



**Title:** Do Management Teams Throughout New Zealand Rugby Apply a Learning Organisation Model to Drive Performance?

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**Do management teams throughout New Zealand rugby apply a learning organisation model to drive performance?**

by

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## **Abstract**

This research identifies a learning organisation model in New Zealand rugby teams and describes the trust-based, player-centered management model on which rugby teams in New Zealand operate. This model relies on a continuous reflection and review process enhanced using leadership groups, player groups, and the incorporation of technology. The open and ongoing communication process within the teams, not only helped develop leadership, but it generated learning through various channels in the team.

The overall purpose of this research was to explore whether management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance. Coaches and managers at the 1<sup>st</sup> XV, Club Premiere and National Provincial Championship level were interviewed. Using a thematic analysis five themes were identified: communication, leadership groups, coaching and management model, reflection and review process and principles driving New Zealand rugby. These principles were communication, trust, enjoyment, player-centered approach and continuous learning.

The findings identified a learning organisation structure in the coaching and management model used by New Zealand rugby teams. They also found the widespread use of messaging groups and technology across the teams, and their reflection and review processes, drove the continuous learning. A key to the learning organisation structure were the leadership groups. This research provides an explicit description of the management model used by rugby teams in New Zealand, which can inform future coaching and management. Future research can be undertaken to explore the quality of the learning and communication within New Zealand rugby teams and the effectiveness of leadership groups in management structures.

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## **Chapter I. Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview**

This study comes to life on the back of the researcher's experience as an educator for over 25 years and involvement with New Zealand rugby for 12 years. The researcher's industry experience has provided him with deep knowledge and understanding of the nature of the industry. Based on this experience the researcher has identified key areas that need to be explored if the industry is going to continue its path of continuous improvement, and organisational performance.

The researcher's connections, and involvement with the sport and management industry, both at applied and educational levels, have enabled him to develop a niche area of practice where international consulting in areas sport performance complement his work in education and training. His experience in contextualising content to specific sport industries, for example the New Zealand Diploma in Sport, Recreation and Exercise in the context of Rugby and, delivered to New Zealand Provincial Rugby Unions, provide a background of where the outcomes of this research can be deployed.

Further, the continuous dialogue conducted with overseas sport and rugby industry, where the success and performance of New Zealand rugby is admired, provides an audience that will be benefit of this research. The researcher plans to directly contribute to the industry through this research by incorporating its findings to his class content, developing training workshops for New Zealand Provincial Unions and sharing an insight into a New Zealand rugby's management model based on a learning organisation for overseas stakeholders.

This research aims to determine whether New Zealand rugby applies a learning organisation model to drive performance. It seeks to determine whether this model is implicit or explicit to current management teams and draw out the principles to propose a management system or framework which can be used across other organisations to drive performance via a learning organisation management model.

## **1.2 Underlying Assumptions**

Sport, and rugby in particular, is underpinned by assumptions as to what drives the performance of individuals and the teams. In preparation for this research, certain assumptions will be stated to help clarify popular thoughts regarding sport and rugby, and the pursuit of the research objectives will help determine the management models that drive performance in teams.

The first assumption is that performance in sport equals success by winning. The second assumption states that national cultural heritage plays a fundamental role in how teams perform, and their cultural behaviour. A third assumption contends that performance in rugby comes from the on-field training and working hard.

## **1.3 Significance and Rationale for the study**

The researcher teaches Sport Management and Administration and Sport as a Business and has developed Diploma in Sport programmes that are delivered via New Zealand provincial rugby unions. These programmes are contextualised to the New Zealand rugby industry. The conclusions drawn from this research will provide a body of work that will be used in the teaching and training of future sport graduates. Being able to draw conclusions and a framework from New Zealand rugby coaching and management which can be used across sport

management and administration will provide a New Zealand approach to the learning of sport management and business.

New Zealand rugby annually trains and retrains coaches and managers. Having a working framework of how coaching and management teams drive performance will provide coaches and managers with a tool they can use, and thus support their focus on generating their own learning environment according to their player ecosystem. As many coaches and manager across the country are volunteers, incorporating a researched framework into their work will strengthen their management skills, and support them to transfer this to their own industries and work environments. The ripple effect of a management framework based on a feel-good activity such as rugby, which is also highly successful internationally, can be significant. Thus, the interest of the researcher is to explicitly promote this management structure through the rugby unions.

The researcher has also experienced the ongoing interest in New Zealand rugby through his Podcast, Rugby-Ed (Serrano, 2019), which in 14 episodes has over 600 listens, with 76% of the listeners being from overseas. The researcher also consults with, and speaks to, rugby industry leaders internationally annually with regards to best practices in leading rugby and sport operations and teams.

Individuals and organisations outside New Zealand have asked how is it that New Zealand teams achieve and sustain a high performance. This thesis will provide a research-based response for those markets rather than an experiential response. As organisations and the sporting world are being significantly challenged through the current sporting scenarios this research shall provide direction as to how to use a framework to create a high performing organisations and teams. The novelty for overseas markets is how a learning organisation management model can drive a high-performance culture.

Therefore, this research project will benefit both individuals and organisations in New Zealand and overseas. From coaches and managers of teams to managers and administrators of rugby unions and sport organisations, a diverse audience will benefit from this research. In addition, students and managers in other industries may benefit where the conclusions are applicable. Ultimately, this research aims to provide an academic publication to be used by the researcher and other educators in their teaching, and a tool for future coaches and management teams to be used in their own environments.

## **1.4 Definitions**

### ***Performance***

When explaining the nature of performance, there is no better reference than *The Score takes care of Itself* by Bill Walsh (2010). In his 19 steps of the standard of performance, Walsh refers to performance as the output achieved through, “The exhibition of ferocious and intelligently applied work ethic directed toward continual improvement” (Walsh, 2010, p 16).

### ***Learning Organisation***

A learning organisation is described by Serrano Romero (2018), based on the work of Peter Senge (2010), as the environment where individuals and the organisation are committed to learning as a continuous activity. There is a true commitment to learning, and as such individuals are prepared to be wrong and continue learning (Senge, 2010)

### ***Culture***

Culture is a particular group’s way of being or life (Rothman, 2014), or way of being or behaving. The All Blacks coach, Wayne Smith refers to team culture as the behaviour taken on by

the group, where the players and coaches of the Waikato Chiefs would ride bicycles around Hamilton to be fit and be amongst the community. (Smith, 2020)

### ***Player ecosystem***

The player ecosystem is the network of people, organisations, events and circumstances in which players are involved, such as work, relationships, and study, all of which affect the players contribution to team performance.

### ***Framework***

For the purpose of this research, framework is defined as the operational structure provided to enable the performance of the members of a team.

### ***Adaptive management***

The adaptive management approach in this research is defined as the ability to identify contingencies and signals from the organisation's environment or co-existing ecosystems, develop strategies that take into account the organisation's and player's ecosystems, and the actions that are taken to accommodate new and changing environments.

## **1.5 Background**

The researcher's role as a lecturer at Manukau Institute of Technology, and a mental skills coach for the Counties Manukau Rugby Football Union, has provided insight into creating learning environments and working towards supporting others to achieve as high as they possibly can. Everyone has their own approaches to getting others to achieve and maximising their potential, but in rugby environments it is common to experience a somewhat similar approach to education. In particular, in New Zealand rugby, coaching and management teams are made up, at the very minimum, of by a coach and a manager, who together create an environment to enable

the team to perform. The question is raised: 'Is there a management model in this environment, which is left to chance, or is there an implicit or explicit system put in place to drive performance within New Zealand Rugby teams?'

New Zealand rugby teams have a specific management structure in place; the minimum is a coach and manager. As teams compete at higher levels their management structures include more participants, as like in any other organisation. From the researcher's experience overseas, these management teams are recognised for leading teams well and achieving performance. Management teams across different levels of New Zealand Rugby have common approaches towards management of their teams and this is what the researcher seeks to investigate and describe.

When driving performance in a sports team, performance can be synonymous with winning, however in the way New Zealand rugby drives performance, winning is the cause and the effect of that drive. Coaches are trained to be skill developers (New Zealand Rugby, n.d., p 7-9); their formation focuses on teaching and developing, which is visible in the content in the New Zealand Rugby coaching resources (New Zealand Rugby, 2016).

Sport has a feel-good nature, and in New Zealand, rugby is the national pastime and an aspirational discipline for many in society (Kerr, 2013). The tradition and challenge of mastering this discipline, as a player or coach, is present from a positive perspective, where all participants approach it with an intention to contribute and succeed at it (Pink, 2009). This feel-good nature of being involved in a sport, such as rugby, draws in volunteer coaches on a yearly basis to coach and manage teams at all age and skill level. These coaches and management teams formed follow a management system that enables New Zealand rugby to continue to achieve on a yearly basis; this management approach is what drives continuous performance culture in the sport.

In the past 12 years, the researcher has noticed that coaching and management teams make a strong commitment to their team's performance. Management teams apply continuous improvement methods that correlate with the player's environments. When the topic of how New Zealand teams are run and perform is discussed overseas, the question often arises: 'What do the players do in training, what is the magic formula?' As a mental skills coach in rugby, there is an awareness that players all over the world have the potential to perform, but it is how they are coached, managed, and developed that makes the difference over time in New Zealand.

### **1.5 Relevant findings from Literature**

Past studies of successful teams, particularly their coaches and managers, such as Coaches Wooden, Walsh and Holtz, noted in the literature review, revealed that they were all teachers (Serrano Romero, 2018). In New Zealand, recent key coaches, who have driven success, have also been teachers, according to Wayne Smith (McKendry, 2018), Gilbert Enoka (Gray, 2016) and Graham Henry (Serrano Romero, 2018). The strong connection to teaching has facilitated a learning environment at the All Blacks level, but the how this is embraced at all levels of New Zealand rugby is what this research will show. As an educator, this demonstration of connection, where other teachers have driven performance from a continuous learning environment, resonates strongly with the researcher.

In the case of NZ rugby, the coaching education resources highly focus on skill acquisition from the player perspective, and thus developing skills from the coaching and management perspective. This sets the background for the start of a continuous learning environment with most teams. From a management perspective, rugby teams continuously adapt to contingencies and continue to drive performance. How learning organisations adapt to

contingency will provide a point of comparison as to how coaching and management teams adapt to their own contingencies and continue to drive performance.

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The aim of this research is to explore whether management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance. The research will explore this via three research objectives.

Firstly, the researcher will determine whether New Zealand Rugby uses a specific management model.

Secondly, the research aims to describe the management model use by New Zealand rugby.

Thirdly, the researcher aims to propose a system or framework to be used by management teams to implement a learning organisation management model with team to drive performance.

## **1.7 Research Questions and sub questions**

The overarching research question for this thesis is ‘do management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance?’ This research question will be explored through a series of research sub questions. Questions for the interviews (focusing on interviewees from a range of performance levels of rugby in New Zealand,) will be directly aligned with these research questions and sub questions.

The research sub-questions are:

1. Does New Zealand Rugby use a management model to lead teams?

2. What are the key principles for managing rugby teams?
3. What is the focus of the management model used by NZ rugby?
4. How is performance defined by management teams?
5. How can the organisational structure of the team facilitate a continuous improvement model based on learning?

## **1.8 Methodology**

The methodology of this research will be sustained on the basis of the researcher's philosophical approach to the topic. The researcher will bring a pragmatic approach, in which he will be looking for explanations and answers from management teams that will provide meaningful and practical application of the research to real industry environments. The researcher's exploratory approach will be inductive as he intends to propose a system or framework to be used by management teams to implement a learning organisation management model for teams to drive performance. This will be pursued via a qualitative, mono-method strategy to data gathering.

The researcher will take on a cross-sectional study to look at management teams in New Zealand rugby across different age groups and performance levels. In order to have a representation of New Zealand rugby at the different performance levels, the research will focus on secondary schools First XV rugby teams, Senior Club rugby teams and Provincial Representative teams. The data will be gathered via a mono-method approach consisting of interviews of coaches and managers of the different teams. Non-probability sampling will be used as the researcher has access to teams across different rugby unions and grade levels which can provide the spectrum for the proposed research. The findings will be analysed using a

thematic analysis that will aim to identify whether rugby teams in New Zealand are managed through a learning organisation model and describe the management models being used.

The research population will consist of coaches and managers of the 1<sup>st</sup> XV teams, Senior Club teams and Provincial Representative teams in secondary schools. The management and coaching staff of the rugby teams will be sought from the Auckland, Counties Manukau, Waikato and Manawatu Provincial Rugby Unions. Teams will be approached, and separate interviews will be requested, from the coach and manager of the teams. The interviews will be held at either the Provincial Union, at the Team's clubrooms, school or via video conferencing if required due to social distancing and contact tracing regulations in place in 2020.

The interview will be a semi-structured interview, which will explore the management model, the processes to lead the team, the key principles for the management team, whether the team includes a reflective process in their management and how they describe performance. The interview will also explore the processes and outcomes the coaching and management obtained through their work and communication with the team. It will also explore whether the coaching and management staff implement a learning environment within their teams that is seen to drive performance.

Participants will be purposively selected based on the level of rugby team they coach and manage, to capture the different stages identified in New Zealand Rugby that go from development to performance coaching. One group of participants will be coaches and managers at 1st XV Rugby level at secondary schools. A second group of participants will be coaches and managers who work with a team at provincial premiere club level. The third group of participants will be coaches and managers who work with a team at a professional level either at National Provincial Championship level.

## **1.9 Limitations, Delimitations and Bias**

### ***Limitations***

The research may be affected by limitations regarding the objectivity and the potential generalisability of the conclusions. The scope of the teams chosen to be interviewed, and the fact that the research will focus on data collected from coaches and managers, not players, are aspects which can limit the reliability of the conclusions as they are a true representation of the management model applied in New Zealand rugby. This in turn will impact on the generalisability of the findings.

### ***Bias***

The researcher's involvement with New Zealand rugby teams can generate a bias in the construction and analysis of the interview questions. This bias will be addressed to ensure that the data gathering is directly related to the objectives of the research, and the identified research questions. The same questions will be consistently used across all teams, and all data will be interpreted collectively in pursuit of generalised findings. Furthermore, any findings and consequent conclusions will be clearly triangulated with the research design and methodology, and the literature reviewed.

### ***Delimitations***

To ensure that the research covers a broad scope of New Zealand rugby, the coaching and management teams to be interviewed will come from different provincial unions. Also, the research will focus on teams competing at different levels ranging from High School to professional. By spreading the scope both geographically and demographically the data will be more representative of New Zealand.

The research will take on an intrinsic analysis of the management teams. Similar to the way in which Henry Mintzberg approached his study in *The Nature of Managerial Work* (Mintzberg, 1973), by observing managers in their interactions with their teams. (Serrano Romero, 2018). This will allow the research to focus on the coach's and manager's perspectives as they utilise their management structures to generate learning environments that drive performance.

The researcher's involvement in rugby can condition the research from his viewpoint. To reduce this bias, while the data will be collected only through interviews, the information will be triangulated, and trends will be identified by a thematic analysis looking to identify common principles being applied in the management teams interviewed and surveyed.

### **1.10 Ethical Considerations**

The research will be guided by the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, partnership, participation and protection. The researcher will work in partnership with the rugby unions, teams and its people. The research will embrace the participation of the coaching and management staff of teams irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, and the participants will be protected by anonymity and confidentiality.

The research may potentially have areas of interest to Māori depending on the ethnic background of the coaching and management staff. The kaupapa of team may provide an interest for Māori on how kaupapa is represented through NZ rugby team management structures. Coaches and managers will be asked for their ethnic backgrounds. The analysis of the interview may provide conclusions which may be of interest to Māori.

The participants will not be identified in the research in order to maintain their anonymity. Participants will be provided with an information sheet, so they are fully informed of their role in the study and how the information will be disseminated. It provides them the chance to ask questions, and the rights they have. They will be given due time to consider their participation and will be given the chance to withdraw from participation in the project at any time up until the point at which the data is anonymised and amalgamated into the report, without any disadvantage of any kind to the participant.

They will also be provided a consent sheet they will need to sign before taking part in the study. The consent will be written informed voluntary consent. Participants will be able to withdraw from participation in the project at any time up until the point at which the data is anonymised and amalgamated into the report, without any disadvantage to of any kind.

All personal participant information will be kept anonymous and confidential. The audio recordings and transcripts used for the purpose of this research, and any other notes or documentation will be kept by the researcher. All data will be kept on a password protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet. All data will be kept for 5 years after the completion of the research.

The participants will be given back a transcript of their interview so they can verify its content. By keeping the interviews anonymous across all teams, any potential conflict of interest will be eliminated.

The researcher will interview teams in which he has direct participation. While this may indicate a potential bias, the researcher will ensure the same questions are consistently asked across all management and coaching teams. The researcher will interpret data collectively thus not giving not differentiating amongst the teams he has direct participation and those he does not.

There will be no risk for the research participants and no compensation will be offered to the research participants.

### **1.11 Layout of the study**

The subsequent chapters of this research will be focused as follows.

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical constructs of this study. It will present an industry analysis of New Zealand rugby using the following strategic analyses; a SWOT analysis, McKinsey's 7-S to assess changes, a PESTEL and an Industry Life Cycle analysis. These analyses will provide a scenario of where New Zealand rugby is at from a financial, governance and operational point of view in a pandemic-impacted year.

In Chapter Three, existing literature will be reviewed exploring the background to management theories from classical management theories to the postmodern theories. Furthermore, research on rugby team environments will be reviewed looking at international research and recent research in New Zealand rugby environments.

In Chapter Four, the research methodology will be presented. A pragmatic approach will be presented through the methodology of a qualitative mono-method cross sectional study. The non-probability sampling will be described, as well as the thematic analysis of the findings.

In Chapter Five, the findings and analysis of the data will be presented. The findings of 11 interviews will be presented using an inductive and interpretive analysis. The main themes will be discussed, and the key principles that drive New Zealand rugby will be described.

Finally, in Chapter 6, the conclusions and recommendations of this research will be presented. This chapter will provide a relationship to previous research and a thorough discussion as to how this research expands the conclusions of previous studies done in New

Zealand rugby. It will also provide recommendations for future research and application of the management model used by New Zealand rugby.

## **Chapter II: Theoretical Constructs and Industry Analysis**

### **2.1 Introduction and Theoretical Construct**

In this chapter, organisational behaviour is discussed as the theoretical construct behind the performance of New Zealand rugby teams, and an industry analysis of New Zealand rugby is conducted to understand the environment in which performance is driven.

Organisational behaviour addresses attitudes and behaviours of all the stakeholders within an organisation. When a sport organisation is observed, it is made up of volunteers, coaches, managers, players, officials, and supporters. How these different stakeholders interact, and how effective they are in pursuing their vision, is what concerns organisational behaviour. The field of organisational behaviour provides a platform to observe the values, beliefs, attitudes, and culture of rugby organisations and specifically teams to establish a model for practising coaches and managers. The study of organisational processes within teams and the interdependency of stakeholders provides a background as to how a sport industry operates, what it can achieve and how it can adapt.

Sport organisations are competitive as they are in the business of competing. They compete for patrons, consumers, and stakeholders, as well as competing on the playing field. Organisational behaviour approaches the understanding of how these members interact by identifying the nature of the individual characteristics of leaders and followers, how they interact together and how the sport organisation is structured all together. The way members of a sport organisation experience their involvement can generate strong motivation, not only to themselves to continue being involved and developing their teams and organisation, but also for other members on how they engage and as a group to achieve their visions and goals.

In this research, it is questioned whether New Zealand rugby applies a learning organisation model to drive performance. The fact that there is a learning organisation model and an intention to drive performance are both topics that demand a theoretical inquiry through the lens of an organisational behaviour perspective to approach the understanding of these phenomena. Organisational behaviour examines how individuals are managed, their personalities and attitudes within their teams, and the kind of personality a team has. While managing teams, the topic of leadership arises, and it is an element to consider regarding the influence it may have on the shaping of the performance of a team. In this process of determining team success, based on performance, the concept of attribution needs to be considered; Is team performance attributed to the players or the management?

In a learning environment, players and management are in multidirectional feedback where learning is acquired. Determining the relevance of management driving this learning in a team environment needs to consider additional factors. Firstly, management must have an attitude that will drive a behaviour that will influence learning. Attitude consists of commitment and satisfaction. Commitment is represented by placing value on the team's vision, and the members that make up the team. While the attitude must provide a satisfaction to continue to drive the positive behaviours of the team.

From an organisational behaviour perspective learning, motivation, training and development are elements that support the performance of individuals and teams. When commitment and satisfaction can shape the positive attitudes, learning behaviours follow. Motivation is activated by committing to challenges and the satisfaction of overcoming them, which allows an openness to further training and development. Understanding that training focuses on skills and abilities, while development focuses on capabilities in an overall process,

enables this research to address the learning environments in New Zealand rugby teams, as either organisations that focus on training or development. The performance feedback in each of these cases is different as there are two different learning approaches.

Sport organisations that explicitly encourage and support the learning process as a strategic objective are learning organisations (Taylor et al., 2015). Under this definition the attitude, commitment and satisfaction towards learning is the strategic objective of a learning organisation. These learning organisations can take on several approaches: behavioural, cognitive, or constructivist. The first approach focuses on learning by means of feedback on the observation of a behaviour. While the cognitive approach focuses on the mental processes of the learner and the constructivist approach looks at the learner experience and the interpretative learning that comes from the experience.

Unlike other organisations, an underlying factor in sport organisations is that the learning is grouped around a game. The very nature of a game is that it is meant to be fun and generate enjoyment, which leads to the positive attitudes that enable learning behaviours. In a player-centered coaching model, having the concept of fun ahead of everything else sets the tone of the behaviour that can eventually follow. As sport is the subject of this study, it comprehends the factors competition, rules and how to execute within the playing conditions. These factors are the pillars by which organisational behaviour is exhibited in a sport organisation. The interaction among the members of a team and their fulfillment of goals will be tightly constrained to these factors in a sport organisation. From an external point of view, sport organisations are open systems where their members, teams and the organisations are influenced by multiple factors foreign to the organisation. How well the organisation can take on the inputs from external

factors, work with them and deliver a service, a product or a sporting results will shape the organisational behaviour.

Situating this research from a theoretical construct of organisational behaviour enables the researcher to understand the research topic better. This understanding is grounded in how learning in sport organisations can occur via three different theories, the Behavioral approach, the Cognitive approach and the Constructivist approach, and that the learning can focus on different outcomes being training of skills and abilities or the development of capabilities. This will enable the researcher to contextualise the learning taking place in the different rugby teams, as the approaches and objectives may vary depending on the age and skill level of the athletes.

## **2.2 Industry Analysis of New Zealand Rugby**

The industry analysis of New Zealand rugby focuses on the New Zealand rugby from a team perspective. The models are used to analyse the capacity of New Zealand rugby to adapt to change and to continually evolve through the application of learning through their management model. For this reason, four strategic analysis tools will be used; a SWOT analysis, McKinsey's 7-S to assess changes, a PESTEL and an Industry Life Cycle analysis.

These industry analysis tools were selected as they provide a mix between internal and external forces acting on the rugby organisations. The SWOT provides an introductory analysis into the rugby industry in New Zealand allowing a transition to a wider analysis tool in the form of PESTEL, which analyses the current climate in New Zealand Sport and Rugby in midst of the COVID 19 pandemic. The McKinsey's 7-S analytic tool helps assess the impact of the current changes in New Zealand rugby, and finally the Industry Life Cycle analytic tool provides a closer look at New Zealand rugby environments to understand what stage of development

organisations such as the rugby clubs and provincial unions are at, and how receptive they can be with regards to changes.

