstances aren't in your favour?
  - a. "if you have a vision of winning the Vanier Cup, but you lose your first 3 games, how do you adjust the vision? Or how do you change the messaging to the team?"
11. Can you give me an example of a failure in relation to your vision and how you overcame the failure?
12. Can you give me an example of a success in relation to your vision and how you celebrated the success?