### 2.2.1 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis provides an overarching view of the strategic position of the rugby industry in New Zealand. It is a tool widely used by profit and non-profit organisations and its use transcends to non-business related organisations, such as teams and groups in general. The SWOT analysis is a commonly used and understood resource to describe an organisation with the intention of achieving objectives. In the sporting environment, a SWOT analysis is applicable to describe teams, clubs, and associations, see Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 SWOT Analysis

<p><b>Strength</b></p>	<p>Rugby continues to be New Zealand’s national sport, by which the country is recognised. The All Blacks brand is strong and recognisable across the world. The fact that Super Rugby Aotearoa is the only form of professional rugby being played post Covid-19 lockdown also gives New Zealand Rugby an advanced placement as a product for rugby consumers around the world. Domestically, the reach of New Zealand Rugby through the network of provincial rugby unions provides a mature structure to reach communities across the country in an organised and direct way to better serve its stakeholders. There is also a base of employed sport administrators who can continue to develop rugby and adapt its offering to communities.</p> <p>Colleges and their 1<sup>st</sup> XV competitions are one of the most stable sectors of the game. Schools will continue to have students comes through, the coaches and volunteers are in-house, being made up of teachers and parents and in some cases hired specialized coaches. Schools have available resources to continue developing this space. There has been a growing media output due to the televised 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby for over eight years allowing this segment to continue to grow as an attractive product for youth.</p> <p>Local clubs are situated within their communities across the country enabling them to be hubs for community gathering from both a social and business</p>
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	<p>perspective. The positioning of clubs amongst the community is a strength highlighted by their extended history across New Zealand towns and cities.</p>
<b>Weakness</b>	<p>Due to the consequences of COVID-19 in 2020, all provincial representative competitions have been suspended for 2020. The only two categories going ahead are the top sides for Men's and Women's rugby, in the Mitre10 Cup and Farah Palmer Cup respectively. This has led to the cancelation of the season of the Heartland Championship where 12 rugby unions participate with their top sides. Also, the annual Jock Hobbs Memorial Under 19 Tournament, which congregates the provincial unions with the best players in the age group, who then go on to make up the New Zealand Under 20's team that represents the country at the annual World Rugby Junior World Cup, was cancelled. Cancelling this tournament restricts this age group from a traditional development pathway in 2020. The tournament and competition cancelations in 2020, have weakened the pathways for players and coaches. Without these immediate pathways, the core business for New Zealand Rugby, of being able to offer rugby to its communities has been struck.</p> <p>The suspension of club and school rugby during the COVID-19 lockdown at the start of the rugby season also weakened the basis of rugby in the communities, testing the sustainability of the clubs and local competitions. This weakening was seen in the numbers of volunteers, players, coaches and referees, as well as financial constraints for clubs and rugby programmes with traditional funding options unavailable in 2020, such as the gaming and licensing trusts. Without these funding options, and with an economic downturn, sport organisations across New Zealand have had to lose staff and reduce their operations to be able to function within the available resources. New Zealand Rugby and the Provincial Rugby Unions have been directly affected by this, with staff being required to take salary deductions of 20%, working less days and the New Zealand Rugby Union looking to cut 50% of the jobs; women's rugby being one of the areas most affected.</p> <p>The fragile financial position of the New Zealand Rugby Union, who announced a \$7.4 million loss for 2019, and forecasted a \$120m decline in revenue for 2020, contribute even further to a dismal financial position in the Post Covid-19 environment (Francis, 2020).</p>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<p>As New Zealand was able to come out of lockdown faster than other countries and restart professional and amateur sport with attending public, it has generated the opportunity to attract followers, volunteers, and participants to return to rugby as a form of entertainment. This has been seen with the numerous crowds attending Super Rugby Aotearoa, with, for</p>

	<p>example, the Auckland Blues registering their biggest crowd for a home game in 15 years (Geenty, 2020). Also, New Zealand rugby is in the spotlight as a sporting product for rugby commercial sponsors and television rights, as it has been the first professional sport being played around the world after the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020.</p> <p>At a local level in New Zealand, the chance to be able to extend the rugby seasons through Term Three has allowed clubs to resurface and project an operation to bring more financial stability. Also, the loss of grade representation at the provincial level, allows for greater interest to develop around 1<sup>st</sup> XV College Rugby, a product that has been growing in profile over the last decade. There are also opportunities for neighbouring provincial unions to develop initiatives together which can provide regional competitions for players and development for coaches and referees.</p> <p>As all sport organisations are being affected by the reduction of funding options. There is the opportunity for sport clubs to merge into sport hubs that congregate several sports under one organisation to streamline operational cost and attract greater funding options as their outreach is greater than just one sport code (e.g. Hutt City Sportville, Kolmar- Papatoetoe). While provincial rugby unions, have the opportunity to restructure their competition format to allow greater participation of their communities and enable the clubs to be sport hubs for their community throughout the week (e.g. Under 85 or Under 21's competition on Friday nights, generating club life on Friday and Saturdays).</p> <p>There is an opportunity to look for an alternative development pathway for coaches and players in partnership with tertiary education providers, in this way alleviating financial cost in this area for the provincial unions. Also, the incorporation of online training and development sessions and the sharing of knowledge across New Zealand rugby has flourished during the pandemic and has become a real opportunity to share knowledge across multiple communication channels, which can allow for new forms of engagement with stakeholders.</p>
<b>Threats</b>	<p>The main threat for the rugby industry in New Zealand is the lack of funding. This has been a threat for years and it has heightened post Covid19 lockdown. The main traditional source of funding from the gaming and community trust has reduced or disappear. Also, the funding options for the clubs and the rugby unions have not changed, thus a lack of adaptability to</p>

	<p>seek new funding options or restructure to accommodate for existing funding is a self-inflicted threat.</p> <p>The rise of other team sports such as football and basketball, which compete for player numbers over the same season with rugby has been threat which continues and poses an even greater challenged when rugby in New Zealand is being affected by job losses and salary reductions of staff. Thus, affecting the motivation rugby staff who can help overturn this trend.</p> <p>In 2020, Covid-19 has been the principal threat for all sports. Firstly, it put a halt on all forms of rugby, then it set restrictions on how to return to play and even cancelled competitions across New Zealand. The ongoing threat of the pandemic in the case of community spread, it could put a definite end to the 2020 rugby season and raise further financial and engagement challenges for the oncoming years.</p>
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*Note: Source - Serrano, 2020.*

A weakened financial position for New Zealand Rugby coming into 2020, plus the hit of the Coronavirus pandemic and the possibility of continuous disruption to competitions were jeopardising the sustainability of rugby in the formats known at the beginning of 2020. The flexibility shown by New Zealand Rugby to adapt to the current environment and reshape competitions and restructure its operations, such as Super Rugby Aotearoa and the local provincial competitions, is an encouraging sign as to how New Zealand Rugby can adapt to change. The immediate results have been an increased attendance and viewership of Super Rugby Aotearoa, resulting in growing interest and following of rugby. This, on top of a healthy College Rugby competitions, enables the sport to continue developing at the centre of New Zealand communities. Aside from the challenges the pandemic has posed to rugby, and sport in general, it has allowed coaches and managers to be more engaged in their season and players in 2020. With regards to the three tiers of rugby being studied in this research, they have all been able to carry on their season and pursue ongoing coaching development via new communication channels.

### 2.2.2 McKinsey's 7-S Analysis

The McKinsey's 7-S model provides an internal analysis of New Zealand Rugby with a focus on its capacity to take on change. As New Zealand Rugby experiences challenging times financially, and due to the pandemic, this internal analysis provides a position to be able to understand the values and structures that are helping New Zealand Rugby adapt to current scenarios. New Zealand Rugby's annual report focuses on six priority areas that will help determine how aligned these priorities are with the current state of rugby New Zealand.

#### *Strategy*

New Zealand rugby is driven by the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU), thus when defining the strategy behind rugby in New Zealand the NZRU's strategic focus areas below are the guide (New Zealand Rugby Union, 2020).

1. Teams in black winning pinnacle events
2. Creating a more respectful and inclusive culture
3. More players and more communities participating
4. Fans are engaged and numbers growing
5. Positive global presence
6. Develop, diversify and maximise commercial opportunities.

New Zealand Rugby aims to meet these focus areas by taking a holistic approach to the welfare of its people – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social, focusing on the power of rugby to assist them to improve their lives (New Zealand Rugby Union, 2020).

In the current scenario, New Zealand Rugby has been challenged in its focus areas. In 2019, the All Black did not win the Rugby World Cup and the 2020 pinnacle events such as the World Rugby U20 Championship, Olympic Games, HSBC Sevens Series, Rugby Championship and

test matches have been either cancelled, postponed or are pending decisions, due to the current pandemic. These events have affected the opportunity for New Zealand teams to showcase their winning culture, grow fans and maximise commercial opportunities.

Domestically, the pandemic has enhanced a collaborative culture among New Zealand Rugby stakeholders using digital technologies. Throughout the lockdown period and ongoing post lockdown, stakeholder engagement and following has strengthened, this is seen in online activity (Headfirst programme) and attendance at Super Rugby Aotearoa. Super Rugby Aotearoa is the only professional rugby being played post lockdowns, and this has favoured the New Zealand rugby's global presence, despite not being able to compete in international competitions thus far. In term three and four, a count of participation numbers will provide information regarding whether New Zealand rugby has been able to retain or gain more participant numbers post COVID-19. The loss of provincial representative competitions should have an impact; however this may be reverted by participation at club level.

The adjusted strategy has been to focus on local community rugby to grow participation numbers and ensure the viability of provincial unions and local clubs. This has been assisted by financial aid provided by NZRU to provincial unions and the New Zealand government relief package for sport organisations.

### *Structure*

For the purpose of this industry analysis, the structure will be examined from three perspectives: the organisational perspective; the competition perspective; and the team perspective.

New Zealand Rugby is organised at the national level by the New Zealand Rugby Union and under it there are 26 provincial rugby unions. Fourteen make up the major unions that

compete in the Mitre10 Cup and 12 rugby unions make up Heartland Rugby. Each rugby union administrates community, club and school rugby in their provincial geographical area.

From a competition perspective rugby is organised from the age of five to adults into the following categories. The competition structure provides a pathway for players and coaches to grow and develop their career in the sport.

- Junior Rugby from Under 5 to Under 13
- College rugby from Year 9 to Year 13 in school (ages 13 to 18 approximately)
- Senior Rugby (classed as Under 19 and above)
- Under 19 Provincial representative
- Under 85 Provincial representative
- Provincial B Side
- Provincial A Side competing in Mitre10 Cup, Heartland Championship or Farah Palmer Cup
- Super Rugby Franchise
- National Representation

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a direct effect on the structure above, as the following competitions have been cancelled or are postponed for the time being.

- Under 19 Provincial representative
- Under 85 Provincial representative
- Provincial B Side
- Heartland Championship
- National Representation.

From a team perspective, all teams from the smallest grade of rugby are organised by at least a coach and a manager. As teams compete at a higher level the coaching and management teams can become more elaborate by having multiple coaches, trainers, managers and health professionals. The management structure generates operational challenges for teams to solve to achieve more effective outcomes. When availability of volunteers is affected, the depth of the structure of these management teams is affected, thus impacting on the experience of the players. The pandemic and economic downturn can influence the management structures at the provincial level.

### *Systems*

With a new national selector and coaching staff, New Zealand Rugby is rolling out a new talent identification system in 2020. However, the stoppage of Super Rugby and cancelation of international test matches did not allow these systems to be tested. Furthermore, team selections for North and South Island teams, for a one-off game, is a new system being put in place to select players for national representation.

The COVID19 pandemic has also increased the systems coaches and managing teams need to implement for teams to be able to train and play. The increase in rules and regulations generated a delay in the return to play as the initial guidelines, though they allowed teams to train, made the burden of implementing the systems too resource-heavy to be able to make training and playing viable. These guidelines for return to play are at <https://www.nzrugby.co.nz/news-and-events/covid-19/>.

### *Shared Values*

The common value shared across New Zealand Rugby is to “Aspire to take a holistic approach to the welfare of our people – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social,

focusing on the power of rugby to assist them to improve their lives. New Zealand Rugby aims to create an environment that is attractive and welcoming, a game for all” (New Zealand Rugby Union, 2020).

Based on this value of assisting to improve lives, New Zealand Rugby, from a coaching and management perspective, strongly focuses on developing individuals through the acquisition of playing skills or decision making. These values are transmitted through coach development courses delivered by provincial rugby unions with guidelines developed by the New Zealand Rugby Union.

### *Style*

The relationship among the rugby unions, and the rugby unions and the clubs, tends to be collaborative. There is a sense of mentorship in the way messages, training and development are transmitted from one organisation to another, and from the provincial unions to the clubs and coaching and management teams. Annually the staff of the provincial unions attend conferences organised by the NZRU, where participants are encouraged to collaborate, share ideas and resources with other staff members from other provincial unions. This is then replicated at the provincial level, as coaches and managers are brought together by the provincial unions to collaborate and develop and thus enhance the rugby knowledge in the unions. As the approach is collaborative it encourages those among these groups to grow. The style requires the participants to act and do in their respective roles rather than to follow, though it can be barrier for those with less rugby experience or prior knowledge to join, as it will require them to immediately take on roles. Overall New Zealand Rugby and its participants have a ‘can do’ attitude.

### *Staff*

From the perspective of this industry analysis, the staff roles of importance are the team coaches and managers. The economic downturn due to the pandemic has created a strain on volunteer numbers as there are fewer volunteers available as people need to find and take on new jobs. The staff positions at the 1<sup>st</sup> XV School rugby level should remain consistent as these positions are filled primarily by school teaching staff and parents, which will remain in their roles unaffected by the pandemic.

At the national organisation and provincial level there have already been staff redundancies announced, thus limiting the outreach these organisations were achieving in the community. The development work previously done by NZRU will now need to be done by staff at provincial unions and delegated to clubs within their coaching and management structures. The reduction in available funding will require reshaping of the use of volunteers and remaining staff to continue to develop the focus areas of the sport.

Though female staff involved in the development of women's rugby have lost their jobs, this will be a staffing area that will be needed to further develop women's rugby, as it is the area with the biggest growth in the past few years, with 11% increase in female players in 2019 and increase of viewership of the Black Ferns and Black Fern Sevens of 31% and 22% respectively (New Zealand Rugby Union, 2020).

### *Skills*

The strongest skills present across New Zealand Rugby are:

- Communication skills
- People skills, be engaging
- Transmitting Rugby playing skills

- Coaching / teaching delivery skills
- Organisational skills.

New Zealand rugby is not only well known for its skills development of the players, but also of the way rugby knowledge is transmitted throughout the industry. There are currently some players and coaches who have returned from overseas, which will increase the offering of skills. This can produce a bottle neck in the growth and development of the skills of current participants. Annually, coaches and managers must renew their coaching accreditation, which allows coaches to stay current with the latest changes or innovations that may have been introduced. The ongoing availability of training and development for coaches and managers allows those involved in rugby to have similar skills across the country that help develop players who can then adapt to different coaches or playing groups as the skills and systems have been similar throughout their formation.

From this analysis, despite the challenges coming out of COVID 19, we know there are available people to continue to carry out the rugby development and coaching. The collaborative nature of this industry is highlighted and has enabled rugby to continue and adapt in an unprecedented year. The adaptiveness discussed in the analysis should be evidenced in the coaching and management approaches in teams subject to this study. How coaches adapt and collaborate to create ongoing learning environments is a shared value extracted from this analysis which should inform the objectives of this research.

### **2.2.3 PESTEL Analysis**

A PESTEL analysis of New Zealand Rugby aims to explore the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors that have an effect on New Zealand rugby. New Zealand is recognised as the best rugby nation in the world having the reigning

women's world champions and the All Blacks until the 2019 World Cup had held the number one ranking for 509 weeks and collected two world cups in this period (McConnell, 2019). Its international influence on the game of rugby is significant and it has been demonstrated during the COVID19 pandemic being the first country to start live sport, rugby, with crowds. Therefore, this PESTEL analysis is of significance as the projection of New Zealand rugby goes beyond the shores of New Zealand.

Table 2.2 PESTEL Analysis

<p><b>Political</b></p>	<p>New Zealand Rugby is governed by the New Zealand Rugby Union. The country and administration of rugby is divided into 26 provincial rugby union, who manage their own club competitions, junior rugby development and college rugby.</p> <p>New Zealand Rugby is represented internationally in South African, Argentinian New Zealand, and Australian Rugby (SAANZAR) and World Rugby. The former is the association where New Zealand participates in both Super Rugby and The Rugby Championship with Australia, South Africa and Argentina. While New Zealand is represented in World Rugby by Bart Campbell in the Executive Committee, Steve Tew as Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee and on the Regulations Committee, while current New Zealand Rugby CEO, Mark Robinson is on the Professional Game Committee.</p> <p>Domestically, New Zealand Rugby is governed by a diversified board of nine members chaired by Brent Impey, including two women and Pasifika and Maori members. The strategic priorities for New Zealand Rugby are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Zealand teams winning pinnacle events</li> <li>• Creating a more respectful and inclusive culture</li> <li>• More players and communities participating</li> <li>• Fans are engaged and numbers growing</li> <li>• Positive global presence</li> <li>• Develop, Diversify and maximise commercial opportunities</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Environmental</b></p>	<p>The COVID 19 pandemic has affected the rugby in New Zealand in 2020. The pandemic, and consequential March to April lockdowns, affected sport and halted the Super Rugby, and the start of provincial club and school competitions across the country. The restrictions in place affected the return to play and slowed the access of players and participants to their clubs. After the lockdown the Heartland Competition was cancelled for the season and the 2020 season focus across the country has been to have competitions in place with an adjusted calendar.</p> <p>Super Rugby has been affected by the pandemic as it has been reshaped into a domestic competition, Super Rugby Aotearoa. While the club, school, Mitre10 Cup and Farah Palmer Cup competitions will be held, subject to there not being community transmission of COVID19, and the country not going into lockdown, as this could lead to adapting the competition calendars, playing with no spectator, suspension or cancelation of competitions.</p>
<p><b>Social</b></p>	<p>It is understood in New Zealand that without community involvement in Rugby, there would not be a chance to excel and be world leading in the sport. The focus is for New Zealand rugby to have participation of community members in the different roles the sport requires: coaches, referees, players and volunteers.</p> <p>In the past two years, the participation rate of players has grown, led strongly by the growth in women players - 11%. There still remains a focus on referees where there is one referee for every 38.2 players, and refereeing is promoted as a way to stay involved in the game. Currently there is one coach for every 13 players, leaving each squad with approximately two coaches.</p> <p>In the wider Auckland Region, there has been recognition of the predominant participation of Pasifika representatives in rugby, and initiatives as The Navigating Two Worlds Project have been put in place to allow better representation of Pasifika at governance and management levels in rugby. Also, the changing population in New Zealand, primarily in the Auckland region has led to the Chinese Engagement Programme which has captured an 8-10% participation in junior players.</p>

<p><b>Technological</b></p>	<p>Technology has affected New Zealand rugby largely via broadcasting. In New Zealand, rugby is not free to air, and all rugby is televised via SkySports. The broadcasting of rugby starts with the Secondary School rugby games, the Condor Sevens, and the World Schools Sevens, Farah Palmer Cup, Mitre10 Cup, World Rugby Sevens Series, Super Rugby as well as international matches.</p> <p>Fan participation is measured in terms of viewership through paid broadcasting and social media engagement. The latter becoming an ongoing platform for information, highlights and interviews at the different levels of the game.</p> <p>During the COVID19 pandemic lockdown, as rugby from a coaching and playing perspective was stopped, the use of Zoom video calls, interviews and webinars became largely available via social media platforms engaging the rugby communities around the country. This incorporation of technology has made access to knowledge from New Zealand Rugby actors much more accessible and closer. This has led to extensive rugby development taking place online in 2020.</p>
<p><b>Economical</b></p>	<p>New Zealand Rugby reported a loss of \$7.4 million for 2019 (Napier, 2020). This impacts all areas of the game and in particular New Zealand Rugby staff.</p> <p>A restructuring of how NZRU and its staff operate, are part of the plans to free \$20 to \$30 million dollars a year. One of the initiatives is to restructure the talent identification process by moving it from the provincial unions to the Super Rugby Franchises, freeing up the expenditure of high performance programmes in the provincial unions and having them focus primarily on community rugby.</p> <p>The economic effects of the pandemic will create more stress for rugby due to decreasing revenue from a shortened season, the \$1.25 million relief given to the Super Rugby franchises, the eventual losses from the television revenue from a reshaped Super Rugby competition, and no international matches played by New Zealand national teams.</p> <p>An immediate impact was the cancellation of the Heartland Championship to save money and reinvest in community rugby across the country, thus removing a tier of representative rugby in the country.</p>

<b>Legal</b>	<p>The New Zealand Rugby Union Incorporated Constitution is the legal body used to govern and administer New Zealand Rugby. Each provincial union has its own constitution that aligns to the New Zealand Rugby Union; Secondary Schools rugby have an additional administrative body called College Sport.</p> <p>Rules and directives from Sport New Zealand also affect rugby and most recently the COVID19 Alert Levels have impacted as to when and how rugby can be trained and played.</p> <p>Finally, RugbySmart is an ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) programme to which all referees, coaches and players must adhere and renew yearly with regards to how to keep players safe and prevent injury. As all accidents are covered, RugbySmart is an added requirement for the rugby community with regards to health and safety of its participants.</p>
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*Note. Source (Serrano, 2020)*

As discussed in the PESTEL analysis, the detrimental financial position of New Zealand Rugby will have an impact on the structures of New Zealand rugby. Aside from this aspect, some positive conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. It has a strong and well positioned governance and, as an industry, has adapted to the current environment by adapting competitions and allowing the sport to go ahead. A clear working framework also permits the participants and community that make up New Zealand rugby to continue to enjoy and participate in rugby. The systems are in place to reach out and provide further opportunities to members of the rugby community, such as Pasifika and Chinese in Auckland. This well-established framework that holds New Zealand rugby together also allows it to move forward and it reaches all participants. Under a well-defined structural organisation, the concepts of structures are expected to flow down to the different level of New Zealand rugby and this research should identify this through a

better understanding of the organisational and learning structures coaches put forward for their teams and players.

#### **2.2.4 Industry Life Cycle Analysis**

For the purpose of this analysis, the industry life cycle analysis is focused on product development to a life cycle that focuses on service delivery. The industry life cycle will look at the life cycle of the club or provincial union and at the 1<sup>st</sup> XV programme of secondary schools. Participants in New Zealand rugby both provide and receive a service in their involvement. How their teams, clubs and provinces are prepared to in their life cycle to accommodate for these services to be delivered is what this analysis seeks.

The stages in the industry life cycle used in this analysis are:

- Startup Stage
- Growth Stage
- Consolidation Stage
- Maturity Stage
- Decline

Prior to Covid19, Rugby Clubs throughout New Zealand have been battling between the maturity stage and the decline stage. Over the past years, Rugby Clubs have noted a decrease in player numbers both at junior and senior levels, and decrease in funding, making their subsistence harder every season. The NZRU, through the provincial rugby unions, has been addressing these issues with different approaches to attract the community and increase player numbers. Some of these initiatives have been to expand the development of women's rugby, strengthen the U85 competitions and in some cases support the amalgamation of rugby clubs.

This last fact illustrates how some clubs are in a maturity to decline stage and how an amalgamation is a chance to recommence a life cycle for those communities.

After the COVID 19 lockdown, because international travel has been stopped and international rugby suspended, the rugby industry in New Zealand gained an opportunity to grow. New Zealand Rugby was the first professional sport to get underway away after the pandemic. Though the New Zealand Rugby Union has been affected financially, needing to make significant financial adjustment during 2020, the domestic and international viewership of New Zealand rugby has generated a renewal of the interest and support for the game (Cully, 2020). This new growth stage, the return to New Zealand of players, who were overseas, increased coverage of 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby and Super Rugby, and new Mitre10 Cup competition structure, has rejuvenated the industry. At club level, the provincial unions during 2020 have supported clubs and run checks to see how strong they are from the financial, volunteer and player number point of view so they can run a successful 2020 season and beyond. There has also been a government relief grant for sports clubs to enable them to manage through the COVID 19 Financial crisis. All these measures have allowed the clubs to reposition themselves as a recreational and social space for their communities around the sport of rugby.

Although there is an understanding that New Zealand Rugby at all levels is under financial strain, which is no different from other sport industries after the COVID 19 lockdowns, it has multiple opportunities at the moment from which to grow. Looking at the Industry Life Cycle analysis, the changing scenario for sport, both domestically and internationally, provides New Zealand Rugby the opportunity to implement new structures which can grow the interest, participation, on-field performance and revenue of the game. In 2020, Rugby in New Zealand will implement the new structures that will consolidate rugby for the decade ahead.

With the resurgence of domestic rugby at all levels, the increase domestic and international viewership of New Zealand rugby from 1<sup>st</sup> XV level up and with the new competition structures, New Zealand Rugby is entering a new life. The strengthening of its financial position will allow it to focus on its growth into 2021, until it consolidates the new running model for the industry in New Zealand.

At a time of change, where new models to for running the industry are being designed and implemented, it is important to determine what is the constant that allows the industry to rebuild and grow. In the case of New Zealand Rugby this is the product, how the game is played and how performance is driven on the field. This research will provide a tool for continuous improvement for New Zealand rugby as it will determine the management model used in New Zealand rugby to drive the performance of teams and by proposing a system to be used by management teams to implement a learning organisation model. As the New Zealand Rugby industry develops through its new growth stage into consolidation in its industry life cycle, having a clarity about its teams' management models will strengthen its product and the development of the its players and coaching and management teams, who sustain and grow the participation stakeholders in the sport.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Through the four industry analyses used in this chapter, some key points can now be acknowledged with regards to New Zealand Rugby:

- New Zealand Rugby has a weak financial position, which has been further impacted by a Covid19 affected year.

- New Zealand Rugby has a strong governance and operating framework which places it in an influential international and domestic position.
- Rugby remains at the center of New Zealand community interest, despite the pandemic.
- There is a collaborative structure and interrelations among the actors of New Zealand Rugby, and
- New Zealand Rugby can adapt to its environment and circumstances.

Covid19 has come to reshape the sport industry and rugby is not immune to this effect.

The adaptability and collaboration shown in New Zealand Rugby and its community has given it the opportunity to be innovative, through Super Rugby Aotearoa, and be prepared to take on new challenges in the present times. The success of adapting has brought more coach development to bear at the provincial rugby level and more engagement as rugby has worked as a community hub to overcome the current scenarios. These characteristics have helped position New Zealand Rugby in a growth stage of its life cycle.

Across the country, there will be clubs in later stages of their life cycle due to their financial position and the implications of the pandemic, but New Zealand Rugby's well-structured governance, that goes from NZRU through to the provinces and onto the club rugby and schools, will enable collaboration to generate new growth stages. From the perspectives of coaches and managers, the current year has pushed a 'collaborate and develop' approach even further as it has not been a normal year. This has served to shape the definition of success for the 2020 season into a concept other than winning, which will require coaches to be more explicit with regards to the achievements in their team environments. By having coaches and managers developing and engaged, this research is benefited as it will look at how they generate learning environments to drive performance within their teams.

The characteristics of collaboration, flexibility, and ability to adapt that have been drawn from the industry analysis can be connected to the earlier theoretical construct of organisational behaviour. In particular, the behavioural and constructivist learning approaches relate well to the traits identified in New Zealand rugby and how its participants take on circumstances. Therefore, these relations shall inform the analysis of the research findings in Chapter Five.

In the following chapter, the researcher presents a literature review examining management theories as they inform this research on rugby team environments and exploring the international research and recent research in New Zealand rugby environments.

## **Chapter III. Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This literature review was completed as part of MGT803, which is the research methodology component of the Master of Applied Management qualification, of which this research thesis is the final element. Only minor amendments have been made from the original literature review completed as part of MGT803. As MGT803 is the research methodology paper for this research project component of the Master of Applied Management qualification, self-citation was not required.

This review intends to examine, through the evolution of management theories, how management has been impacted by a learning organisation approach over time. In classical management theories, the concept of organisational culture, and more specifically a learning organisation, is not considered as the focus is mostly on the organisation as a production entity with disregard to relationship and the human element. As noted through the Neoclassical to the Postmodern theories, the need to consider human relations, and how behaviour and learning contributes to organisational outcomes, makes the concept of learning within organisations become more apparent (Smith, 2001).

This literature review will review the concept of the learning organisation, exploring Peter Senge's representation through his paper *Leading Learning Organizations* (Senge, 1996). Understanding the types of leadership aligned with a learning organisation will be key to developing an understanding of how a learning organisation can be the active management model in New Zealand rugby, designed to drive performance. By clarifying the role of leadership, as it drives learning at different stages and levels of the organisation's life, members

of the team can be accountable of their learning regardless whether the team fluctuates between a coach-centered approach or a player-centered approach.

As part of this review, the work of successful American coaches is analysed, with the intent of examining how coaching philosophies, as they underpin a management approach, have focused on human relations as central to generating learning environments that drive performance. Reviewing different management approaches and coaching styles, in the context of management, provides a platform for the research question: Do New Zealand rugby teams take a learning organisation approach?

Learning and performance in rugby is reviewed from an overseas perspective focusing on the 2003 English national rugby team that won the World Cup, and coaching behaviors in South Africa. In these cases, the review examines the way coaching and knowledge-generation in a rugby team context is primarily coach-centered. The South African environment provides a view of team management from a compliance point of view, similar to those from classic management theories. While the focus of the English rugby team in 2003 was on generating knowledge for their players so they could have plenty of resources on which to fall back in case they needed to solve situations either on the field or in training.

The literature review also explores the concept and role of tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2007). The English team valued the fact that their players drew on their tacit knowledge as a reserve, or add on, which they could tap into, while it was not necessarily the prime mover of their knowledge and learning (Rosca, 2010).

## **3.2 Search Strategy**

The search strategy for this study started with establishing a literature review component outline, which guided the keywords used in search databases. Keywords included, but were not limited to, learning organisation, learning, rugby, reflective learning, performance, coaching.

Google Scholar was also leveraged to search for information. Sources of information included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses and dissertations. Sources dating from the 1990s to the present were identified, with relevant material mainly linked to that published within the last 10 years. Some older sources were included to provide a perspective of the longevity and history of the topic, principally the Learning Organisation. The databases used to retrieve the sources were Proquest and SPORTDiscus. A subset of the sources retrieved as listed in the references section of this dissertation, was identified as the most relevant sources of the study and provided the foundation for the literature review.

## **3.3 Management Theories**

This section will examine the evolution of management theory. The background of management theories provides a view of how the management approach has varied and evolved over time from a strongly management centered approach in the classical theories to knowledge-based approach in the post-modern theories. Also, the review of sport management theories allows the researcher to locate where these theories stand within the evolution of management theories.

### **3.3.1 Classical Management Theories**

When examining the type of culture organisations in the period of the classical management theories, the human element related to culture, emotions and behaviour were not

considered (Ehiobuche, 2012; Kitana, 2016). During this period, management focused on the logical and rational structuring of jobs from which employees sought a financial benefit. Any features of culture or emotions in building the behavior of the employees were overruled by the logical financial benefit they received from doing their jobs (Ehiobuche, 2012). The idea of having employee behaviour shaped to satisfy organisational efficiency was the only behavioural concern (Burnes, 2017). Organisational culture did not exist as a concept as the organisation was conceived as a machine, where each part performed efficiently to achieve the organisational goals set from the top. Thus, a management-centered approach prevailed that did not consider the learning of, or feedback from, the employees. This lack of attention to the inherent culture of staff and middle managers led to the emergence of the Neoclassical management theories that focused on Behavioural Science and the prime concern with employee behaviour (Kitana, 2016).

### **3.3.2 Neoclassical Management Theories**

The Bureaucratic Model was one of the flagship management approaches from the Neoclassical era (Burnes, 2017). According to Burnes, it established a sense of fairness in workplace relations as a rule of law was set to determine the relationships and accountabilities within the organisation (2017). The normative essence of this management system did not provide flexibility to workplace relations but was a step forward in contributing to building what can shape employee relationships, it did not make employee relationships more humane or considerate (Robbins, 2013, p. 372). It did establish an accountability system based on work functions, which can be seen as an initial means of performance culture pushed down from above by management. Thus, the Neoclassical theories were management-centered with a focus on accountability rather than learning.

Within a well-structured system, such as a bureaucratic organisation, Chester Barnard (cited in Pindur, Rogers, & Kim, 1995) stated that employees accepted orders based on free will (Pindur, Rogers, & Kim, 1995). According to Pindur et al., (1995), Chester Barnard attempted to connect a scientific approach to human relations; this became a step forward to recognising an employee's contribution to the workplace system. At this point in management history there is still a top-down approach, where employees respond to logical and rational systems within the organisation. In this stage, the response from employees is in accordance with their understanding, and the appropriateness and ability to follow directives. This is an initial step into a focus on learning by the employees in an organisation.

The Human Relations approach superseded the classical management theories, in that it was developed in response to the bureaucratic approach. The Human Relations approach addressed people's social and emotional needs, emphasising their influence at work and also recognised organisations as social structures, where informal rules and structures sit alongside the set processes established by the organisation (Burnes, 2017, pp. 76-77).

### **3.3.3 Modern Management Theories**

Under the umbrella of modern management theory, the innovation management approach, contingency theory, the cultural excellence approach, and the concept of learning organisations will be reviewed.

Peter Drucker's work on innovation management highlights the distance management theory has come from the structured, production-focused management approaches in the classical theories. He focuses on talent, ingenuity, knowledge (Drucker, 2001). These three elements come from within the individual. This approach is no longer organisation-centered; rather individuals, and their uniqueness are at the centre of the present and future of the organisation.

When reviewing the contingency approach, the value placed on individuals, who operate in an environment where they are allowed to be flexible, is paramount. Henry Mintzberg (1987) questions set managerial processes as he sees managers as individuals who are responding to issues and change daily. This observation makes the process-driven classical approaches less likely, as managers make decisions on their assessment of the daily contingencies. These decisions are an emergent response to contingency, which lead to dynamic employee cultures. To be able to lead dynamic employee cultures into higher levels of performance, managers need to be aware of the set patterns in their organisation which enable them to have an emergent response to contingency. A response that is complemented from the management approach by setting organisational values, which relates to the cultural-excellence approach (Mintzberg, 1990).

The Cultural Excellence approach is distinctive, as it places organisational culture at the centre of organisational performance. The management consultant company, Bain & Company, in research of business leaders, noted that organisations that do not promote an organisational culture are destined for mediocrity (Burnes, 2017, p.113). Cultural Excellence is based on setting a common vision and having a collaborative team that is adaptable and works towards mastery. According to Burnes, the Cultural Excellence approach is at the centre of a high performance organisation (Burnes, 2017).

### **3.4 The Learning Organisation**

The Learning Organisation approach, outlined by Peter Senge (2010), describes how individuals and the organisation are committed to learning as a continuous activity. In this approach, there is a true commitment to learning, and as such organisations and individuals need

to be prepared to sometimes be wrong and, through that acknowledgement, continue learning. If individuals and organisations are not prepared to challenge their 'mental models', they are not demonstrating the potential to be wrong. Mental models are either the simple generalisations or theories that shape the way people act (Senge, 2006). Senge also discusses that people need to be employed in different capacities within their organisations so that their different points of view can be captured. Furthermore, people must focus on knowledge acquisition as this is what promotes organisational performance (Senge, 2010; Smith, 2001).

Smith (2001), in his analysis of the learning organisation, notes that only those organisations that are flexible, adaptive, and productive will excel. For this, the organisation needs to focus on their structures. The people within the organisation might not be able to see these structures but these will be the building blocks on which the systems of a learning organisation will be based. Smith further comments on the necessity of building a shared vision, establishing mental models within the systems, and having individuals work towards their personal mastery, the discipline of continually improving personal vision, competence and skills that align with the vision (Smith, 2001). Concepts such as recognising the roles of leadership and the various structures within an organisation are valuable. However, it is also highly important to note the contribution of the individual towards the continuous learning within an organisation or team, as this is what frames a continuous learning environment. It is key then, to acknowledge within the learning organisation there is individual learning as well as team learning. The organisation, the teams, and the units, need to be able to act and learn together as part of their continuous improvement. This will then enable them, according to Smith, to be more convivial and creative (Smith 2001).

In a learning organisation, it is understood there will be commitment towards learning as well as a structure and leadership that will drive the learning. It is also important to acknowledge that the organisation adopting this model can be seen as a learning system. According to Nevis et.al, (1995), a model for an organisation as learning system will be made up of two parts. The first will be the learning orientation while the second part will comprise the facilitating factors (Nevis, DiBella, & Gould, 1995). The learning orientation includes the values and practices reflecting how the learning occurs within that organisation system, while the facilitating factors carry a stronger emphasis on the structures and processes that enable the learning. These structures and processes can cause learning within the organisation to become either easier or more difficult. Nevis et.al, (1995) have divided up the learning orientation and the facilitating factors into three main stages: knowledge acquisition, dissemination and utilisation (Nevis, DiBella, & Gould, 1995). These facilitating factors and learning orientations span across these three stages. They emphasise how a learning system is implemented, and the intention that is given to the learning system. These elements are key to understanding an organisation as a learning system, how it works and the outcomes it can achieve.

Within an organisational environment it is common to view the individual's participation within a hierarchical structure. In the article, *Leading Learning Organisations*, Peter Senge (1996), stated that a learning organisation will not be led from within a hierarchical structure, but more so through a network of leadership. This multilayered, collaborative, and participative leadership environment encompasses different actors within an organisation, integrating learning capabilities into their work environments. Here, Senge describes three types of leaders within an organisation: the local line leaders, the executive leaders, and the internal networkers (Senge, 1996). The generic roles played by these leaders are those of designer, teacher, and steward. The

local line leaders, described by Senge, head or lead specific units or groups within an organisation. They have autonomy to perform and have independence to decide and influence their areas of responsibility in an organisation directly.

These local line leaders are active agents trying new things and working with others in the pursuit of new practices; they become teachers within the organisation. The executive leaders are the advocates for change and improvement. They play a mentoring role to enhance the uptake of new processes within the organisation. The executive leader, according to Senge (1996), will help carry learning systems across the organisation. They provide institutionalised credibility to the learning processes and help establish measures and checkpoints to evidence the success of the learning systems.

From a classical management theory viewpoint, the executive leader can be seen as the boss, the hierarchical head, who is pushing his system down on the individuals or simply giving an order. The difference is that the executive leader is invested in promoting learning within the organisation and recognising learning systems that have been effective across different units. The third type of leader needed in a learning organisation are the internal networkers (Senge, 1996). These networkers can be described as leaders by example. They do not carry a title; they do not formally lead a unit or a group within the organisation but through their work and good practices are able to exemplify learning behaviors across the organisation. A key characteristic of the internal networkers is that they can move freely across the organisation. This could be due to their role or due to their teaching capacity. According to Senge, “they are effective internal networkers, seen as credible, knowledgeable, committed individuals who are not a particular threat to anyone” (Senge, 1996, p 10). They are contributors; collaborators who act as implicit teachers within their learning organisation. From Senge (1996), it can be acknowledged that

leadership in a learning organisation is distributed across different actors in the organisation. Some carry formal titles; some are higher up in the hierarchy and others are directly involved in learning processes. It is essential in the learning organisation that such leadership exists throughout the organisation to promote learning at all different levels.

### **3.5 Postmodern Management Theories**

The literature acknowledges there is a postmodern approach to the classical management theories, which is still in development (Schultz, 1992). This approach is characterised by a knowledge-based approach, where there is managerial flexibility to achieve quality and efficiencies. Recognition that the knowledge required to create quality and efficiencies may sit with employees, has eliminated the authoritative layers between employees and managers. Teamwork has become the common ground from where solutions, innovations and efficiencies can emerge (Kemp Linzi, 2013).

In postmodern organisations, leaders are facilitators. Communication occurs through various channels. All members of the organisation will take part in leading, planning, decision making and monitoring (Burnes, 2017). The organisation is run and developed by all, making all accountable and responsible of the outcomes. From the organisational culture perspective, in the postmodern approach, culture represents the co-constructed values of the organisation. Schultz states that postmodern corporate culture is a dualism between the underlying patterns of the organisations and the subcultures existing amongst its members and how they respond to the changing scenarios in the workplace (Schultz, 1992).

When postmodern approaches to management are reviewed, it is hard to define them as an approach or a theory. The postmodern view sees the organisation as an entity in continuous

change and therefore its leader (or agents) must be sufficiently flexible to take on the changing scenarios. Defining an approach means we are making flexible and dynamic situations rigid (Lawrence, 2014). In a postmodern organisations, individuals are faced with a culture of flexibility which leads to innovation. Leadership depends greatly on communication and how a vision is communicated to the team.

This review of management theories has provided a view of how a management centered approach has evolved from the classical management theories to a more dynamic, flexible, and collaborative management approach in the postmodern management theories. This evolution provides a platform to understand the management model in New Zealand rugby teams and how in these organisations there can be a dynamic approach to learning and management within the teams.

### **3.6 Sport Management**

So far, the researcher has reviewed literature corresponding to the different periods of management theory and examined how the thought process around management has impacted culture within organisations to drive performance. In this section, the researcher reviews the coaching philosophies of four successful coaches in the United States. The literature on the management of sport teams shows how since the early 1960s they have established themselves as learning organisations, where the culture has a higher value to which the team aspires; and winning takes care of itself (Walsh, 2010).

The first coach, John Wooden, UCLA Basketball Coach, won ten national championships in eleven years. He established the Pyramid of Success (Wooden, 2005), where the founding principles are all elements of human relations: loyalty, friendship, cooperation, enthusiasm, and

industriousness. The focus was on performing well and performing what had been learnt; winning would follow, however it was not a focus. He focused his role to be a teacher, or a facilitator, where he managed his teams to get the players to learn, to be alert, confident and have intent. These elements enabled his teams to be ready for different scenarios with an underlying value, which was intent. There should be an intent to improve performance and performance is not a constant, therefore the culture set was set to continuously adapt to improve performance (Wooden, Wooden on Leadership, 2009) (Wooden, Coach Wooden's Leadership Game Plan for Success, 2009).

The second coach, Bill Walsh, was head coach of the San Francisco 49ers in the 1980s; he also generated a learning environment. Each training session was a learning environment for his players. He established an environment of excellence. He viewed managing the team as a way to achieve excellence, and to achieve excellence you need to do things over and over. His idea was if players could go over things over and over again, when faced with uncertainty, they deal with it. His theory of keeping feet always moving is a metaphor for the alertness to change he expected all players to have. His belief was that he and the players were to achieve greatness in life, and he wanted the best each player could be; if they could achieve this as individuals, results would follow as there was a culture of excellence from the personal sense that they were living (Walsh, 2010).

A third coach, Phil Jackson, was head coach of Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers, winning a total of eleven championships. Like Wooden and Walsh, Jackson also prepared his team to be responsive. His approaches were probably the most postmodern of them all, as he worked with his players on mindfulness so they could better understand what was happening around them in order to make the correct decisions. For him, managing these teams was a

learning process; an example that stands out was that he would call a timeout if he thought his players could learn something at that moment when he called them in. His focus on an ever-changing landscape comes from his point of view that doing the usual can become boring, so the individuals and the group must put their spirit into what they are doing to give it a purpose. Here it can be seen that he flips the leadership to the players, and he becomes a facilitator (Jackson, 2014).

The final coach to be discussed is Lou Holtz, one of the most successful coaches in college football in the United States. Holtz also set a learning environment as his platform for managing his football teams. His simple unstructured approach to learning is based around five principles: a vision, a plan, leading by example, being accountable and having core values. Similar to Kotter's description of the 8-Step Process, (Kotter, 2007; Kotter, 2005), Holtz establishes setting a vision as a starting point to set the team culture for performance. When it comes to establishing values, he advises keeping things simple, doing the right thing, doing things to the best of your ability and caring for one another. These values are the backbone of the culture set within the team, which acknowledges the individuals as part of a social network accountable to themselves and one another (Holtz, 2007).

The review of these coaches provided insight into how the management of sporting teams, since at least the 1960s, has focused on the individuals and on making them better, aside from the team outcomes. The focus on individual accountability, where all members take part in learning or finding ways to improve provides insight into how sporting teams focus on continuous improvement. Also, the fact that the coaches are referred to as teachers has triggered

the interest in finding whether there are situations in New Zealand Rugby that can be recognised as learning organisation environments.

### **3.7 Learning and Performance in Rugby**

Reviewing previous studies of how learning and performance management occurs in a rugby team environment will provide a background for this research with regards to its research objective. The review will look at international research as well as recent New Zealand research that has studied New Zealand rugby teams and their environment.

#### **3.7.1 International research**

In the search for recent literature about rugby, learning environments in rugby and their associated performance, there is one particular South African study that exemplifies the difference in management approaches in other parts of the world from that of New Zealand rugby. The focus of this study (Deas & Linde, 2013) was on the perceived performance of a rugby team and of the individuals. It was based on what the players thought the team and the organisation expected of them. This article shows how, from a South African perspective, the rugby organisation is managed under a classic management model, where its essence is on the exchange between the organisation and its players. The measure of performance, according to this study, is based around the obligations that either the organisation or the players mutually held (Deas & Linde, 2013). Therefore, performance was not sought on the basis of continuous improvement and the learning that takes place within the organisation and through its actors, but rather it was based on compliance. This article justifies the perceived novel approach of the New Zealand Rugby learning organisation model that drives performance; a point this research clearly seeks to demonstrate.

Regarding the English national rugby team that won the 2003 World Cup, Rosca (2010) explores how knowledge management is a key driver for sporting success. Rosca focuses on knowledge management in sport, how knowledge was created for the English rugby team, and how knowledge helped win the World Cup (Rosca, 2010). From an international perspective, this article most closely aligns with the focus of this research. It examines the manager as the starting point for knowledge, and how that knowledge is moved across the team. It also looks at knowledge as the product the players and the team must digest.

Knowledge is handled by the team manager who carries the responsibility of creating and packaging this knowledge. What motivates this researcher, based on the work of Rosca,(2010), is that it emphasises the need for rugby teams to have a knowledge management environment in order to have success (Rosca, 2010). Rosca further notes that the management tools used in sporting teams can also be used in the business world. This idea is valuable for this thesis as there is an expectation that the findings from a New Zealand rugby context can be used in other environments. It is interesting that this article about the English rugby team nominates the coach or manager as the “prime mover” of the knowledge production process (Rosca, 2010). This gives a one-directional approach to the generation of knowledge and the transfer of knowledge within the team structure. Though it is acknowledged that the head coach relied on knowledge generated from his assistants, it is a fact that, for the team, the final decisions sat with the head coach, thus, reinforcing a unilateral transmission of knowledge within the team environment. This concept should be further investigated, if the research questions for this study are to be answered.

Rosca (2010) indicates that the knowledge creation process was not a hybrid. It was a process managed and coordinated by the team manager. Although it recognises knowledge had

to be communicated across the team, the emphasis on centralising the generation of knowledge is highlighted through this article. It is of interest how the concept crystallisation of knowledge (Rosca, 2010), which emphasises the importance of communication for the team to acquire the knowledge, is used to represent the embedding of knowledge from the coach to the players.

Rosca (2010) further notes the significant use of different communicational tools within the English Rugby team environment, thus, facilitating communication via electronic devices as well as verbally. In this environment of centralised knowledge generation, it should also be acknowledged that the players bring tacit knowledge to the environment, however, this tacit knowledge is given only a 5% importance (Rosca, 2010). Therefore, 95% of the knowledge is created and transferred from the coaching and management to the players, and only 5% of the knowledge comes from the players. Player knowledge is required, if and only when the knowledge provided by the management does not suffice the situation.

From this study it should be highlighted that knowledge creation for the 2003 English rugby team was a deliberate focus. The study concludes that knowledge creation for management teams in rugby should be deliberate. It further highlights the need for coaches to be open minded, and to package the knowledge for their team in a way that it can be communicated effectively to the players. It confirms that coaches and managers should acquire knowledge so they can continuously innovate (Rosca, 2010).

The work of Rosca (2010) is encouraging for this research, as it notes that, while other articles have been written about knowledge management and sport management, they have not combined the two topics. It identifies the need for further study in knowledge creation as part of the transition from amateur to professional sport. As this research focuses on rugby in New Zealand through the transition from secondary school to professional provincial level, and on

how performance is driven through a learning organisation model, it responds to the call by Rosca (2010) for further research in the area of knowledge creation and sport management.

According to Morgan et. al (2015), there is an opportunity to further explore the performance of the 2003 English rugby team. Their work identifies five psychosocial processes that create the platform for team resilience; transformational leadership, shared team leadership, team learning, social identity and positive emotions (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2015). These topics provide interest for this research as leadership, learning, identity and emotions enable learning systems and help establish intent and how learning is disseminated across the organisation (Morgan et al., 2015).

The focus Morgan et al. (2015) given to the team life cycle goes from the stages of transformation and shared leadership to a facilitated learning stage. While the observation of behavior stage gives us an insight into how learning is perceived as a key stage for building resilience that enables performance. The authors stress that before learning can be facilitated, a leader (as coach or manager), must set a vision for the group to pursue. This leader is defined as a transformational leader, as they will build a strong relationship based among leaders and followers and create the platform of social exchange to empower the facilitation of learning in a later stage of the group's development (Morgan et al., 2015). This work was attractive to the researcher as it approached the organisational behaviour of the team from a life cycle perspective, coinciding with an industry analysis used in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Interestingly, both Rosca (2010) and Morgan et al, (2015), in referring to the English rugby team, confirm that in an organisation the focus of the communication and the building of knowledge comes from a central leader. Morgan et. al, (2015) further highlight the importance of shared leadership to help transmit the vision set by central leadership to be able to overcome

difficult situations. Nevertheless, knowledge building and learning continue to be unidirectional. Even in the team learning stage, these authors refer to this as the stage where the team members can acquire knowledge; meaning they receive it, they do not generate it. They are not driving their own learning, but they are positioned to be receptive to the knowledge provided by the team and thus make it their own. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is learning happening on behalf of the players, but in a receptive model.

Shared leadership, according to Morgan et al, (2015), carries great value in difficult circumstances where different members of a team have acquired the same learning and are able to coordinate their actions to resolve situations together. What the team resolves is not innovation but a common approach that derives from all the members agreeing to rely on their acquired knowledge. Morgan et al, (2015) cite the example of how the English team, while in overtime, referred to using their combined knowledge to resolve the situation and win the World Cup final. This repetition of learning provided to the team members activated their memory as individuals and as a collective to play in a difficult situation. The learning implanted into the group is the system that they relied on to solve individually and as a group in different situations.

Morgan et al, (2015) also discuss tacit knowledge, the knowledge that the players carry from past experiences, which enables them to have an extra tool to navigate through difficult situations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2007). As with Rosca's (2010) explanation of the use of tacit knowledge by the English national team, this additional knowledge can provide an additional resource but is not the predominating knowledge and learning use by the English team.

Morgan et al, (2015) focused on resilience as a driver for performance and acknowledged that future research efforts should explore the way group processes can influence the functioning and performance of a team. From the researcher's perspective those group processes can be

described as the learning processes with which a team must engage if they are to be a learning organisation that drives the performance. Morgan et al, (2015) further highlight that when building a team with a culture of sustainable excellence there must be a focus on the psychosocial processes. The observation of behavior is the third stage of the team life cycle according to the psychosocial process, where further research can be undertaken to determine whether learning models are providing the scenario for rugby teams to have a learning organisation approach to their performance. Morgan et al, (2015) focus on performance and on building the resilience required to achieve that performance. However, emphasis must remain on communication and learning led by a central leader, which Morgan et al, (2015) call transformational leadership. These authors note a lack of research on the multidirectional relationships within the research on organisational behavior in rugby, and how these relationships can develop knowledge and learning within the organisation. There is also insufficient research into the systems that can create the structure to have a learning organisation in New Zealand rugby.

### **3.7.2 New Zealand research**

A recent paper from Bennett and Fyall (2018), acknowledges the current emphasis in New Zealand is on athlete-centered pedagogies in secondary school physical education and in coach education. This highlights the fact that New Zealand's working environments tend to push an athlete-centered approach with a pedagogical value. The study focuses on concepts of power and control in the coaching and player relationships. It establishes a tension between what is being pushed out in the New Zealand environment as a player-centered coaching approach versus the control and power relationship used by coaches when dealing with players in the

secondary school space. The 'control' reference by Bennett and Fyall (2018) has to do with the lack of trust coaches have in enabling players to contribute to their training and development.

This control overlaps with the concept of power that the coaches exhibit with young players in order to dominate and direct the relationship. According to Bennett and Fyall (2018), there is a clear indication that the coaches are focused on improving the performance and the development of their players. Using an etymological analysis, the authors stress the role of coaches, overstating their power through experience and knowledge greater than the players. The study notes that coaches do get player feedback in this power relationship, but it also identifies some coaches ignore the feedback and the comments of the players. Therefore, the question arises as to whether an actual learning system is in place or is it just forced knowledge acquisition. The limitation of this study is that it interviewed only five high school coaches, thus limiting the scope to generalise that in fact coaches are coach centered and all coach-player relationships are dominant.

The research by Bennett and Fyall (2018) further contends that coaches approach the team leaders to give them space to be in control in some training sessions, which would contradict the atmosphere of control. According to this study, such a situation would still be an exercise of control by the coaches (Bennett & Fyall, 2018), although it can be seen as an opportunity for leaders to take the initiative, make decisions an exercise player-centered coaching in the high school rugby teams. This practice, as explained by the authors, does not necessarily sustain an imbalance of power in favor of the coaches. The fact that some players accept the coach-centered approach and transfer the power of the relationship to the coaches, because they have more experience or they have the capacity to reward or nominate players to representative teams, is a concern that restricts active learning. In such a scenario, players are

handing over the active participation in the learning process as they move into a leader-follower relationship, where they solely execute what they are told. The coaches interviewed by Bennett and Fyall (2018) acknowledged that, while they try to hand more control and decision-making power to the players, the feedback is not necessarily meaningful, which then shortens the communication, causing the coaches to return to a coach-centered approach.

From these findings it can be seen that coaches need to be willing to authentically hand over control to their players; this unwillingness is usually more prevalent in less experienced coaches. Another factor that causes coaches to revert back to a coach-centered approach is the lack of time, the pressure to win and the need to be perceived in control of both the knowledge and learning environment (Bennett & Fyall, 2018).

This research can be considered subjective regarding the assessment of how much learning is generated in the high school environment and how much power and control the coaches execute. The Bennett and Fyall (2018) research acknowledged that rugby teams focus their performance on skill development, learning on behalf of the players. It also emphasises that the New Zealand curriculum focuses on player-centric coaching (Bennett & Fyall, 2018), which places attention on the player and shares the knowledge generation and learning responsibilities with the player. This is not a one-directional approach as noted earlier in overseas examples. As Bennett and Fyall (2018) conclude, coaches dominate the high school space with traditional coaching structures and limited reflection on the development of players. Bennet and Fyall (2018) open up the possibility further investigation into whether a player-centric coaching model is being used in New Zealand, and how coaching and management models are enabling critical thinking and learning on behalf of the players.

Wilson (2011) emphasises leadership and communication inside rugby teams as part of the model that sustains a learning organisation to become. Wilson (2011) explains that the way coaches and captains of New Zealand rugby teams communicate is a key to their success. He promotes the importance of team identity and how this identity is expressed through team communication. When considering a rugby team in New Zealand as a learning organisation it has been acknowledged that it must be a bilateral relationship between coaches and players. Different actors within the organisation exercise leadership, and the way that they facilitate their communication can generate a more robust learning environment. Wilson (2011) focuses on leadership and communication, not the learning environment, but his conclusions in the areas of leadership and communication strengthen the existence and collaboration of learning environments in New Zealand rugby teams. Wilson (2011) concludes the leadership is distributed across a range of individuals in a rugby team and that players can emerge as leaders through their communication. This correlates with Senge's (1996) description of leaders. The local line leaders, the executive leaders, and the internal networkers can emerge and, through their communication, become active learning agents who lead the organisation within its learning environment.

Wilson (2011) invites research in this area to be expanded to amateur teams and professional rugby teams. This researcher aims to continue the work of Wilson (2011) by exploring how a learning organisation drives performance in both amateur and professional rugby environments in New Zealand. An emphasis on communicative practice, the construction of leadership, and team identity provide solid pillars for the research. In the search to identify whether New Zealand rugby teams are learning organisations that drive performance, the identity of a learning organisation must first be constructed. Secondly, leadership within that working

organisation needs to be identified. Finally, the communication practice within the organisation should be considered in terms of how it will facilitate the understanding of the learning organisation identity and how leadership is exercised.

McKenzie (2019) provides a vivid account of the environment in which first XV players perform in New Zealand rugby. Although high school players are in an environment of autonomy and supportive behavior, McKenzie (2019) concludes that players are mostly in a controlling environment. McKenzie (2019) further acknowledges that New Zealand is focusing on an athlete-centered approach to coaching, and that while coaches accept this, they refer back to a coach-centered approach related to environmental expectations such as winning.

McKenzie (2019) highlights the first XV environment, defining a unique environment of collaboration, called 'brotherhood' by the players. In this brotherhood they bond and make autonomous decisions to support their own growth and learning. Examples provided include players requesting meetings to provide feedback, or making their own decisions on the field despite the calls made by the coaches (McKenzie, 2019). While McKenzie (2019) challenges that the coaching environments did not provide a truly athlete-centered approach, it appears the players still had the capacity to make autonomous decisions around their learning and rugby development. Players recognised that the possibility of playing first XV rugby gave them the opportunity to develop positive life skills. This strong acknowledgement of the brotherhood, and the comfort this created within their environment, is a sign that rugby in New Zealand provides a platform for players to learn and develop, which can be further enhanced if coaches empower autonomy towards learning from the players.

Unfortunately, the surveillance and monitoring by coaching staff reported by players interviewed by McKenzie (2019) inhibited players' learning and made them feel "robotic".

Players believed that this feeling of being ‘robotic’ undermined the ownership that players could achieve with regards to their own learning and development, thus creating a unidirectional environment. The scope of McKenzie’s (2019) research was three focus groups, representing three teams. The behaviors extracted from the interviews, therefore, cannot be generalised to the entirety of New Zealand rugby. McKenzie (2019) focuses exclusively on first XV teams of the Auckland 1-A competition.

What can be extracted from McKenzie’s (2019) work is that autonomous supportive behaviors helped in generating a sense of belonging within New Zealand rugby teams. Players may not have a positive experience in a rugby environment, but rugby environments still promote a sense of belonging generating a feeling of brotherhood among players. Rugby teams in New Zealand promote an athlete-centered approach to coaching. This generates the space for leadership to be developed and learning acquisition to take place from the experiences the athletes have. In the coach centered environments, just as in examples from the English rugby team, (Rosca, 2010), knowledge generation comes from the coach. However, this does not mean that there is not an opportunity for continuous learning for the different stakeholders involved in the rugby team environment.

### **3.8 Reflective Practice in Learning Organisations**

Throughout this literature review the topics of power and control have been highlighted in the relationship between management and the players. Current coaching practice in New Zealand focuses on a player-centered approach where the coaches and managers are facilitators who promote learning and development of the athlete (McKenzie, 2019). For there to be reflective practice, an appropriate environment needs to be created with the individuals who

participate in these teams. There needs to be autonomy to reflect and also to be able to share reflections communicatively with the other members of their team. From the discussion of management theories in this literature review to the consideration of contemporary postmodern theories, the researcher has demonstrated how management has shifted from a manager-centered, top-down approach to an adaptive, continuously changing approach, that has solutions arising from both the leaders and the followers.

Llobet-Martí, López-Ros, and Vila (2018) explore how the accountability of learning in a rugby environment is transferred from the coach to the players. The experimental nature of their research provides insight into how a learning system can be established to transfer learning accountability from the coaches and managers to the players. The establishment of segments of interactivity, where the coach provided learning to the players, or the coach facilitated time and space to the players to ask questions and generate their own knowledge, were used to determine how players took up the responsibility of their own learning in these different segments (Llobet-Martí, López-Ros, & Vila, 2018).

Wilson (2011) discussed coach-centered learning, where the accountability of the learning can be on the players or the coaches. While Llobet-Martí et al, (2018) state that players have to be actively engaged in their learning, and if they are, this engagement refers to the players being accountable for their learning. The learning can be generated solely from the player, solely from the coaches, or driven through an autonomous behavior from the coaches to the players (Llobet-Martí et al., 2018). What can be concluded from these authors is that learning must be accountable, and players and coaches must have a space for autonomous learning to take place.

When it comes to reflective practice, practical experimental interventions have also been done in rugby league to enhance a deliberate reflective process in the learning environment. Whitehead et al. (2016) the intervention is for the coaches to take note of their language and words they use during their coaching. This explicit practice generated a self-conscious reflection by the coaches that allowed them to understand and learn from their own coaching practice (Whitehead et al., 2016). The deliberate interventions such as this to promote self-reflection and formative learning for the participants in a team environment can be done individually or shared with the other members of the team. It can also create the initial reflections to build the systems to generate a learning environment. Thus, it can be concluded that in the think-aloud intervention (Whitehead et al., 2016) a learning system was put in place to generate self-learning for the coaches which could then be shared within their team environment.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Sport provides a window to see how a learning environment can be generated for teams to drive performance. This literature review navigates through the history of management approaches, focusing on the learning organisational model, which is subject of the thesis. It explores the work of successful coaches who have embraced the learning organisation, cultural excellence and emergent change. Since early in the 1960s, Wooden, Walsh, Jackson and Holtz, through their coaching philosophies and management approaches, have taken a hybrid, postmodern approach, that is imbued with traces of learning organisation and cultural excellence.

All four coaching approaches reviewed focus on a higher value that is being sought: becoming accountable for being better individuals. This is encouraging when undertaking research of New Zealand Rugby organisational team cultures, where the underlying theme is

“Better People, Make Better All Blacks” (Kerr, 2013). From this management approach review, a pattern was found; a high-performance culture is generated in an environment where individuals are empowered to be resilient and adaptable, problem solvers, always ready and learning.

The focus on how to approach the organisational behaviour in rugby environments highlights the tension between a coach-centered approach to managing a team versus a player-centered approach. This tension is similar to that of the classical management theories versus the postmodern management theories. Being able to see the push for learning in a rugby environment, starting from the coaches and moving onto the players, creates a context in which to explore the effectiveness of the learning approaches in New Zealand rugby. The recent research examples of New Zealand rugby, examined in this literature review, provide the grounds for necessary further research into the areas of player centric coaching, leadership, communication, performance and learning.

The literature reviewed illustrates that there is a push for learning, but it is not clear if there is a deliberate learning model in New Zealand. The concept of leader, and leadership, communication, learning, knowledge, and performance are common amongst the teams but how they are put together into a system is yet to be resolved. Also, the existing research proves to be narrow in scope and does not provide conclusions that can be generalised. This thesis aims to provide a window into NZ rugby, from an amateur to professional level, and explore whether the management structures in place throughout teams enable the basis of a learning organisational model to drive the performance in New Zealand rugby teams.

In the following chapter, the researcher presents a detailed account of the research design and methodology for this thesis.

## **Chapter IV. Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this exploratory study of management teams throughout New Zealand rugby teams and the application of learning organisation model to drive performance. The intention of this research is to inform future practice, therefore a pragmatic approach that focused on the applied nature of the existing management structures reconciled both the facts and the principles of the management teams that carry forward their teams. This qualitative, mono-method cross-sectional study explored, through the interviews of coaches and managers of rugby teams in New Zealand how communication, management models, principles and review and reflection processes shape the performance framework of rugby teams in New Zealand. The pragmatic approach to this research through an exploratory inductive mono-method strategy will be discussed in this chapter. The researcher will do a cross sectional study and take on non- probability sampling to be able to do a thematic analysis. The research plan, including the methodology, participants, researcher, data collection, procedures, data analysis, and ethical concerns are also components of this chapter.

#### **4.1.1 Researcher's Background**

The researcher through his undergraduate studies at the Pontificate Catholic University of Chile developed a strong focus on ontology and metaphysics through law school, focusing his work and study on the existence of reality and being. Thus, the researcher has followed the principles of non-contradiction and causality. From an applied management research perspective, the researcher has positioned himself from a pragmatic approach as he has been a senior lecturer in sport management for over three years. Previously, he was a lecturer in business for five years

and has worked as a mental skills coach in rugby for six years. Overall, he has over 20 years' experience in the education sector. This practical experience across the sport and education industry has given him problem-solving experience where the researcher contextualises solutions. This extended practical experience grounded the researcher with a pragmatic philosophical background in the applied management space.

The researcher has the necessary skills to carry out this study. Throughout his long year career in education, he has been required to interview and question students as well as candidates for positions applying for roles. Among the courses that the researcher has taught is communication, making the researcher aware of the importance of active listening skills required to carry out the interviews in this study. Also, the researcher's experience as a mental skills coach gives him awareness of the rugby environment and the tone and manner that is required to conduct the interviews with coaches and managers in the rugby space.

The researcher had been asked by overseas management teams with regards to the practical application of a management model in New Zealand rugby teams. This shaped the researcher's purpose to explore how rugby teams in New Zealand were implementing a model for performance. His experience in the New Zealand rugby environments and the knowledge of how successful coaches have used a learning approach in the past, as identified in chapter 3 of this study, led him to explore whether rugby teams in New Zealand applied a learning organisation model in their teams.

## **4.2 Research Design**

The research onion approach explained by Saunders et al, (2019) has been used in this chapter to provide the background to the research design. The author approached the

philosophical background of this study from a pragmatist point of view. He used an inductive approach to the theory development and the methodological choice was that of a mono-method qualitative research. He approached the research strategy from a case study perspective, constructing through his interviews of different rugby teams, at different levels of rugby, a case study of the management structure of New Zealand rugby teams. The timing of when this research was conducted made this research a cross sectional study due to the seasonal nature of rugby. The following sub-sections provide a comprehensive understanding of the researcher's philosophical approach to this research and the eventual research design he developed to conduct the study.

#### **4.2.1 Philosophical background**

The methodology selected for this research is based on the researcher's philosophical approach to the topic. The researcher is a lecturer and coach, and therefore approached this study from a learning organisation viewpoint as well as from an understanding of coaching models in New Zealand rugby. Pragmatism focuses on organisational practice, this research sought to explore the management practice of rugby teams in New Zealand. Pragmatism, from an ontological perspective, explains reality as the practical consequence of ideas (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). As the purpose of the study was to explore management teams' approach to learning, the researcher took a pragmatic approach, in which he sought explanations and answers from management teams via a semi-structured interview to obtain meaningful and practical experiences from team environments. The researcher's purpose to study management teams in New Zealand rugby teams was to identify a learning model that can be transferable to other organisations. The pragmatic approach reconciles the existing structures and how these structures drive performance. In contrast with the postmodern approach which rejects ontology focusing on

continuous change and does not focus on a specific order. This approach for this research would be the antithesis of the philosophical background of the researcher and would challenge the pragmatic approach focused on a specific practice within rugby, which for this study is the learning organisational model.

The pragmatist approach focuses on what is being applied, and this is what the researcher intended to explore. This philosophical approach enabled the researcher to take a real-world view of the reality of the management structures in New Zealand rugby. Though pragmatic research is associated with mixed-method approaches, it has the flexibility to accommodate to mono-method approaches and quantitative and qualitative research. Due to the seasonal characteristic of the life of rugby teams, and the fact the research pursued to identify the existence of a management structure and if this was a learning organisation, a mono-method approach via an interview sufficed. For the researcher, as a pragmatist, the context, the nature of the research as well as the conclusions are the driving forces for choosing to situate himself in pragmatism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). The key for the researcher was to be able to situate himself from a viewpoint that would enable him to explore the applied nature of the management structure of the New Rugby teams and be able to extract generalisable conclusions from the specific applied experiences from each team interviewed.

#### **4.2.2 Approach to Theory Development**

The researcher's exploratory approach was inductive as he proposed in his research question a learning organisation model as the framework management teams used to drive performance. According to Saunders et al., (2019), the opportunity to explore issues through interviews and listen to the interviewees detailed accounts of their practice provides descriptive and explanatory data that facilitates the interpretation of qualitative data. The possibility to

explore the management practice of New Zealand rugby teams and the structure they apply to drive performance enabled to identify a conceptual framework used in New Zealand rugby.

When semi-structured interviews are used based on an inductive approach, they will tend to be exploratory in nature and allow the interview themes to evolve and develop from the data analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019, p.438). Furthermore, the generalisability of the theory development starting from the exploration of specific cases was a determinant for an inductive approach as it follows a causality principle. Also, the inductive approach uses data collection to explore phenomenon, identify themes and create a conceptual framework (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019, p. 153).

#### **4.2.3 Methodological Choice**

This inductive exploratory approach was pursued via a qualitative mono-method strategy to data collection. According to Saunders et al., (2019, p. 179), “Many varieties of qualitative research commence with an inductive approach to theory development, where a naturalistic and emergent research design is used to build theory or to develop a richer theoretical perspective that already exist in the literature.” The researcher reviewed literature to identify existing theory and approaches from a learning perspective used by successful coaches and in the context of rugby. As there were no learning organisation theories applicable to the New Zealand rugby environments, the researcher was keen to take an inductive exploratory approach with the objective to create new theory. The researcher was able to achieve his inductive exploratory approach via a single interview of each team as a mono-method approach sufficed to identify the management structure the rugby teams had. This review has led the researcher to explore New Zealand rugby teams’ management structures and their learning organization approach. Due to the researcher’s practical experience in the rugby industry, he was able to access participants via

nonprobability sampling. The researcher grouped the interview questions thematically, which provided consistency across the interviews with the different participants to be able to construct a case study of New Zealand rugby through this exploratory approach. Through this inductive mono-method qualitative strategy of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to compare the responses of the participants to each theme to identify the management structure and the learning approaches in NZ rugby teams.

#### **4.2.4 Research Strategy**

The strategic approach selected was a case study. According to Yin (2018) “A research case study involves in-depth inquiry into the case.” (Yin, 2018, p. 321) This research was an in-depth inquiry into the management structure of rugby teams in New Zealand. Rugby, teams that in 2020 were organised and played in New Zealand competitions. As a case study, it set out to understand the dynamics of the management structure of New Zealand rugby teams. To do this the case study covered 11 rugby teams in New Zealand at secondary 1<sup>st</sup> XV level, premier club level, and national provincial championship. The case study was put together from the point of view of the coaches and managers and their interactions with the other members of the team, coaches and players. The case study generated insights to the communication systems, management models, review process in learning environment within the team. The case study generated by this research permitted the symmetrical analysis across the different teams, their key attributes that make up a learning organisational model in New Zealand rugby teams and their focus on continuous learning. While case studies can be used for exploratory research, but they also provide a description an explanation of processes which in this study provided a description of the management structure of New Zealand rugby teams. The case study strategy

permitted the identification of themes that enabled the description of the learning organisational model present in New Zealand rugby teams. The exploratory nature of this research and the generation of the case study led to the emergence of an unexpected communication and leadership model.

#### **4.2.5 Time Horizon**

The researcher took a cross-sectional study of New Zealand rugby teams to be able to look at management teams in New Zealand rugby across different age groups and performance levels. Due to the limited timeframe defined by the length of the rugby season to conduct this research and the access to sampling the researcher was privy to, a cross-sectional study was most appropriate. The researcher intended to have a single interview with a member of the management team to understand the management practice they had in place with their players. As only a single interview was required, a longitudinal study was not appropriate. To take on a longitudinal study the researcher would have had to schedule interviews at different moments of the season. For the management practice that was being explored, a longitudinal study was not needed as the type of management model was being explored, and not whether a management model was sustained in time. As the sampling was taken during a specific point in time, in order to have a representation of New Zealand rugby teams, the researcher decided to interview participants at the different performance levels.

#### **4.2.6 Techniques and Procedures**

The research focused on secondary schools' 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby teams, Senior Club rugby teams and Provincial Representative teams in the National Provincial Competition, called Mitre10 Cup in 2020. Secondary school's 1<sup>st</sup> XV teams were selected as a sample as they constitute a level of rugby that is largely followed by supporters, the media, talent scouts, and the

provincial rugby unions. The 1<sup>st</sup> XV's are an intricate part of the development pathway of New Zealand rugby players. It is from this level that they go on to the first national representation for rugby and eventually to paid semi-professional and professional contracts. As the 1<sup>st</sup> XV are a significant part of the talent development pathway of players, the researcher found that it was unavoidable to explore the management structure used to drive performance at this level of rugby. Premier club level rugby is the intermediate step between 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby and provincial representation, which is professional rugby.

At Premier club level there are amateur players and semi-professional players. As players necessarily go through Premier club rugby on their pathway to professional contracts and provincial rugby representation it was important for the researcher to explore the management structures in place to drive performance of rugby players at this level. At the national provincial level, players are managed to perform and develop to Super Rugby level and national representation. Being Super Rugby and national representation the two highest levels a performance a player can pursue.

The researcher was interested in exploring the management structures at the national provincial level as this would be the highest level of development provided add New Zealand rugby. Though players can continue to develop and improve their performance at Super Rugby in national representation level, it is at the national provincial level where their performance is driven to gain higher honours. Therefore, by exploring these three levels of rugby the researcher was able to generate a comprehensive view of the management structures used across New Zealand rugby.

The data was collected via a mono-method approach consisting of semi-structured interviews with coaches and managers across different teams. Non-probability sampling was

used as the researcher had access to teams across different rugby unions and grade levels which provided the spectrum for the research.

The interviews consisted a semi-structured interview guide, which explored the management model, the processes to lead the team, the key principles for the management team, whether the team includes a reflective process in their management and how they describe performance. An exploratory, semi structured interview was the most appropriate to explore the research question and sub questions as this allowed the researcher to explore different themes, but at the same time generate a comfortable rapport with the participants so they could express themselves in detail with regards to their management structure and practices. A semi structured interview gave the participants space to describe the essence of their management structure and practice but also provide details of the attributes that made up their management structures and practices in their own environments. A structured interview or a survey would have not captured the detail covered in a semi structured interview.

The interview questions were pilot tested by a rugby coach and two coach developers, and feedback was obtained with regards to the order of the question topics. With this feedback, the interviews explored the processes and outcomes the coaching and management obtained through their work and communication they had with their team. It explored whether the coaching and management staff implemented a learning environment within their teams that drove performance. The interview questions were initially themed by grouping them into four categories: Communications; Coaching and Management Model; Review and Reflection; and Principles. The automated transcription system, Otter.ai, provided a summary of key words for each interview. The researcher then coded the information collected from the interviews by category and level of rugby and analysed them using a thematic analysis.

### **4.3 Methodology**

In this section, the methodology for the research is discussed: the research objectives; the research questions; data collection; the selection of participants and the data analysis. Special emphasis was given to the selection of participants. The sampling, obtained in conjunction with the advice from the rugby unions, was essential to obtain the quality of responses required by the research questions. Also, the formulation and format of the semi-structure interviews were key to facilitate the data collection. How the data was analysed through a thematic analysis is also described in this section.

#### **4.3.1 Objective**

The aim of this research was to explore whether management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance. The research explored this via three research objectives.

First, the researcher sought to determine whether New Zealand Rugby used a specific management model.

Secondly, the research aimed to describe the management model used by New Zealand rugby.

Thirdly, the researcher aimed to propose a system or framework to be used by management teams to implement a learning organisation management model to drive performance.

#### **4.3.2 Research Questions**

The research sought to explore the following overarching research question:

**RQ:** Do management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance?

This research question was explored through a series of research sub-questions:

**RSQ 1:** Does New Zealand Rugby use a management model to lead teams?

**RSQ 2:** What are the key principles for managing rugby teams?

**RSQ 3:** What is the focus of the management model used by NZ rugby?

**RSQ 4:** How is performance defined by management teams?

**RSQ 5:** How can the organisational structure of the team facilitate a continuous improvement model based on learning?

### **4.3.3 Data Collection**

Once ethics approval was granted from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Southern Institute of Technology (Appendix A), the researcher piloted the interview questions with a secondary school 1<sup>st</sup> XV coach and two coach developers. He shared the interview questions for them to review and provide feedback. The feedback received focused on the importance to try to identify how coaching and management focused on improvement. By conducting semi-structured interviews, this would allow space to explore more profoundly the focus on improvement that the coaching and management may have. Also, the feedback on the piloted interview questions mentioned that the questions put forward in the semi-structured interview were good starters to unpack if there was actually a learning model in New Zealand rugby. Feedback also related to the coaching philosophy the coaches and managers held, and where they had developed it.

As this was a principle that supported the background of the management structures in practice, it was recommended the order of the questions were reorganised, so the interviews would finish with the question: ‘What was the coaching or management philosophy of each participant?’. This enabled the previous questions in the interview to be a basis on which the

respondents built their description of their philosophy. The feedback also recommended to discuss team communication before discussing the management model used. Once feedback was received, the order of the topics and questions was modified.

This study used an interview method through a synchronous electronic semi-structured interview via videocall platform. The chosen videocall platform was Zoom, which enabled scheduling and private invitations to each interviewee. Also, Zoom allowed the embedding of a third-party application, Otter.ai, which is a speech to text transcription application that uses artificial intelligence and machine learning (Solsman, 2018). The interviews began with the background information of the interviewees and followed with questions on the topics of communication, coaching and management model, review and reflection and the principles behind the coaching and management. Within each one of these topics more detailed questions were asked with the intent to explore the required data for this research.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted over video calls. With the consent of the interviewees, all interviews were both video and audio recorded, and their automated transcription was recorded simultaneously. The audio and video recording of the interviews were done through the Zoom application and saved directly to the hard drive of the researcher's computer. The audio and video recordings were saved in a specific folder named 'Research Thesis Interviews'. The automated transcriptions were generated on the researcher's account of the Otter.ai application. The Otter.ai account is a personal account only accessible by the researcher with his username and password. The transcriptions of the interviews were edited by the researcher on the Otter.ai application to match what had been said where the automated transcription did not pick out the correct words. Once the editing and the keyword coding was

done, the transcripts were downloaded to the researcher's computer hard drive and saved into a folder named 'Research Thesis Interviews'.

When the interviews commenced, before the recording and transcription started, the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions and if they agreed for the interview to be video and audio recorded as well as simultaneously transcribed. The participants agreed verbally, and the recording began after the participant agreed. The researcher followed the amended order of the interview topics and questions from the feedback he obtained from the piloted interviews. The same order was kept in all the interviews notwithstanding the level of rugby they were involved in or whether they were a coach or manager.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the audio and video recording were triangulated with the automated transcription to assure accuracy of the transcription. Any inaccuracies in the automated transcription were edited manually by the researcher by taking the correct wording from the audio and video recording. Otter.ai provided an automated coding of the keywords in each interview. The researcher also included keywords that were found across the multiple interviews.

Through the interview process the researcher kept a notebook with notes from each interview and it helped to keep a focus on the topics in the semi-structured interview and the questions that were set out. Also, it helped to better define concepts that were used by the coaches and managers when discussing the types of communication and the model used by their teams. Bias was also minimised by the researcher by going back and triangulating the audio, video and automated transcription to ensure that the correct wording was captured in the transcription and eventually used in the data findings.

#### **4.3.4 Decision on Sample**

The sample of participants was drawn from coaches and managers actively involved coaching or managing a rugby teams in New Zealand in 2020. The participants were sought from secondary school 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby teams, Premier club rugby teams and national provincial championship teams playing in the Mitre10 Cup. The coaches and managers interviewed were volunteers or paid employees within their organisation. The participants were fluent in English, although English was not necessarily their native language. The participants came from a range of range of career backgrounds, sport, business, education and police. All of them having many years of experience coaching or managing rugby teams in New Zealand at different levels. The participants were all actively coaching or managing rugby in 2020, in different rugby unions throughout North Island - Auckland, Counties Manukau, Waikato and Hawkes Bay Provincial Rugby Unions.

The participants were recruited through the researcher's existing professional networks in Auckland, Counties Manukau, Waikato, Hawkes Bay and Manawatu Provincial Rugby Unions. The professional contacts the researcher had with the rugby unions across North Island in New Zealand permitted enabled access to a wide spread of participants. The researcher initially approached his contacts in the provincial rugby unions to establish what coaches were free to be able to participate in interviews. He then approached the participants in several ways. Firstly, he contacted the participants through a text message on either LinkedIn, Messenger, WhatsApp or email. Once the researcher had a response from a potential participant, he emailed them the information sheet and consent form. The researcher then coordinated a date and time to have the interview over a Zoom call, as it complied with the social distancing measures in place in 2020

due to the pandemic. A Zoom call invitation was sent via email to conduct the interview via the video conferencing platform.

### *Participant Selection*

Participants were purposively selected based on the level of rugby they coached or managed. As non-probability sampling approach, it was important for the researcher that the coaches and managers selected were experienced in working with the management teams and with their player groups. As a cross-sectional study, it was pursued a sampling at different levels of rugby. The coaches at each one of those levels needed to be coaches with a purpose to be involved in rugby, which was mentioned by one of the coach developers when the questions were piloted. It is for this reason, that the researcher liaised with the rugby union to find the best suited participants at each level of rugby. The rugby unions expressed interest in the outcomes of this study as it would inform their coach development practice. Therefore, the rugby unions were keen to provide the names of participants that they thought best represented coaches and managers at each level of rugby.

As the researcher explored the three different tiers of rugby in New Zealand, it was determined that the researcher would seek to interview four participants at each level, anticipating 12 participants. The reasoning behind the number of coaches to be interviewed was that each level of rugby had its own characteristics. If the research was to explore a management structure in place across rugby teams in New Zealand, it was best to identify if there were common structures at each level of rugby and commonalties that overlapped into other tiers of rugby. The COVID19 pandemic impacted on the ability to conduct face to face interviews; it postponed or delayed competitions and mandated adjustments to management teams to government, New Zealand Rugby, as a result of the Ministry of Education COVID19 guidelines,

made it difficult to access coaches and managers. It was especially difficult as a second lockdown eventuated at the start of the Mitre10 Cup, which affected teams at the National Provincial Championship level. Thus, the number of participants at this tier of rugby in New Zealand was reduced from four to three.

### *Participant List*

The researcher made a list of potential participants he could contact for the interviews at each tier of rugby set out in the research. The initial list of potential participants had five coaches at 1<sup>st</sup> XV school level, seven coaches at Premier club level, and five coaches at National Provincial Championship level. The researcher messaged the potential participants via text message, WhatsApp, Messenger or LinkedIn to get in contact with them. Not all the potential participants in the initial list responded and therefore the researcher approached two rugby unions to ask for assistance with names of potential coaches or managers the rugby unions though could be good contributors to the research objectives. Further names were given, and they were approached by the researcher in the same manner as the initial list of participants.

The potential participants who responded were then sent an email with the information sheet and consent form for the interview and a request to partake in the interview. The participants would confirm their participation via return email and the researcher would confirm a time and date to have the video conferencing interview with the participant via Zoom. Prior to the agreed time and date of the interview the researcher sent a Zoom meeting invite to the participants so they could log on to the video conferencing app via the link provided and the password assigned. Prior to the interviews the researcher set up the third-party automated transcription application, Otter.ai, on Zoom so the interviews could be transcribed simultaneously to their audio and video recording.

#### **4.3.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used in this research as its essential purpose was to search for themes and common patterns across rugby teams in New Zealand at different levels. Thematic analysis provided a flexible and accessible approach to analyse the interviews. Thematic analysis facilitated the integration of data that came from different participants. It also assisted the identification of key themes and patterns within the management structures, as well as producing a thematic description of the data. As a standalone analytical process, thematic analysis fitted the research design and aligned with the philosophical background of the researcher. It supported the philosophical background as it focused on themes present in applied practice of management teams in New Zealand rugby teams.

The formulation of the research question and sub-questions assisted at the commencement of the identification of themes. This was the first step in the analysis in establishing the main themes the researcher was to explore through the semi-structured interviews. Once the interviews started taking place coding of concepts within themes became clearer as there were common practices being conveyed by coaches and managers. Coding was done specifically for each tier of rugby and then overlapped to the other tiers to find overall trends. The coding was done in a dual manner by the automated transcription application, Otter.ai, which identified commonly used words and by the researcher in the notes he took each interview. The familiarization with the data grew through the data collection as the thematic analysis expanded and the coding of common practices became more apparent and repetitive.

#### **4.4 Validity and Reliability**

The research demonstrated reliability and validity through the research questions and the interviews. Validity was generated by the alignment of the interview questions with the research questions, and the overall alignment with the research objectives. This coherence across the research objectives to the interviews provided strong validity to this research. Reliability in this research was achieved by the spread of participants interviewed across the industry. The fact that multiple participants were interviewed at the different levels of rugby has given validity to the findings of this research. Also, the selection of participants and the allocated timeframe for the interviews to take place assured a consistency across all the interviews.

The researcher managed the threats to reliability by taking the account of how each participant worked and managed their team. The knowledge of their team was exclusive to them and therefore eliminated the threat of participant error and bias. While from the researcher's perspective he eliminated the threat of his error by having the interviews audio and video recorded and the transcriptions done automatically. While the threat of bias was removed by having prepared interview questions to be done in a set amount of time.

The COVID19 pandemic was a threat to validity as it affected the rugby teams during the time of this research. Nevertheless, all participants were under the same conditions and guidelines during the COVID19 pandemic and all teams managed to compete, thus having a season where their management structures had to be used to drive performance in the situation they were. The fact that the researcher was able to conduct the interviews to at least three participants at each level mitigated the fact that the start of the Mitre10 Cup limited access to coaches at the national provincial championship level. Overall, the challenging times under

COVID19 and the ongoing guidelines and restrictions the teams had to follow, generated similar conditions for the coaches and managers to manage their teams.

The validity and reliability of this research was based on credibility, generalisability and authenticity. To be able to establish credibility the researcher piloted the research questions of the semi-structured interview with a rugby coach and two coach developers. Their feedback provided a better order for the topics and interview questions to be covered. The researcher incorporated this feedback to the semi-structured interview he used with all participants. Also, all interviews with the 11 participants were between 45 to 60 minutes long, making sure all participants had a similar context to cover the topic of the interview. The amount of time the interview took was communicated to the participants prior to the interview. It allowed participants to know how long they would take and set aside enough time for the interviews so they would not be rushed or interrupted by another activity. Though none of the participants requested a copy of the transcription, it was also made available to the participants for verification.

With regards to generalisability, the research deliberately focused on exploring the management structure at three different levels of rugby in New Zealand to ascertain that the findings would be representative of New Rugby teams. Also, the participants came from four different ethnic backgrounds, Pacific Islander, Maori, NZ European and Hispanic. The data collected from the different levels of rugby and from participants of different ethnical backgrounds represents the transferability of the findings to other rugby teams in New Zealand, as well as, potentially, to other industries with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

As for the authenticity of the research design, the sampling of the participants based on their professional backgrounds, the different levels of rugby that they are involved in, and their

ethnic backgrounds, provided a true representation of NZ rugby teams. The participants came from a professional background in sport, education, business and the police force; what they had in common was that they were either a coach or manager of rugby team in New Zealand. With regards to ethnic background of the participants, there were four Pacific Islanders, three Maori, five NZ European, and one Hispanic. The researcher, to be able to explore an authentic sample of New Zealand rugby, interviewed participants at different tiers of New Zealand rugby, four at secondary school's 1<sup>st</sup> XV level, four at Club Premier level, and three at National Provincial Championship level. The participants did not come from a single rugby union, they were approached from different rugby unions across the North Island of New Zealand. The authenticity of the data was also tested in the data collection process, which entailed a video recording, an audio recording, and an automated transcription. All three data sources were triangulated once the interviews were concluded, to ensure the transcription was accurate with the audio and video recording.

The researcher constructed this research approach in order to identify findings and make recommendations that would be generalisable across similar industries in New Zealand and perhaps overseas.

#### **4.5 Bias**

The researcher reduced bias by keeping interviews anonymous across all teams and rugby unions. Despite the rugby unions provided names of participants, the researcher did not share with the rugby unions which participants eventually participated, thus eliminating any potential conflict of interest. The researcher has been a mental skills coach at Counties Manukau Rugby Football Union for the Academy players. Academy players are players between the ages of 18 to

21 who play for different rugby clubs and train under the supervision of the rugby union to develop them into professional players. This potential conflict of interest was minimised in 2020, as this group of players was not engaged with the rugby union in 2020 as representative rugby was cancelled due to the pandemic. Therefore, the researcher did not have active involvement in the rugby union in 2020.

The researcher's involvement with New Zealand rugby teams could have generated a bias in the construction and analysis of the interview questions. This bias was addressed via the piloting of the research questions to ensure that the data gathering was directly related to the objectives of the research, and the identified research questions. The same questions and order of topics were consistently used across all teams, and all data was interpreted collectively in pursuit of generalised findings. Furthermore, any findings and consequent conclusions have been triangulated with the research design and methodology.

The researcher's involvement in rugby could condition the research from his viewpoint. In order to reduce this bias, the data was collected through a video interview, and the transcription of the interviewed was triangulated with the audio and the automated transcription. The trends were identified by a thematic analysis looking to identify common concepts applied by the management teams interviewed and surveyed. By keeping the interview topics and questions open and consistent the objectivity of the responses was be raised.

#### **4.6 Limitations**

In the process of confirming participants, the researcher encountered difficulty confirming 1<sup>st</sup> XV coaches or managers within the Auckland region as the second COVID-19 lockdown took place and altered the end of the season for these teams. The researcher therefore

contacted the Counties Manukau Rugby Union Secondary School's Development Manager and asked for a list of potential participant names that they thought could participate in this research. 4 names were given and 2 of the coaches confirmed their participation in the research. Also, confirming interviews of National Provincial Championship coaches and managers was difficult as the Mitre10 Cup season started during the second COVID-19 lockdown. This situation altered the preseason agenda of the teams and the start of the season making it difficult for the researcher to confirm interviews at this time. For this reason the four intended interviews at the National Provincial Championship level were reduced to three as there had been ongoing difficulty to confirm interview dates and times with other coaches and managers.

Conducting research in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic was a limitation in itself. Firstly, due to lockdown restrictions and the inability to access organisations and facilities due to the maximum number of people limits allowed to gather at a venue, the researcher, conducted all interviews via a video conferencing platform, rather than the planned face-to-face mode. The pandemic was not only a limitation to the data collection and the interview process, but it was also a limitation for the management teams in how they ran their team organisation in the 2020 season. Through the interviews the participants mentioned the difficulties COVID-19 generated for their management teams and their players, and how they had to adapt to be able to get through the season.

As a cross-sectional study done at a specific point in time, the experience shared by the participants in the interviews was affected by the COVID19 pandemic during their rugby season. At first 1stXV and club level, the seasons were interrupted twice and thus, creating a situation different to a normal year. The management teams discussed how they needed to adapt to new communication models and technologies to be able to stay in contact with their players, which

made the 2020 season different. In terms of the national provincial championship teams, their pre-season and their season start were also affected by the COVID19 pandemic. It gave the management teams less access to players and at the time of the interviews the management teams were still adapting to how their management structures were navigating through the restrictions in place for the pandemic.

#### **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher prioritised ethical considerations in this study. The researcher applied for ethics approval to the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Southern Institute of Technology and was granted approval to conduct this research on 23 June 2020 (Appendix A). The Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi; partnership, participation and protection guided this study. The researcher, as explained in this chapter worked in partnership with the rugby unions, teams and its people. The research embraced the participation of different ethnic backgrounds from the piloting of the research questions through to the selection of the participants and their interviews. The participants are protected by anonymity and confidentiality.

The researcher was aware that the research may potentially have areas of interest to Māori depending on the ethnic background of the participant. The kaupapa of a team may provide an interest for Māori on how kaupapa was represented through rugby team management structures in New Zealand. Coaches and managers were asked about their ethnic backgrounds and the mix of four Pacific Islanders, three Maori, four New Zealand European and one Hispanic demonstrated a high level of diversity. The analysis of the interview was likely to provide conclusions that may be of interest to Māori.

All participants were over 18 years of age, and did not demonstrate any impaired mental state, as can be evidenced by the roles they have within their rugby teams. The participants were not identified in the research in order to maintain their anonymity. Participants were provided with an information sheet, so they were fully informed of their role in the study and how the information was to be disseminated. Participants were provided a chance to ask questions, and the rights they had. They were given time to consider their participation and were given the chance to withdraw from participation in the project until the point at which the data was anonymised and amalgamated into the report, without any disadvantage of any kind to the participant.

Participants were provided a consent sheet to sign and return to the researcher before taking part in the study. Also, participants were advised prior to recording their interviews that their interviews were going to be video and audio recorded. The researcher asked the participants verbally before starting the interview if they agreed to being recorded during the interview, to which all participants agreed.

All personal information of the participants will be kept anonymous and confidential. The audio and video recordings, transcripts and the notes taken by the researcher used for the purpose of this research were kept by the researcher. All notes taken were digitalised and saved in the researcher's computer hard drive and saved in the folder named, 'Research Thesis Interviews'. All data is kept on a password protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet. All data will be kept for five years after the completion of the research.

The participants were asked to review a transcript of their interview so they could verify its content, however no participant took this opportunity. Also, the interviews were kept anonymous across all teams, thus any potential conflict of interest was eliminated. The researcher did not

interview teams in which he had direct participation. To ensure there was not any potential bias the researcher used the same question topics and the same order of the questions consistently across all interviews. The interpretation of the data was done through a coding process and thematic analysis, which did not differentiate among the teams interviewed, except for the coding of the three different tiers of rugby.

#### **4.8 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the research design and methodology used to respond to the research question and the research sub-questions. In this chapter, the researcher has explained the pragmatic, inductive approach and the exploratory mono-method, case study strategy used for this research. The chapter has discussed the researcher's background and readiness for this methodological approach, the research design, methodology, validity and reliability, bias, limitations and ethical considerations.

A thorough consideration has been given to how this research has been conducted and the steps taken to maintain the confidentiality of its participants. The research design was examined primarily through the research onion analogy presented by Saunders et al., (2019), while the methodology discussed the objectives, research questions, data collection, sampling, and data analysis. Also, details have been provided to how reliability and validity of the data was obtained through this cross-sectional study. All participants contributed to the methodology by firstly, accepting to participate in the interviews; secondly, providing their written consent; and thirdly, by sharing their experiences and insights to how they work in their rugby teams in New Zealand. In the following chapter, the researcher presents the thematic analysis of the data and the findings from that analysis.

## Chapter V. Findings and Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

The findings and analysis in this chapter have been drawn from semi-structured interviews with 11 coaching and management staff across three tiers of rugby teams in New Zealand, conducted via video conferencing. The data was tabled into different themes and coded into specific topics to be able to respond to the research question and research sub questions. This enabled the researcher to collectively analyse the responses across the different teams and tiers of rugby in New Zealand, using an inductive and interpretive analysis of the data to identify findings. This thematic approach provided a structure that facilitated the identification of common trends across the different teams as evidenced through the interviews.

This chapter explores the findings for each theme and the researcher's analysis of findings within the theme. The themes are:

1. Background of the Participants
2. Communications in the team environment
3. Leadership Groups
4. Coaching and Management Model
5. Review & Reflection in the team environment
6. Principles Driving the teams.

The findings further address the overall research question 'Do management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance? This research question was explored through a series of research sub-questions:

**RSQ 1:** Does New Zealand Rugby use a management model to lead teams?

**RSQ 2:** What are the key principles for managing rugby teams?

**RSQ 3:** What is the focus of the management model used by NEW ZEALAND rugby?

**RSQ 4:** How is performance defined by management teams?

**RSQ 5:** How can the organisational structure of the team facilitate a continuous improvement model based on learning?

## **5.2 Background of Teams and Participants**

Participants identified their background as 38% New Zealand European, 31% Pacific Islander, 23% Maori, and 8% other. The spread across the three major ethnic groups participating in New Zealand rugby teams provided this research with an objective view of how the organisation works and reacts from a cultural perspective.

The professional background of the interviewees provided insight into why a learning organisation model is more readily represented within the organisation of New Zealand rugby teams; 45% were teachers, 45% were either former players or professional coaches or sport development officers. The final 10% (one participant) did not have a professional career associated to teaching or sports. Almost half of the participants came from an educational background and the other half had experienced or had direct professional involvement in sports. Therefore, a common focus on learning and improving by the coaching and management teams and the athletes in New Zealand rugby teams is noted.

All participants had more than 10 years of experience in the rugby environment. The minimum time involved directly coaching or managing a New Zealand rugby team was six years. Though some participants had only been with their current team for two years they were all highly experienced, having participated as both players and or coaches in different rugby

teams and at different levels of the game in New Zealand rugby. The interview data with these coaches and managers generated a strong sense of reflective practice for the participants, based on previous experiences as coaches and particularly their current experience coaching and managing in their current environment.

The research participants were all members of a wider and more extended coaching and management team. Their roles with their current team ranged from head coaches, assistant coaches, and team managers. As they had different organisational roles, the researcher was able to gain a perspective of the organisational structure and operation of New Zealand rugby teams at different levels. By correlating the information gathered from the different teams, common perspectives around learning, improvement, communication, and leadership were noted. Common patterns were identified from the responses of different participants.

The participants came from three different tiers of rugby in New Zealand, 1stXV school rugby, club Premiere level rugby and provincial rugby. These different tiers consistently included coaching and management teams. The participants were not alone in their teams and were part of a bigger coaching and management group. At the 1stXV level and at Premiere club level the teams had an average of seven members in their coaching and management teams. While at the national provincial championship level, professional rugby in New Zealand, the teams had coaching and management teams of an average of 13 members. Each of the members of the coaching management team were responsible for a portfolio. A specific area of responsibility within the team, be it a unit of players, a medical area or a management and organisational area of the team.

### **5.2.1 Analysis of the background**

From this analysis it was noted that coaching and management teams are run by a group of members. Overall, members of the coaching management teams had a depth of experience in rugby, derived from their participation as a player or their involvement as a coach and manager with teams at different levels. The nature of the participants reflected that coaching and management in New Zealand rugby attracts individuals who are strongly associated to coaching a sport or teaching and education. This background of experience in sport and education provided a background for New Zealand rugby teams to potentially have a learning organisation approach to how they function. As the participants interviewed were representative of New Zealand's cultural community this also facilitated the engagement and relationship building with the player groups.

### **5.3 Communications**

The focus on communication between the coaching and management team, and with the players, was central to how teams operate in New Zealand rugby. For all participants a key requirement was to have an open and ongoing communication with the coaching management team and the players to develop a team culture. The focus was on improvement and most importantly establishing a trust-based model on which the teams operated.

*“We do have a weekly meeting, ...all the coaches in the management staff. ... most of times have a daily coaches' meeting, ... a debrief of the day, ... a briefing for the next day. So, it doesn't have to be long... so we always take 10-15 minutes at the end of the day, just to have a small chat between all the coaches ...”, (Interviewee 10).*

Throughout the different levels of rugby teams, weekly and daily communication was noted to be central to their environment. At the beginning of a season ongoing communication helped build the relationships which would facilitate their learning and decision-making processes later in the season. As Interviewee Five said,

*“So, in November, sorry October, we started with skill sessions, scrum blocks and line out blocks and fitness blocks, and most of it was, was for relationships. Mainly for me to build credibility with these with these boys... I had to use that period to build relationships with them, and it was difficult. I still remember the first training, very difficult.”*

Technology and the use of technological applications was central to facilitating team communication. While face to face communication was used in contact-based interactions, all interviewees used message groups, such as WhatsApp, permitting ongoing communication among the coaching and management team, and players. Interviewees added they used video analysis software (messaging or video) across platforms such as Facebook or Heja to distribute messages and get feedback from coaches and players. Coaching and management teams relied on the most appropriate technological application to facilitate communication, as well as understanding and feedback from the coaching and management group and player groups. Other technologies used to enhance communication were Google Calendar, Google Docs and Google Drive. Five of the 11 interviewees used Zoom video conferencing. Interviewee 11 said,

*“We're all fathers and he understands (Head Coach) that it's important to get that balance as well. So, he doesn't, he doesn't want to sort of come into the office on a Sunday. So we'll have an hour or so catch up on Zoom on a Sunday afternoon or evening.”*

For this interviewee, Zoom allowed his Coaching and Management Team more flexibility to have their weekly review meetings without having to go into the office to do this.

The specific use of message groups empowered the communication structure drawn up in each team. As Interviewee Nine noted,

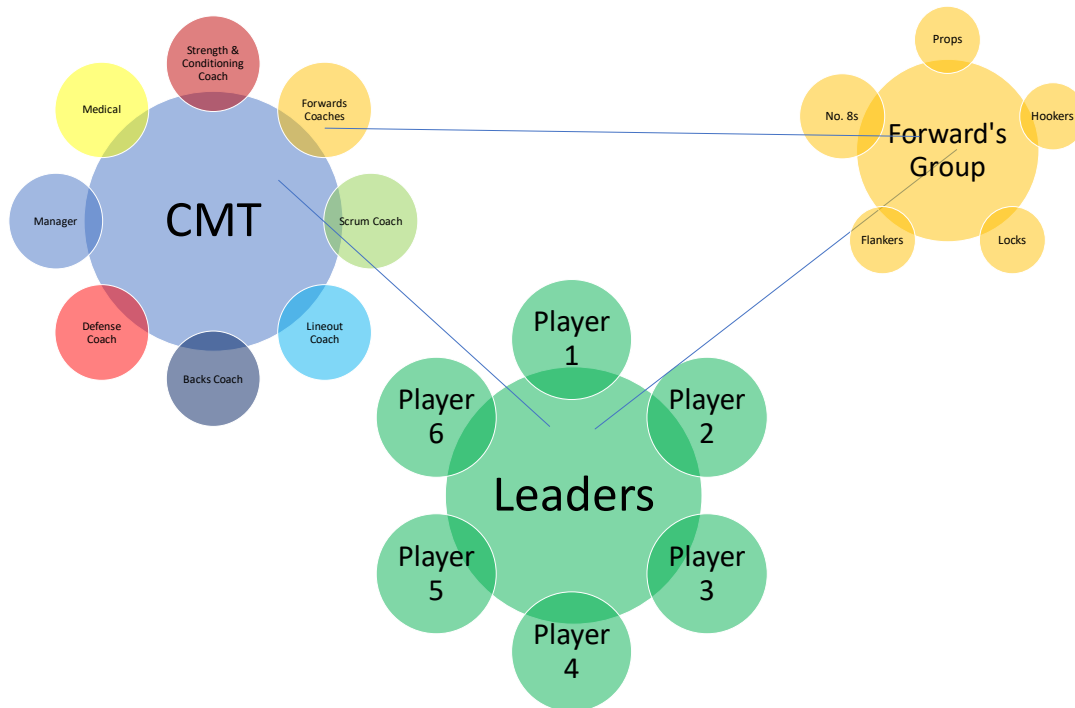
*“Of course, WhatsApp it is probably the biggest form of communication that we use in terms of chat groups. Yeah, very big on WhatsApp.”*

All interviewees identified they had message groups for their coaching and management, a message group for coaching and management and players, and a message group with the leadership group of the team.

*“We have a WhatsApp group, a couple of them. So, we have a wider management team WhatsApp group, which also includes our Director of rugby. Okay, we have a playing group, WhatsApp group, which is all our players that have played in our squad and then we have a leadership WhatsApp group, where we liaise with the leaders around, review, preview, any specific changes that, that may need to be a part of. And we get this on a probably on a daily basis, we're always tracking each other,” said Interviewee five.*

This model of communication generated a minimum of three communication networks. These three communication networks were interconnected with each other through its members and thus worked intricately together. This allowed communication to flow from one network to the other (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 – Message Groups



*Note: (Serrano, 2020).*

From the team structure and operational perspectives, there were set weekly times when communication was focused on team reviews to the coaching management team, the leadership group and to the wider team. These opportunities for review were communication starters. They generated ongoing communication during the week among coaches, managers, and players, either on a one-to-one basis or within player groups.

At the coach and management level, daily communication was mostly reflective, considering planning and continuous review about how they could improve their delivery and the performance of the players both individually and as a team. For the three tiers of rugby, interviewees acknowledged it was useful to have brief meetings at the beginning of the day or

before training. This helped the coaching and management teams align their focus on the players and what they needed to work on towards their performance.

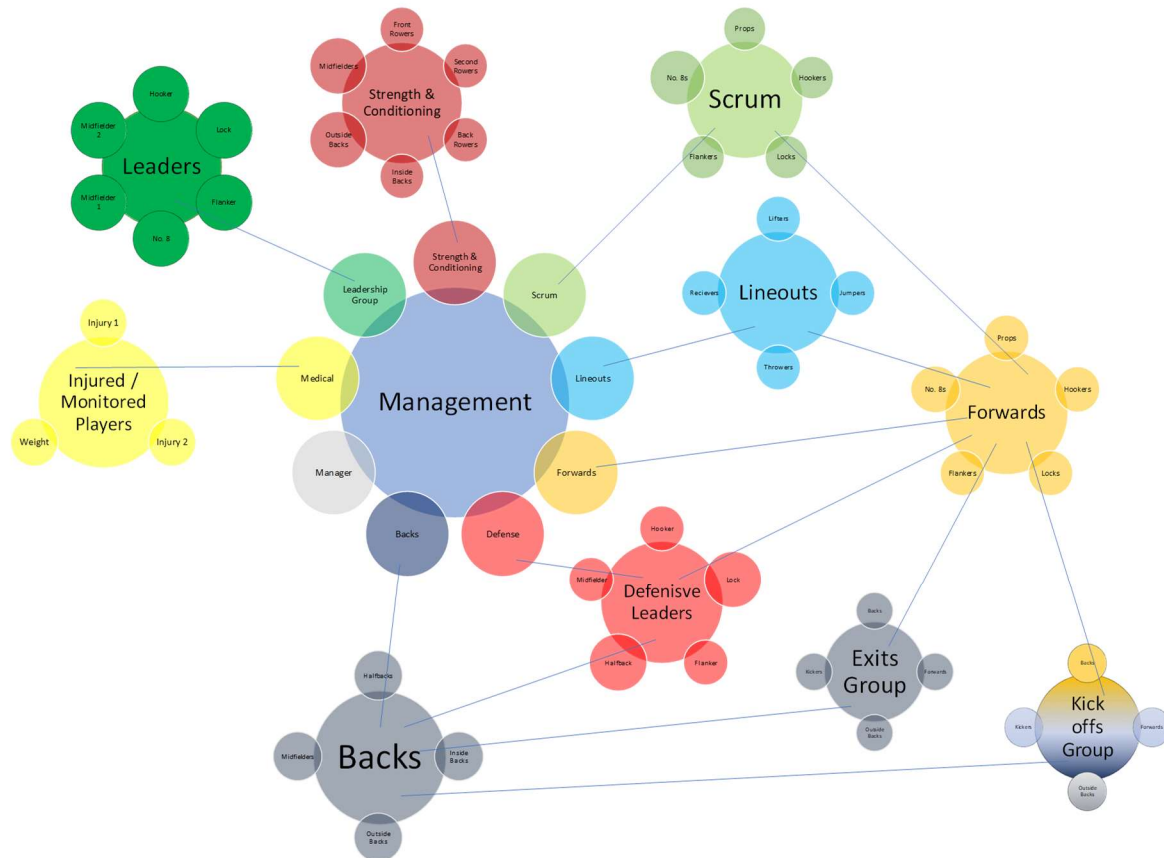
Structured and organised meetings with the leadership group were a constant across teams. Interviewees highlighted how communication with the leadership groups was key to understanding how the players were feeling and gauging the commitment from the player group about how the team was feeling and working towards performance. In some teams, the players had their own message groups outside the coaching management team. In other teams, the coaches and managers were a part of specific player message groups. In these groups, specific information around a team portfolio was discussed by that group of players and coaches. The leadership group was a central part of the feedforward and feedback going from coaches to players and players to coaches. Interviewee Eleven described the leadership group involvement in the feedback process,

*“I reckon it was real key learning, because it's got to be the player it's going to be player driven or player ideas, no point be trying to tell them something they don't want to do.”*

The leadership group also managed their own communication that went to players or the coaching and management group. Interviewee Eleven also added,

*“The game drivers (Leadership Group) will be just delivering the key messages. I don't even have to go into the shed.”*

Figure 5.2 – Communication Network in a New Zealand rugby team



*Note: (Serrano, 2020)*

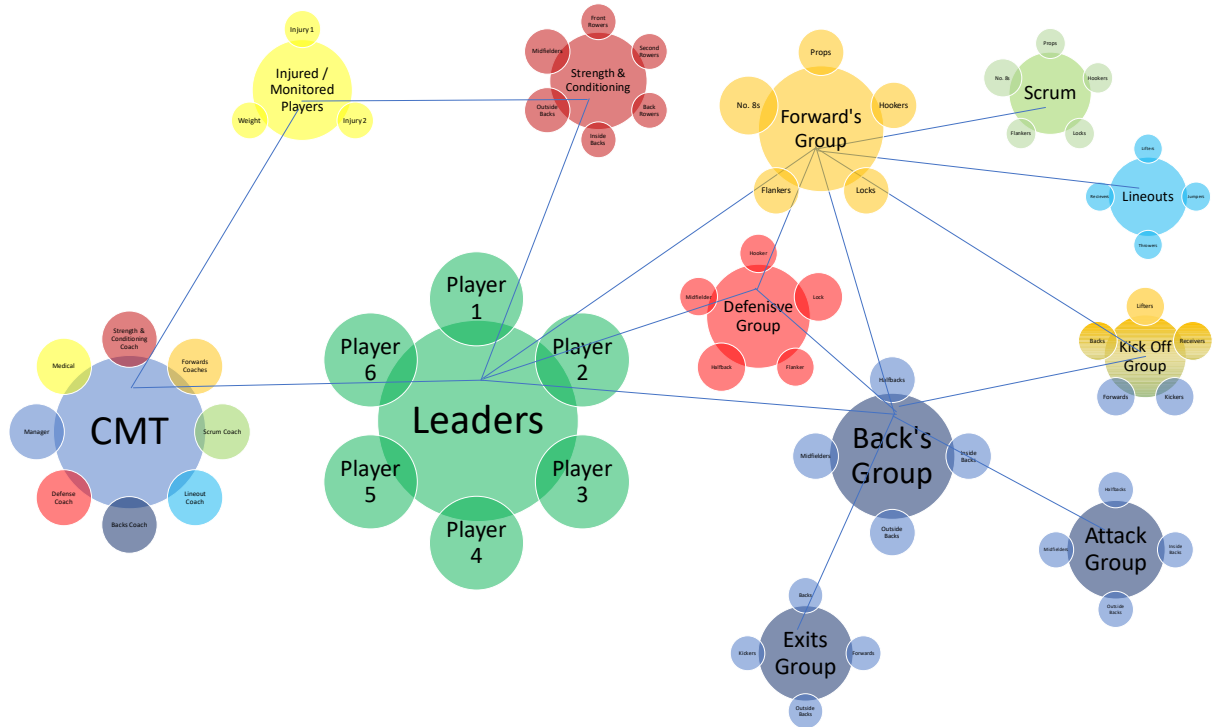
### 5.3.1 Analysis of Communications

When analysing the communications within New Zealand rugby teams, leadership groups enabled continuous communication as shown in Figure 5.2. The communication within a rugby team in New Zealand is dynamic, from multiple sources, with multiple receivers and flows through the team via different networks. To comprehend how communication takes place inside a New Zealand rugby team, at least three different sources of communication must be identified.

Firstly, the coaching and management team; secondly, the leadership group; and thirdly, a player group. In Figure 5.2, the connection between the groups can be identified. The flow of communication messages can be from any one of these groups to the other, all having a space to express feedback or feedforward. The coaching and management team facilitated this structure to gain insight into how the team and the players were feeling, as they would be the ones to ultimately make the decisions and do the work to improve their performance. Different player groups had their own communication networks; their interconnectivity with other units and groups within the team facilitated communication and messaging to travel and interconnect between one group and the other.

The leadership group was a central hub for team communication (Figure 5.3). The leaders' participation in the leadership group or in their individual player groups channeled messages, feedback, and feedforward around the team. Messages communicated were implicit or explicit, but exerted influence across the team as they were conveyed in the different networks. Rosca (2010) discussed how information starts from the management and moves across the team, but the interviewees noted that communication in their teams was multidirectional (Figure 5.2). Also, Morgan et al, (2015) concluded that there was a lack of research in multidirectional relationships in team environments, and the findings in this research respond to this.

Figure 5.3 – Leadership Group’s Communicational Influence



*Note: (Serrano, 2020)*

Participants noted this model was based on trust. The coaching and management teams relied on the leadership group to gain commitment from the players. Through the leadership group the coaching and management teams pushed out ideas and adapted according to the feedback. Most importantly, they created an environment according to the profile of the player group, based on continuous improvement worked towards achieving the performance of the players.

### 5.3.2 Relation to Research Questions

This analysis of Communication theme offers findings to support **RSQ 3** ‘What is the focus of the management model used by New Zealand rugby?’

Through the 11 interviews coaches and managers identified that continuous communication between the management teams and the players, either in the leadership team, player groups or individually was a primary focus. Feedback and feedforward to the coaching and management teams enabled the reflection and review process and a solution-focused environment. For this reason, the management model focused on enabling communication to be able to get the most from the leadership groups and the players.

#### **5.4 Leadership Groups**

Interviewees identified the leadership groups in terms of how communication happened inside the team environment. In some environments, the leadership group comprised senior players. In others, the leadership group included game drivers; those players who would lead on the field to achieve performance based on the game plans. Other teams had leaderships groups comprising players with leadership qualities and some teams indicated the need for leaders across different units in the team. Regardless of the characteristic of the members of the leadership group, the constant was that every single team in New Zealand rugby had a leadership group. The coaching and management teams relied on working and communicating at least on a weekly or even daily basis with the leadership group.

*“We have a weekly meeting at the start of the week, ... for about 30-40 minutes or less depends on need but the leaders know that they can come anytime to ask what is happening. .... The good thing about having a meeting with all the leaders is that you can actually discuss and talk with all the leaders about one topic. And ... we make a decision and everyone is there. .... anything not just coaching in any type of work, or job. Relationships are key, and trust in the relationship is the main one. It is trust, ... you can*

*be a good or bad employer or employee, you can be a good or bad coach, you can be a good or bad, ... player but when you have trust at least you can work on those things. You can be excellent ...coach and an excellent player you don't have trust between the both of you, nothing good is going to come from it. (Interviewee ten)*

The relationship between the coaching and management teams with the leadership group was strong and essential to be able to drive performance across the whole team.

*“It just creates so much more buy into your whole environment and that basically let's be honest the feelgood factor. And of course, the more that we can as management... have relationships with players families, the more conversations we can have, the more we get to understand about our players as well. And I think that's, that's key, that's really key... getting to know the player as best you possibly can do, and getting those strong connections is vitally important to success.” (Interviewee Nine)*

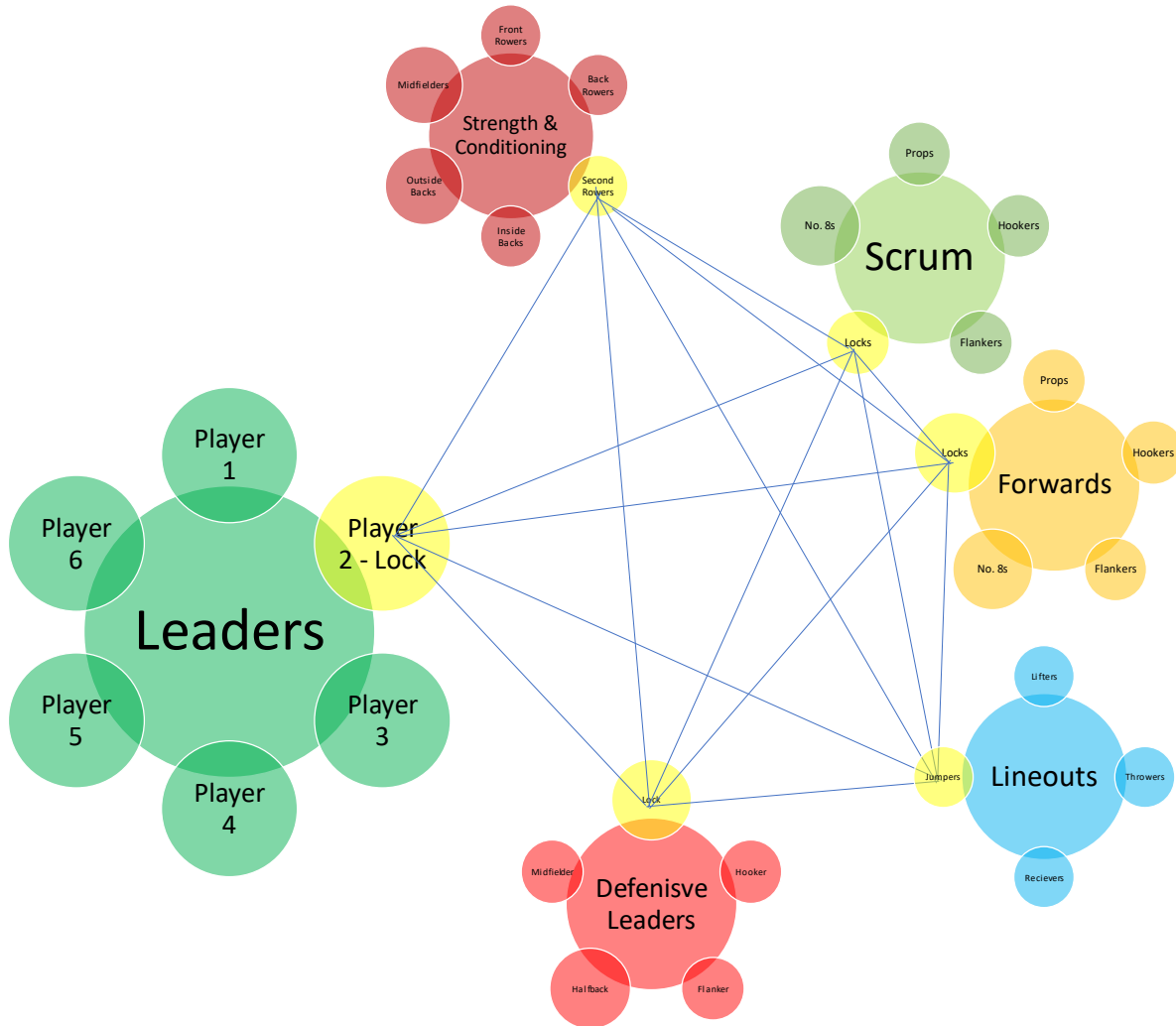
Leadership groups had their own message groups with the coaching and management team; they also had special meetings with the coaching and management team and were given special tasks within the team to drive performance and promote learning in the team environment, such as conducting video analysis.

Senge (1996) noted three different types of leaders in a learning organisation: the local line leader, the executive leader, and the internal networkers. While the coaching and management team were the executive leaders, taking on that mentoring role with the players, the leaders in the leadership group were the local line leaders. They did not only contribute directly to the leadership group, they fed back and fed forward to the coaching and management team and acted as heads of units to their specific player groups in which they participated within the team organisation (Figure 5.4). Some teams had senior leaders, who did not want an explicit

leadership role; rather. they fulfilled the role of the internal networkers who lead by example (Senge, 1996). Not all senior or higher-level players or leaders led, but the idea was to take pressure off them and let them play, it generated buy in from the others.

*“We’ve taken away the pressures off them and just letting them play.... the elder statesman that are there just to play club footy and, and the thing is, they see all those boys buying in and they all start buying in and so that, that’s probably the big thing.”*  
*(Interviewee Eight)*

Figure 5.4 – Leadership Group Interconnectivity via a Leader



*Note: (Serrano, 2020)*

Therefore, leaders and leadership groups across the different teams contributed in different ways. In some teams, the leadership group channeled how the team felt through the work week. Through their communication to the coaching and management team, the leadership groups decided whether to hold trainings. Many management teams relied on delegating this type

of decision-making to the leadership groups, based on a trust-based model where there was a shared vision of what the team was trying to achieve. The relationship with the leadership group were more fluid and the continuous messaging via WhatsApp groups or simply having an open-door policy, where the leaders and leadership group could approach the coaching and management team at any time worked well in the team environments.

In Wilson (2011), it was discussed how New Zealand rugby had a collaborative environment and how leadership was distributed across a range of individuals, recognising that players could be leaders. The findings in this research showed how players are active leaders and generated interconnectivity which is multidirectional. The findings also responded to Wilson (2011) by looking at amateur and professional team environments.

The participants noted the leadership group's responsibilities and accountabilities increased over the week. Early in the week, the coaching management team would take on more responsibilities, but as the week progressed the coaching and management team took a step back and the leadership groups took on more control of the environment.

*“On the third day, so I'd like to see it more player-led now. The drivers will be up. So it's the strike group guys, they'll be up talking about the big rocks. Just re-emphasizing them again.” (Interviewee Eleven)*

A similar pattern was reflected in the involvement and participation of the leadership groups throughout the season. Before, or early in, the pre-season the leaders or leadership group were consulted with regards to the theming, vision and objectives set for the season.

*“Two weeks or three weeks after that, maybe two, with the leadership team and say, this is where we're headed to. This is what we're doing, get some feedback some feed forward. And then, because it's it's tougher. For the coaches driving the vision by ourselves. So if*

*we get buy in from the leadership team, it's a lot easier to get everybody else to buy in.”*

*(Interviewee Six)*

The coaching and management teams presented visions, themes and objectives to the leadership groups and adapted them according to their feedback. Once coaching and management teams and leadership groups agreed to these, they were communicated onto the team. Here, the communication networks in action are most noticeable. The coaching and management team, through their network and their connection with the leadership team, conveyed these messages to the leadership group. Then the leadership group conveyed the messages to the other players (Figure 5.4). When the coaching and management team met with the wider playing group and conveyed the same message, the players had already received it. The messages travel across the team groups via group messaging or by the players themselves presenting the vision, themes, and objectives to the team. By using the communication network, leadership networks were also created.

All teams had a management and coaching team. Each coach and manager headed their own portfolio or area within the team. In overlapping leadership networks, coaches and management teams participated in one network, then each coach or manager participated in another network with players. The leadership group participated in their own networks, which overlapped the ongoing communication with the coaching and management team. Each leader also participated in their own leadership networks through their units or specific areas and portfolios in the team. This overlapping sphere of influence can be seen in Figures 5.2 and 5.4. In Figure 5.4, a player who is lock can be seen participating in five other networks.

Leadership development was an essential part of what the participants did in New Zealand rugby teams. Interviewees noted they needed leaders to focus on improvement and on getting better. Making better leaders was a part of these teams becoming constantly better.

*“As a coaching team we have picked a couple of younger boys and we can identify that they will, they are small leaders at the moment, and they will develop ... into greater leaders and we were deliberately giving them some tasks and things to do, to work on the leadership.” (Interviewee ten)*

*“The overarching aspect to, to all of their development really, and what we're really trying to focus on here because Mitre10 Cup, provincial rugby, is getting younger and younger is the leadership component to it. And that's another aspect too, there is no curriculum. So to speak for developing leadership, so you've got to find ways and means of creating little opportunities here and there for groups, for individuals to develop their leadership.” (Interviewee Nine)*

#### **5.4.1 Analysis of Leadership Groups**

From the interviews it appears that all teams relied on having leadership groups in their rugby team environments. This reliance reflected a trust-based model where the leadership group shared the common vision and objectives as the coaching management team; a vision and objective that was across the entire team. From an analysis point of view, they contributed and drove communication, decisions, and solutions for the team.

Some teams relied on the leadership groups to present the messaging to the wider playing group, reflecting a communication responsibility within the team. In teams where leadership groups were delegated more control over the activities each week, these leadership groups were empowered with more decision-making capabilities. At the national provincial championship

level, the highest tier of rugby in New Zealand interviewed in this research, leadership groups went one step further to develop solutions and bring them to the coaching and management team. Though the coaching and management team carried the accountability for team achievements, the structure they implemented shared this accountability with the leadership group. The coaching and management teams supported this delegated process, which empowered growth in leadership of the players, and aligned with what the interviewees referred to as, “they need to be learning all the time” (Interviewee Ten).

The more the leadership groups were empowered to either present to their peers, find solutions, ask questions, and discuss with the coaching and management team, the more they were strengthened in their leadership roles.

*They're not finding the solutions, themselves, then you're not enhancing their development. (Interviewee Nine)*

This generated an influence across the different networks in which the leaders participated. As coaching and management teams provided this structure of leadership groups within the team, it enabled them to facilitate leadership development progressively from the preseason, adapting to the learning styles of their players. The structure supported leadership groups to flourish; it began with a narrow approach, which widened during the season. The leaders and the leadership group had more options from which to make decisions or find solutions as the rugby team environment and structure widened its context in which these leadership groups could perform.

#### **5.4.2 Relation to Research Questions**

An analysis of Leadership Groups theme offers findings to support **RSQ 3** ‘What is the focus of the management model used by New Zealand rugby?’ Through the interviews coaches and managers identified that the player leadership group provided a communication channel and

also an advisory group which provided feedback and feedforward to the coaching and management teams. Hence, the management model focused its operation on the work of the leadership groups. This focus appears consistent with the focus on communication and the reflection and review process.

Analysis of this theme also informs findings related to **RSQ 5**: ‘How can the organisational structure of the team facilitate a continuous improvement model based on learning?’ The teams in which the interviewees coached or managed had a player leadership group, which facilitated communication between players and coaches and generated buy-in from the player to shared visions and objectives for the team. Having the leadership groups within the team structures facilitated the learning process within the teams which enabled the continuous improvement.

### **5.5 Coaching Management Model**

From the interviews it appears all the rugby teams represented used a similar coaching and management structure; each team with six to seven coaches and managers who divide up the responsibilities in portfolios, units or areas. Where the coaching and management team set up leadership groups and player groups with the members of the team, a coach or manager would participate in player groups as part of their area or portfolio. Used across different rugby teams, this structure generated several independent working groups, or networks, within the team organisation. Each group comprised a hub from where information was processed, learnt and decisions were made. The coaches and managers acknowledged that their organisational model was player-centered.

*“All very much player-centered. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. ... So, it's all about the individual and it's all about the growth of the individual and ... we all know that as*

*management all we can do is best prepare the players from week to week and steer them in the right direction. We all know that ultimately when the pressure and the heat comes on, out in the middle of the field. It's all about the players it's not the management."*

*(Interviewee Nine)*

*"You put your player first, hundred percent man, ... you need to also, I think, like I said, you have your own principles and your own things that you want to, you have to get buy in ... from your players to give them that, but I always put the player at the centre of whatever we do, ... and that's why I sit around asking after, ... getting feedback from them around what we've done. (Interviewee Two).*

*"It's definitely player-centered. It has to be..... Player-centered means ... it's what you want to train, to learn and you want to transfer. It's got to get through faster and sit with the player a lot easier than if it's centered around them because it's catered for the them, .... So, catering learning ... for players is massive. And understanding the way they learn and what their goals are and where they want to go and how he better and better and better is massive." (Interviewee Five.)*

By player-centered this interviewee meant that everything the organisation did was focused on making the players individually, as a group, and as a team, better. The organisational structure focused on establishing the leadership group as the central hub from where communication improvement and learning was conveyed. The coaches and managers recognised the structures provided for the initial ideas and then feedback was sought from the leadership group to carry them forward to the rest of the team. This might be viewed as the reason why the leadership group became the hub from where these ideas flourished. At the beginning of the season, the coaching management model was more coach-led than player-centered. As the bond

between the leadership group and the player group grew during the season, the coaching and management model evolved to be more player-led. In some cases, the shift from a coach-led to a player-led model was also evident through the operational processes during the week.

Interviewee Eleven, who was a coach said:

*“And by the end of the week... the strike guys are presenting. We've got a captain's run today. The game drivers will be just delivering the key messages. I don't even go into the shed. Today, other than to say hello to the boys, I'm not in there for the meeting, it's all on the players by now. ... Total alignment in especially for this time of the week is, is, is very evident.”*

In the player-centered model, the player-led initiatives in the team impacted how the coaching and management team structures generated improvement. Player-led actions focused on decisions, solutions, setting of objectives and establishing team culture and values. All teams promoted a player-centered environment, but the degrees of player-led actions varied, depending on the team and the coaching and management team.

Bennett and Fyall (2018) said high school teams across New Zealand applied and player-centered model, but further investigation was needed to determine if player-centered coaching was in used. The findings from the 11 interviews noted a player-centered approach across the different levels of rugby beyond high school.

When setting the team culture and values, the coaching and management teams relied on ‘theming’ (setting a symbolic concept for the team with associated visual and verbal cues to create unity of concept) across the different tiers of New Zealand rugby. The participants shared the theming used in the 1<sup>st</sup> XV environments, using military metaphors, or incorporating symbolisms of a poem. At club level, theming was used to instill a work ethic and help generate

the vision the teams wanted to pursue. While at the national provincial championship level, theming was based around the history of rugby union and the objectives they wanted to pursue. At the different levels, themes were delivered and shared with leaders and feedback was sought to make sure that these themes resonated with the player group so the theme could be adapted accordingly and pushed out to the wider squad. Theming helped to develop an alignment of shared group visions and objectives, which aimed to generate continuous improvement and consistent player performance. For this reason, the coaches referred to the model as player-centered.

Interviewees noted the coaching and management team empowered the players to make improvements towards weekly and daily team operations. Coaches and managers implemented a structure built on a strong communicational relationship underpinned by constant questioning; in this way players became used to making decisions on finding solutions. This was the purpose of the coaches and managers, as, at the end of the day the players would have to make decisions and find solutions to improve. Players and leadership group members took on more of player-led model towards the end of the week through the guidance of the coaches but transferred the decision making to the players towards the end of the week. Interviewee One said,

*“We'll often leave it to the senior leadership group and say, we do stuff on a Monday and a Tuesday, and on Thursday, we'll do a little bit of work and then at the back end of it, we start to taper off as a management group, personally, you'll often find on a Friday, if things go well, we don't have to do much... I sit in the grandstand with the coaches and we'll just watch.”*

During the season, as the group gained more experience and learning, coaches and managers ran a stronger player-led environment by handing more decision and solution-making

responsibility to the players via their player groups and leadership group. The leadership group took on significant responsibility and accountability about decisions on team behavior and discipline, whereas the coaching and management team left decisions on sanctions of team members for misconduct to the leadership group. An incident dealt by a leadership group, which decided the result of a game was explained by a coach-interviewee:

*“I called him, and the leadership team and I said, this is where this is... Because I know you're aware of what happened. ... Is there any chance that we can play this game and then sort of deal with it afterwards? ... you kind of need to align yourselves as a group. They agreed to stand him down from the game. Yeah, and we lost that game, we lost our 1st V the one that drives the whole team, but they still played well...” (Interviewee Four)*

The player-centered coaching and management model highlights the empowerment given to the leadership group. The reflection and decision-making process created leadership, learning, and fostered better leaders. The interviewees acknowledged that improvement in this area outweighed results on the field, as they could see improvements made by their players even when these decisions could impact the outcome of results in a game. This contrasted with McKenzie (2019), who stated players were in controlled environments and feared taking ownership of decisions.

### **5.5.1 Analysis of the Coaching Management Model**

In the analysis of the coaching and management model it became apparent that all models used were based on trust and building strong communicational relationships between players and the coaching and management team. The coaching management model was player-centered, and through the season, the model became a more player-led one. The implementation of this model required an enormous amount of trust from the coaching and management team. What they

communicated and transferred to their players was taken with a high level of commitment enabling the pursuit of performance and continuous improvement. The establishment of shared vision and objectives, and consultation with the leadership group, aligned with the feel and expectations of the leadership group and players; thus, fostering trust from the players and coaches to work towards the same objectives. The understanding by the coaching and management team that trust needed to be handed to the players, as well as the capacity to make decisions and come up with solutions, required the coaching management team to hand control over to the leadership group. Coaching and management teams constructed an alignment where vision, objectives possible solutions were within a context set by the themes presented at the beginning of the season. The importance that the different coaches and managers gave to commitment, referred to as generating buy in, highlights how the coaching and management model of New Zealand rugby teams was not autocratic but participative in its nature. What connected all interviewees to this coaching management model was an interest in improvement; both by the coach and management team, as well as the players, who needed to be continuously learning to improve and make better decisions and come up with better solutions.

### **5.5.2 Relation to Research Question**

An analysis of the Coaching Management Model theme offers findings to support **RSQ 1**: ‘Does New Zealand Rugby use a management model to lead teams?’ All interviewees used a player-centered management model in their teams. which was strongly based on trust and communicational relationships. This model had at its centre, a player leadership group, which was a key part of how the management model would function. The leadership group for this management model is comparable to the role of the line managers, noted by Senge (1996) as being central to learning organisation theory. This theme also offers findings to support **RSQ 5**:

‘How can the organisational structure of the team facilitate a continuous improvement model based on learning?’ Interviewees explained how their teams had leadership groups and a structured continuous reflection and review process focused on continuous improvement. The continuous learning was a product of the management model to facilitate the continuous improvement through a leadership group structure and connectivity and the reflection and review process set up by each coaching and management team.

## 5.6 Reflection and Review

Throughout the interviews the ‘reflection and review’ process was evident across all the teams.

*“So you do that over a block and then again you reflect over the next couple of weeks, three weeks as coaching staff, build it back into the profile on our spreadsheet, see whether they've achieved it or not or how the tracking wrong, and then go back to individually to the player as well.” (Interviewee Seven)*

This comment was supported by Interviewee Nine, who noted:

*“Clearly each week, that becomes a focus point for that individual. And I guess you use the reflection side of it in terms of how they performed on that skill or that certain aspect of the game last week and comparatively to this week. And has there been some improvement on it, in terms of reflection.”*

This ‘reflection and review’ process operated differently across teams. Reflection and review were undertaken at three levels, by coaches, players, and coaches and players together. Interviewees noted it occurred weekly, and extensively at the end of each season. This

participation was taken on by the different actors and assisted by technology, which was incorporated into the reflection and review process within these teams.

Interviewees One, Ten and Eleven highlighted the process as a deliberate task to determine how the teams operated during the week and during the season.

*“The review reflection and planning, it's, ... demanding but it's simpler than people think. so we plan something. We decided we enforce something this week. Could be a game related thing or not game related thing. We do it. And then we just come back and talk about it.” (Interviewee Ten)*

The fact that coaching and management teams deliberately scheduled, structured and initiated the reflection and review process did not impede the autonomy of the players to input into these processes.

*“So when we get the reflection on Sunday, ... it's done by our head coach, ... and we give feedback in and if we have some. What I really focus on as the backs coach is my feedback from the players from what they see. So, like I said before most times they marry up what the team is trying to work on...” (Interviewee Six)*

The player input came from the leadership groups. Teams relied on their leadership groups to take a role in the weekly reflection and review. Sometimes unit groups had players contribute to the reflection and review from their unit perspectives. In both cases, player input into the reflection and review process was an essential part of how teams functioned. Decisions and solutions were aimed at improvements for to be adopted, contrasting with McKenzie's (2019) findings that reflection was requested from players but mostly disregarded by the coaching and management teams as they found players did not have experience to make decision. From an organisational perspective, the reflection and review process was structured into each team, each

review process was initiated by the coaches and or players. Rosca (2010) mentioned information started solely from the coaching and management team, being the prime mover, which the findings from the interviewees determined several sources of information. In all cases the player and coaching and management reviews were brought together to communicate a single message to the team on the approach moving forward. Interviewee Ten explained the process:

*“Well we select key points, at the beginning of the week with the leadership teams. For example, I'm going to talk about scrums, so I go through the footage, the boys go through the footage, then we meet as a leadership team of scrums. We talked about what everybody sees and then we come up with a plan. Okay then we execute that plan for this week. For the week and for the weekend. And then next week, we go and review what's happened in another meeting. So these are the three key points we went through boys, what happened? The first one, how did that go, oh yeah not so well okay, what we can do to address that. Okay, this one is perfect. The second one, how did it go? Yeah, good. Okay, so what I'm going to do this week keep doing the same. Perfect. Third one. Now we're really bad. Okay Why, because what are we going to do to amend this isn't this? Perfect, and that's the plan for the next week. That's it!”*

The implication of a structured approach to reflection and review was that the goal was alignment across the team, focusing on their progress in making improvements.

The coaching and management teams initiated weekly and yearly reflection and review processes. Weekly reviews reflected on game performance, what worked well, what did not and what needed to be improved. Usually, this occurred in the first two days of the week before a game, and focused on game statistics, game videos and the discussion of coaching and management team meetings after the game. Videos or data was then pushed out to the leadership

group and presented to the team or leadership group, to enable leadership group and the players to have input into decisions and solutions presented by the coaching management team. The interviewees expressed that it was a deliberate action put on the player group to gain player buy-in. Potential solutions were presented by the players, focusing on highlights. Taking the reflection and review process out to the leadership group and other player groups appeared, based on the interviewees' comments, to generate buy-in from the wider team.

In some teams, players would follow the initial reflection and review of the coaching and management team, but in other teams it was simultaneous. In one team, players were given a one to 10 scale to rate their performance after each game. This data was triangulated with that of the coaches and management teams when they did the mixed review with the players. As

Interviewee Two noted,

*“Look for me ... when you come off. I'm just gonna ask you individually, how you think you've performed, and if they said to me, oh sir, I was a six but they were really an eight, I'll tell them. Or I'll tell them they were seven, ... because I think that a lot of them are pretty humble guys and they rate themselves a lot lower. But the other thing is if they told me that they were eight and they were a bit lower, then I could actually show them footage. Actually mate, you are saying this, but a bit of self-reflection, ... is honesty, but we didn't even have to get there that much”.*

The joint reviews between coaching management team and the players were completed either as a whole team basis, broken down into units, or with the leadership team. The interviewees' approach to doing this mixed reflection and review depended mostly on the resources in each team. Therefore, teams with more coaches were able to undertake joint review processes, while teams with less coaching and management resources relied either on a whole

team session or a session with the leadership group. The structured nature of these joint reflection and review processes was conducted either via message group; or face to face or in conversation with players. Whatever the method, it was based on data in videos of the game. An initial review by the coaching and management teams and player groups was to see how that data and review would be used in the new work week.

Reflection and review was not only undertaken weekly; teams had a yearly post season reflection and review process. Interviewees highlighted this helped coaching and management teams learn from one season to plan forward. The interviewees also had review sessions with the players, conducted by either the coaching and management team or the organisation (school, club or the rugby union). The yearly review was done in the post-season once all rugby and field activities had finished. Interviewee Six went through the following process,

*“We'll go away. Come up with a few themes, and then decide on one moving forward. And then we'll come together for session, so November December we'll always have a session. And we plan the whole season together. ... Then we'll have a meeting, two weeks, two weeks or three weeks after that, maybe two, with the leadership team and say, this is where we are heading to, this is what we're doing, we get some feedback some feed forward. And then, because it's tougher for the coaches driving the vision by ourselves. So, if we get buy in from the leadership team, it's a lot easier to get everybody else to buy in. So by the time preseason comes, the seven - the three backs and the four forwards - the leadership team, they've already been contacting their mates. This is our goal for this year this is what we're doing.”*

For Interviewee Six this activity created an environment of continuous improvement.

Technology was used in the reflection and review processes by all interviewees. Weekly reflection and video data were the platforms for the team reflection. Some teams also used WhatsApp, where discussion was held around the improvements the team or the units had to do during their week. It appears the use of technology to facilitate the reflection and review process helped the interviewees to get players in the right mindset for working on the improvements and using time more effectively at trainings. Video was used prior to the training to exemplify what players needed to work on or emphasise what they were doing well and needed to continue to do. This was a relevant finding from the interviews, where coaching and management teams emphasised the improvements they worked on with the players focused on what they were already good at and not necessarily on things they were not doing well that needed to improve. For the interviewees, continuous improvement was their goal; Interviewee Nine explained the focus on improvement from the point of view of team manager:

*“... from week to week based purely based on preview review, both as a team, as units, and as individuals. They all whether it's a team thing whether it's a unit thing whether it's an individual thing. There's always something, ... we always reinforce here that don't fall into the trap of as an individual if you have strengths, you still continue to work on those strengths, because that actually makes you who you are and that's, that's your point of difference. So, you don't relax on that and focus purely on your weakness, because then you're not continually improving your strengths that you already have. And I think that sort of mindset is probably ...how we operate here.”*

### **5.6.1 Analysis of Reflection and Review**

For all interviewees, reflection and review was taken on as a weekly and a yearly exercise, at the coaching and management level, and also at the player level. At the player level it

was either at the leadership group or by players within their units. The triangulation of the reflections and review consistently demonstrated what the coaching and management team did with their players prior to the implementation of solutions they applied to their team environments. As player feedback was continuously incorporated into the reflection and review process this process was a joint exercise. Data to be reviewed was shared across the organisation; both coaches and players had access. It was a process where leadership group and individual player input was required to provide solutions. Interviewees identified a structured feedback loop between the coaching management team, the leadership group and the player groups. This feedback loop operated more informally in some cases than in others. However, the consistency of the practice across the different rugby teams, and at different levels of rugby, showed a shared reflection and review process, with an embedded feedback loop, was part of the structure New Zealand rugby teams used to drive improvement and performance. There was a reliance on data by the coaching management team, who were responsible for the team operating structure, extracting data from videos and discussing it with other coaches and the leadership group. This generated a consensus across the team regarding improvements and actions to follow.

Technology, and specifically the use video data, provided objective information that was available to both the coaching and management staff and the players to analyse, reflect and review. As mentioned by Interviewee Four, “Yeah, it's, it's got a mixture of styles.” The coaching and management teams connected with different members of the organisation, by repeatedly connecting with them through different styles of learning. By using video technology and message groups, learning was delivered in a multi-modal fashion through visual, audio, and kinesthetics. Repetition through multi-modal platforms, including face to face and on-field engagement, generated more buy-in and understanding from the players groups regarding their

improvements. All interviewees highlighted this process was a key part of the learning taking place weekly within the team. Technology was used to present and discuss situations, ask and respond to questions, and prepare the coaching management team as well as the players to present to the wider group. This made it a tool that enhanced the learning experience by building the confidence of the participants in what they were communicating and deciding on. It also ensured engagement of the different participants with the learning that took place and the direction that the coaching and management team were providing to the team and organisation. Interviewee Five described the approach:

*“I find the WhatsApp group quite useful. ... they all have mobile phones, and they're all access it accessible throughout the day. So, if we do post up stuff it usually gets received quite quickly. The information transfers quick.... We've got a Facebook page, which we like to leave to our Director of Rugby to look after. We have an internal page, where boys ... once video footage is up on Hudl, they clip and cut and paste, post up highlights and all that sort of stuff. So, it's not really a tool that we drive, our coaching group... We leave that to discussions on WhatsApp email and then, face to face.”*

### **5.6.2 Relation to the Research Questions**

An analysis of the Reflection and Review theme offers findings to support **RSQ 3** ‘What is the focus of the management model used by New Zealand rugby?’ All interviewees identified the reflection and review process, during, and at the end of the season, was a focus for the management model. The focus on reflection and review was. This process informed management teams on a weekly and yearly basis about the improvement the team needed to pursue. The other two features contributing to the focus on reflection and review were communication and the use of a player leadership group.

## **5.7 Principles Driving New Zealand rugby teams**

Through the interviews at the 1<sup>st</sup> XV level, club Premiere level, and national provincial level, there were consistent themes evident. These themes are the pillars that helped structure how the teams pursued continuous improvement and generated an environment where both coaching and management teams and the players aligned with the vision and objectives of the team. The principles driving the teams of the interviewees in this research are:

1. Continuous Communication
2. Trust-based relationship
3. Enjoyment
4. Player-centered approach
5. Continuous Learning.

### **5.7.1 Continuous Communication**

The end of the year review sessions were based on ongoing and constant communication between the players and wider coaching and management team. In these sessions, positives and negatives were addressed to take away important learning messages. This continuous communication was facilitated by a network-type communication model in which the teams structured themselves as a coaching and management team – the first communication network. The second communication network was that of the player leadership group. Apart from these two consistent communications groups and networks across all teams, some teams had further networks made up of coaches and players and individual player groups. The way these groups, interact and communicate and then connect with the other groups, generated an ongoing flow of communication across the team. The structured meetings, messaging and review sessions the

coaching and management teams set out during a week with the leadership group, and with the other player groups were part of the structured communication across the team. When asked, the coaching management teams said this ongoing communication worked in the way each team thought best for them. Teams had set times and platforms to communicate continuously during the week.

*“So that's the main forums for coaches with players, we have face to face, obviously, we have breakout groups where we have leadership team, that's on WhatsApp group. We have an individual one between the five-coaching staff. We've broken the team into groups so each staff, coaching staff, has their own group of players that they're talking, communicating through WhatsApp groups as well. And then, as well with players individual phone calls.” (Interviewee Seven)*

Most notable was the case of two teams where the interviewees acknowledged that, on a regular and scheduled basis, they took a group of players off site to have a coffee and conversation. The conversations did not have a set agenda but usually covered an array of topics that involved rugby, the team, their development, and personal issues. These ongoing communicational engagements, face-to-face and via message groups, generated greater affinity among the player groups and the coaching and management team, and also enabled members of the team to be informed and participate in the team communication. The leadership groups were key to initiating, engaging, and responding to communication from the coaching and management team, and the player groups. Their communicational influence was seen throughout the different communication networks across the team and in the way the messaging from one network to another could travel through the voice and continuous communication of these leaders.

### 5.7.2 Trust-based model

In contrast to Bennet and Fyall (2018), who found there was a lack of trust from coaches to allow players to contribute to trainings and development, the findings in the interviews reinforced the concept of trust. The interviews repeatedly noted the concept of trust, building trust and trusting the relationships. The interviewees referred to the trust they had in their leadership teams and the trust the players had in their leaders. The role the leadership group played in building and conveying trust across the different networks and the team was important. The coaches and managers relied on the leadership group and said they needed to trust them; when transferring responsibility to the player groups, it was mentioned that this was based on trust.

*“I really trust to do the extra work in terms of homework and in terms of previewing opposition and reviewing ourselves.” (Interviewee Eleven)*

Decisions and solutions came from the leadership group as the players were trusted and if the coaching and management teams were reliant on having the leadership groups generate buy in to the team’s aim, the coaching and management team also had to trust the decision of the player groups. Interviewee Nine noted:

*“We very much, listen to what they have because they ... are leaders, and we have to show some real trust and faith in them.”*

The trust-based model focused on the welfare, the wellbeing and development of the athlete. It was also noted that the care for the athlete extended to understanding and caring for the player’s family. The interviewees mentioned that respect, honesty, and openness to learning with the players, to help players be better individuals, helped enhance the trusting relationship. As one

Interviewee Nine commented, “being a little bit vulnerable with the players, remove barriers and allows players to be vulnerable as well.”

In a year where the teams had to deal with COVID-19, this mutual checkup among the players and coaches outside of rugby helped build the trusting relationship. The coaching management teams were approach in what they conveyed to the players. They acknowledged the players’ families as an important part of their development, improvement and success. As Interviewee Nine put it:

*“Clearly family, whanau, is big for every player, ... and I think for player’s parents to feel included, to feel like they’re part of it all. It just creates so much more buy-in into your heart whole environment and that basically let’s be honest the feelgood factor. ... the more that we can have relationships with player’s families, the more conversations we can have, the more we get to understand about our players as well... that’s key, that’s really key, .... getting to know the player as best you possibly can do, and getting those strong connections is vitally important to success.”*

This highlights how the trust-based model grows as the coaching and management team learns about each other better and gets to know the players better. As the player groups were closer to leadership group, there was a strong trust bond between them that allowed the leaders to set a vision and direction to the team both during the working week and in the games.

When the interviewees were asked about their coaching philosophy, they mentioned the collaborative environment that they sought was based on trust and continuous learning. They noted to build a trusting relationship they should focus on the player’s life outside rugby, their families, being authentically helpful, developing the players as people first and having a service attitude towards the players. Interviewee Ten, expressed,

*“My philosophy is, ... help them to develop as humans first and then as an athletes, ... and giving them all the tools that they need and do the best I can do for them. ... this profession is about servicing people. ... It's not about yourself is not about your ego its not about the things that you want to do its about serving people.”*

Considering these aspects, the researcher found there was trust from the player groups towards the coaching management teams based on an acknowledged transparent approach towards the pastoral care of the athlete. This attitude, in an environment that builds relationships and communication through tight networks, was replicated throughout the teams. It can be said that concern for the individuals across the team became a constant where the players trusted their teammates, the player groups trusted the leaders, the leaders trusted the players and the players trusted the coaching staff.

### **5.7.3 Enjoyment**

Another principle identified by interviewees was that of enjoyment. Some referred to the team environment as a safe place for the players where they could learn, make decisions, and grow while having fun. It was noted the coaching and management teams gained joy from seeing the growth and the development of the players. When players understood what they were learning and improving, a sense of enjoyment grew as they had input into how well they were doing and improving. Interviewee Seven noted that enjoyment was also obtained from the off-field activities of the team, such as barbecues, where the coaches and managers showed their care for their players, grew their communicational relationship and enjoyed time together outside of the normal rugby environment.

When players understood their goal and aspirations, it enabled them to play to their improvements and work to achieve them. According to Interviewee Eleven, when this happened

enjoyment came with it, as players acknowledged their learning, their improvement, and how they were achieving.

*“You need to find ways to micro it down and get that learning and understand, make it fun because the fun part is when it works on the field. But the fun part is also learning, turning up to work and learning something new every day.”*

At the national provincial level, interviewees acknowledged the importance of maintaining fun and promoting enjoyment factor within the team. Enjoyment was considered part of the performance; good performance is not complete if the enjoyment factor is not high. As the interviewee noted, “Learning needs to be fun, the players need to enjoy the growth they are getting.” By having an environment where enjoyment was the basis for player improvement and learning, it predisposes the coaching management team and the players to want to seek their highest performance.

#### **5.7.4 Player-centered environment**

Interviewees considered whether their teams had player-led environments. Through different structures and communication modes, teams had a multitude of player-led initiatives within their teams. Interviewees noted their teams deliberately structured empowered, player-led environments. This was illustrated by the interviewees as they discussed how a player - environment had a responsibility to find solutions and make decisions during the week and throughout the season. Coaching and management teams worked continuously to provide opportunities for the players to lead themselves. This commonality across teams appears to provide evidence that rugby teams in New Zealand are player-centered.

A player-centered environment, according to the interviewees, was demonstrated when the player and the player group are put at the center of all the actions, decisions, and solutions for

the team. Jackson (2014) spoke of how the leadership was flipped to the player and how the management of the teams was a learning process. For the coaches and managers interviewed, the wellbeing of the players, and the focus on their learning and improvement, was at the center of all the decisions and structures put in place by the teams. Interviewee Eight stated:

*“As long as the players become better people and understand that there is more to life than just the game, being an integral player, showing the other players and family that they can actually care and that we can give them good mentoring is what it's all about.”*

This emphasises how the players’ development was central to the operation of the coaching management team. Interviewee Six noted:

*“The key is to have a mental check with the boys and build a relationship with them.”*

These constant expressions of care and concern for the individuals in the team were central to the interviewees’ ideas as Interviewee Nine stated:

*“Winning is a goal, but the philosophy is seeing the pathway of the player becoming a Super Rugby player.”*

This commentary appears to reinforce that the work with individual players, their learning, development, and improvement is core to the New Zealand rugby teams. The interviewees commented that performance was based on the improvement of the players and winning would come when there was a focus on the players doing things well. If the coaching and management team can focus on the development of the hard and soft skills of these players, the players within their own unit groups and leadership groups will achieve higher performance.

Through a player-centered model, the coaching and management team were identified as being pivotal in empowering player development. The coaching and management team, and the structure, helped build habits throughout the season. The structures provided a leadership

framework that allowed players to develop a solution-based focus. Furthermore, players were in an environment where they were cared for and the focus was on their growth as a rugby player and an individual.

### **5.7.5 Continuous Learning**

The fifth and final principle underpinning the performance of New Zealand rugby teams is continuous learning. Both the trust-based model and continuous communication are key principles for providing a platform for continuous learning. Interviewees acknowledged continuous learning was for the players and themselves. Wooden (2009) and Walsh (2010) note the importance of continuous improvement in team environments; interview findings affirm this focus in New Zealand rugby teams as well. Continuous learning for players was sometimes referred to as continuous improvement, and learning was used when referring to data analysed by players and coaches. Throughout the interviews, the concepts of improvement and learning were intertwined and used synonymously by participants. When the members of the teams were able to understand and acknowledge improvement, this was learning. Interviewee One referred to continuous learning ‘efficiently’.

*“If I’m putting time in, I have to add value to what I’m providing the players it could be gradual improvement. Sometimes other teams are just better, but there is learning and improvement and better performance.”*

The interviewees acknowledged this focus on continuous learning led to better performances. The weekly reflection and review process contributed to continuous learning, and video technology, and message groups, enabled ideas and instructions to be repeated, providing an environment of continuous improvement on and off the field. Diverse learning styles were

accommodated through the repetition of the information in an ongoing learning environment. As Interviewee Ten commented:

*“There is learning after every game and every week, it may not be something new, but you may be learning what has to be done or solved.”*

The influence of the leadership group was an important element for the distribution of learning across the team. The interviewees learned through the feedback from the leadership group; players and the members of the other player groups also learned through the distribution of messages and information coming from the leadership group, supplemented by feedback and feedforward between the leadership group and the other player groups. One interviewee mentioned the need to be open to learning and adapt to unexpected or implicit learning. This enabled player groups and the coaching and management team to adopt and distribute learning through the team communication networks.

Continuous learning was reported to happen on a weekly and yearly basis within rugby teams in New Zealand and was based on receiving data and solutions from multiple sources; the coaching and management team, leadership group or other player groups. Continuous learning was generated via face to face communication, video data and message groups through digital networks. Multiple access to this learning information generated a continuous source of learning for the teams.

### **5.7.6 Analysis of Principles Driving New Zealand rugby**

This research examined the structure of rugby teams in New Zealand, a structure reliant on a coaching and management team and a leadership group. For this structure to work and drive performances in rugby in New Zealand, five principles were identified as being key to its operation. These principles generated the environment for the athletes and the teams to achieve

their desired performance. Throughout this chapter the concept of communication and leadership have been discussed; communication was noted as a primary principle driving performance. The trust-based model was developed based on a strong communication structure put in place inside rugby teams in New Zealand. The trust-based model put the players and their development and learning at the centre of the teams' goals. When communication, trust, and a player-centered approach also pursues fun and enjoyment within the environment, it sets the conditions for continuous learning, another key principle. From the interviewees, it is found that the New Zealand rugby team's performance was driven by continuous learning. This continuous learning was open to unexpected and implicit learning in a safe environment where players, and coaching and management teams, enjoy their experiences on a regular basis with the team. The pastoral care facilitated the alignment of a shared vision and objectives. All members were invested in the environment and as the themes and concepts resonated across the team it enabled performance. If there was disagreement, there were structures in place for feedback and feedforward processes in which opinions and insights were considered, and learning adapted to the individuals.

#### **5.7.7 Relation to Research Questions**

An analysis of the Principles theme offers findings to support two sub questions. In terms of **RSQ 2**: 'What are the key principles for managing rugby teams?' this research identified five key principles for managing New Zealand rugby teams. The principles of continuous improvement, trust, enjoyment, player-centered approach and continuous learning are the basis of the management model driving performance in New Zealand rugby teams according to the interviewees.

For **RSQ 4**: 'How is performance defined by management teams?' continuous learning is a key finding; as Interviewee Ten noted, "If you are not learning you are not getting better."

Other interviewees considered the learning of the players and the coaching and management teams were being directly applied to performance improvement, underpinned by the weekly reflection and review process. Performance was defined by the continuous learning happening between players and management teams.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the findings of 11 interviews with rugby coaches and managers of different teams at the 1<sup>st</sup> XV level, Premier club level and national provincial level of rugby in New Zealand. The findings are structured through five themes elaborated from the semi structured interviews - communications, leadership groups, coaching and management model, review and reflection and the principles driving New Zealand rugby. Common trends were found across the interviewees. Important findings are reflected in the relationships and communication structures between the coaching and management teams and the player groups, and the role of the leadership groups and how they drove learning, communication and the relationships. All interviewees reflected on how their coaching and management models worked based on the structures of having leadership groups within their teams. The use of technology for communication and reflection and review processes was a consistent element mentioned in all the interviews as an instrument to drive improvement and learning. From these interviews the researcher was also able to draw the principles that drive performance in New Zealand rugby.

The overarching research question ‘Do management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance’, has been explored through five research sub-questions, as noted at the beginning of this chapter. The findings from these research sub-questions have been noted at the end of each thematic section.

Through the thematic analysis, the management model has been described. The principles that sustain the coaching management practice have been identified and described, while the findings have provided a definition of performance for New Zealand rugby teams. These findings identified a learning organisation structure in the coaching and management models used throughout New Zealand rugby teams. This learning organisation was expressed by the interviewees as the driver of performance in their teams. The findings appear to support an affirmative response to the research question; that is, the management model used by New Zealand rugby teams is found to apply a learning organisation model. In the following chapter, the research builds on these findings to present the conclusions to this research and recommendations for further study.

## **Chapter VI. Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **6.1 Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this research was to explore whether management teams at different levels of rugby in New Zealand apply a learning organisation model to drive performance. The research explored this through three research objectives. Firstly, the researcher determined whether New Zealand Rugby used a specific management model. Secondly, the research aimed to describe the management model used by New Zealand rugby. Thirdly, the researcher aimed to propose a system or framework to be used by management teams to implement a learning organisation management model to drive performance.

The methodology of this research was sustained on the researcher's philosophical approach to the topic. The researcher brought a pragmatic approach, in which he looked for explanations and answers from management teams that would provide meaningful and practical application of the research to real industry environments. The researcher's exploratory approach was inductive as he intended to propose a system or framework to be used by management teams to implement a learning organisation management model for teams to drive performance. This was pursued via a qualitative mono-method strategy to data gathering consisting of interviews of coaches and managers of the different teams.

The researcher took on a cross-sectional study that looked at management teams in New Zealand rugby across different age groups and performance levels. Non-probability sampling was used as the researcher had access to teams across different rugby unions and grade levels which provided the spectrum for the proposed research. A thematic analysis was used to explore

the findings that identified that rugby teams in New Zealand were managed through a learning organisation model and it described the management model used.

The interviews were semi-structured, exploring the management model, the processes that led the team, the key principles for the management team, the teams' reflective process in their management and how they described performance. The interviews explored the processes and outcomes the coaching and management obtained through their work and communication with the team. It also explored if the coaching and management staff implemented a learning environment within their teams that drove performance.

Participants were purposively selected based on the level of rugby team they coached and managed, to capture the different stages identified in New Zealand Rugby that go from development to performance coaching, 1<sup>st</sup> XV level, Club Premiere level and National Provincial Championship level.

### **6.1.1 Initial Findings**

The research found that management teams at different levels of rugby in NZ applied a learning organisation model to drive performance. According to the findings, the learning organisation model was based on the management model that NZ rugby teams used to lead their teams. It was consistent from information shared by the interviewees, that all teams had a similar management model based on having a leadership group of players through which communication, shared decision making, and reflection and review processes took place. The underlying principles to the management model were that it was a player-centered trust-based model with continuous communication and learning, who all enjoyed. The focus of the management model was player-centered, looking to continuously improve and learn through a process of reflection and review assisted by technology and multi-directional channels of

communication. Performance was defined by the interviewees as continuously learning, learning that was directly applied to performance improvement. The organisational structure of the teams made up have management teams with several coaches and managers and a player leadership group facilitated the continuous improvement model based on learning.

## **6.2 Relationship to previous research**

This research has contributed to previous studies examining the management models in rugby. Rosca (2010) established that management was the prime mover of knowledge across a rugby team, having communication in one direction. Wilson (2011) found that the communication in New Zealand rugby teams was bilateral and that there was a collaborative environment, which allowed players to be leaders, but more research was needed at the amateur and professional level. This research expands on the work of Wilson (2011), who found by establishing that communication is multidirectional and player leadership groups are a central part of the inter- connectivity that drives communication and solutions within a team. Thus, making information and knowledge come from both players and the management team. Morgan et al, (2015) similarly established that the coaching management teams set the vision and pushed it across the team and expressed there was a lack of research with regards to multi directional relationships. The findings in this research respond to Morgan et al, (2015 where multi-directional communicational relationships were present in the management model and the vision and objectives were set in a collaborative process between management teams and player groups.

Furthermore, it had been noted that New Zealand uses a player-centered coaching and management model. Bennett and Fyall (2018) discussed how a player-centered model was present across secondary school rugby but found that the model was more of a leader follower

relationship and questioned whether a player-centered model was effectively being used in New Zealand. This research interviewed 11 coaches and managers across different levels of rugby New Zealand from secondary school 1<sup>st</sup> XV to national provincial championship level and found that the coaching and management model was effectively player-centered. Furthermore, it was deliberately structured to be collaborative where the management teams relied on player input.

Bennett and Fyall (2018) commented that teams were not player-led due to the lack of trust coaches had that players could effectively contribute to training and development.

McKenzie (2019) also expressed that coaching and management teams established leadership groups but managed a controlled environment where the players did not have an input to decisions with regards to their training and development. This research contrasts with the findings of Bennett and Fyall (2018) and McKenzie (2019), as across the 11 interviews it found that leadership groups were an essential part of a trust-based management model. The management teams involved the players either through the leadership group or player groups to contribute from the start of the season when setting the vision and objectives, as well as on a weekly basis, with regards to the weekly operation and objectives.

Bennett and Fyall (2018) recommended further investigation with regards to the player-centered model and how coaching and management were enabling critical thinking and learning. This research described the coaching and management model as player centered, meaning that all decisions and actions were focused on improving the players, and the player-led operation came from their involvement and input through the leadership group and player groups. Also, the trust-based team environment used the reflection and review process assisted by technology to generate continuous communication and learning. This contrast with Bennett and Fyall (2018)

and McKenzie (2019), who did not find a trust-based environment and questioned the learning from the player point of view.

From a coaching perspective, this research complements the model set forth by Wooden (2009) based on the findings of trust-based loyalty, enthusiasm and enjoyment in this research. Both Wooden (2009) and Walsh (2009) addressed continuous improvement as a driver for performance, which was also found to be a principle that drove performance in the teams of the 11 interviewees. Jackson (2011) further expressed that managing teams was a learning process and he flipped the leadership to the players. It was found in this research that New Zealand rugby teams through their leadership group handed the leadership over to the players as well, and all involved were in a continuous learning process, both management teams and players.

### **6.3 Conclusions to the findings**

The data collected provided insight as to how continuous improvement is facilitated and the analysis provided a model of how a communication and leadership networks enable continuous improvement within the organisation of New Zealand rugby teams. The teams had a player focus, which operated through delegated responsibilities given to leadership groups and leaders within the player group. Their ongoing feedback and contribution to the player groups and to the coaching management team gave greater significance to the influence that the leadership groups had in this management model. This was reinforced by the fact that all the teams interviewed had a team structure, where there was a coaching and management team, a leadership group, and other player groups confirmed the management model being used across all the teams.

The coaching and management teams deliberately had leadership groups within each team and used them as both executive leaders and local line leaders. In their roles, where they collaborated with the coaching and management team, they fulfilled the role of executive leaders. While in their role within other player groups they fulfilled the role of local line leaders. This distinct management model, using a leadership group and their influence across a team, is what New Zealand rugby teams used. Thus, the profiles of the members of the leadership groups and coaching and management team had significant correlation with the application of a learning organisational model to drive performance within a New Zealand rugby team.

The key principles for managing rugby teams in New Zealand were communication, trust-based model, enjoyment, player-centered approach and continuous learning. These principles work together in the relationship structure that coaching and management teams put together. The principles establish a strong trust-based relationship model based on ongoing communication where the player is at the centre of all decisions and solutions taken by the team. There was also strong recognition of fun and enjoyment as being necessary to support an ongoing continuous learning environment for both the coaching and management team, and also, and most importantly the players. Continuous learning was based on honest and continuous feedback and the coaching management teams referred to continuous improvement as a synonym to continuous learning when there was an understanding and acknowledgement of the improvement.

Continuous learning occurred because of a continuous reflection and review process implemented by the teams on a weekly basis and assisted by both video and messaging technology. Facilitating the reflection review process, within a management model that relied on the coaching and management team and the players to be sources of information, generated

ongoing communication among all involved and also the pursuit of a consensus as to what the decisions and solutions would be for the operation of the team. This practice of reviewing and reflection between the coaching management team and the players worked on the back of a trust based relationship model which the coaching management team relied on to have buy in from the wider organisation with regards to what was put in place and executed by the team.

The management model was a player-centered model. Performance was focused on the individual, the athlete, their development, growth and learning is what would be contributed back into the team for the team to perform. The coaching and management staff interviewed in this research defined performance as getting better. This phrase meant the team and the individuals were focused on improving. The improvement in a New Zealand rugby team was based on both rugby-related objectives and non rugby-related objectives. The interviewees acknowledged that if the players were not learning and growing as individuals, their contribution to the team and therefore the success and performance of the team would be limited. To generate this growth and learning, the players needed to be given a space to grow in their leadership and needed to be supported by the coaching management team but also by their families and closer networks. For this reason, some of the management teams included these networks into the support of their management model.

As a conclusion, the findings from the 11 interviews of coaches and managers of New Zealand rugby teams at different levels of rugby from 1<sup>st</sup> XV to National Provincial Championship have demonstrated that the performance of rugby teams in New Zealand is driven by a learning organisation management model.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for future research and practice**

Based on the conclusions from the research, the researcher recommends both applied practice and further research be carried forward. The areas of applied practice would be rugby in New Zealand and internationally, as well as other sporting codes and other industries. While, from a research perspective further study is recommended in the areas of leadership, communication, and reflective practice in a learning organisation.

The management model used by New Zealand rugby teams was similar across the different levels of rugby, but it was implicit. This research describes the management model and structure used by New Zealand rugby teams and how collaboration takes place in a trust-based model between management team, leadership group, and player groups. This research provided an explicit management model for rugby teams to use and it acknowledged the use of technology in this structure. It also described the repetitive use of the reflection and review processes as part of the continuous learning environment that drives performance.

The deliberate use of this management model by rugby teams in New Zealand, using the leadership group structure together with ongoing reflective practice, is put forward as recommended practice throughout rugby teams in New Zealand to continue to drive performance and enhance leadership development within a learning organisation environment.

It is further recommended that rugby teams, internationally, look at the New Zealand model to trial the implementation of this management model with their teams. The researcher expects the industry to acknowledge this management model explicitly and include it in the coach and manager development of New Zealand Rugby. He expects the model to be communicated to coaching and management teams so there is an awareness of how continuous learning is being achieved and to be able to further develop the leadership group model.

The management model described in this research should also be applicable to other sports and organisations. Organisations or sporting teams, that intend to reflect a learning organisation approach, will benefit from implementing the management model described in this research. Adoption of this model would enable leadership development across the team and provide an improved method of enabling decisions and solutions to contribute to strategic vision, objectives and operations of the team and organisation. The management model is applicable where there are team environments that have multiple members of management and staff, where they can put together leadership groups to operate this management model.

Future research should look at the possibility of implementing this management model across other sporting teams in organisations, as well as in other industries. It should investigate how the described model can be applied in different type of team environment, and if applied internationally, whether cultural perspectives have an impact on the effectiveness of this management model in an international setting. This would be an opportunity for further research that would offer comparative analysis to the management model used in rugby teams in New Zealand.

The researcher is keen to undertake further study into the communication networks generated in this management model. This study would continue the focus on the type of communication channels being used, the influence and quality of the messages being distributed and the impact of the reflection review process within this model. This is consistent with the role of the researcher as a facilitator of learning and leadership development.

This research addressed the use of technology as part of the communicational channels used, determining whether it is the communication channel, the variety of channels used or the repetition of the messaging through various channels; this is a potential area of future research.

This research noted the ongoing communication within the team environment, the ability for players to distinguish the significance of the messages from different members of the team and these messages through various channels have impact on the learning processes. This, and the impact on player buy-in, is another focus of further study that would require going into greater depth with the player groups and leadership groups.

Research is also recommended on the different communication networks generated by this management model, which connects player groups, leadership group, and management teams. Further research is recommended regarding the reflection and review process, to determine whether learning and continuous improvement is coming from the review process or through the repetition of messaging through the different sources and channels.

As for the field of Applied Management, the findings of this research described a management model which is collaborative and relies on a trust-based relationship between management staff and leadership groups within staff. The further exploration of how leadership networks are created, how they learn, and how their knowledge is distributed across different networks is recommended. As this research also found that private messaging groups on channels such as WhatsApp or Messenger are widely used, there is value in the study of the use of these type of channels in leadership development and management, particularly considering privacy concerns as well that come with the use of these networks. Whether the use of these type of channels enhances the learning process or more specifically is the learning process facilitated by the repeated messaging in the team environments, should be further explored.

## **6.5 Limitations of the present study**

This research intended to undertake 12 in-person interviews with coaches and managers, at each of the levels of rugby, 1<sup>st</sup> XV, Premier Club, and National Provincial level. The researcher decided on interviewing a broader spectrum of coaches and managers to be able to describe if a common management model was being used across the different levels of rugby and across different teams. The choice of these three tiers provided a view into teams at the different development stages from high school to professional. Also, this research delimited itself to interviewing coaching and management staff as the intention was to find whether coaching and management used a learning organisation model to drive performance. The research was not focused on determining the quality of the learning, but on whether there was a structure in place for it to happen.

The main limitation encountered in this research was the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were held via Zoom video calls. The interviews for the national provincial level had to be reduced to three due to the inability of the coaches and management staff during the season, which had been rescheduled due to the pandemic. With regards to the other interviewees, they all experienced shortened seasons due to the pandemic. This uncontrollable situation affected the normal functioning of the season for the teams and caused uncertainty throughout the season. The semi-structured interview overall allowed fluid conversations to pick up the themes generated for the analysis of the findings of this research. This interview model worked with all the interviewees except Interviewee Three, who digressed from the topics and was unable to provide clear insight into that team's management model.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Through this thesis, the researcher has had the opportunity to see how teams across New Zealand rugby value their players, value the leadership development, and value the importance of generating growth through learning in their players and their coaching and management teams. Semi-structured interviews generated a space for coaching and management teams to express honestly and openly what is it that they do in their team environments. It provided a significant insight into how the coaching management team thinks, and into the environment they develop with inside the teams.

In terms of conclusions, understanding their model and what the coaching and management teams are trying to do to provide a structure focused on a player-centered environment, was enlightening as it proved what had been set as a thesis. Hearing how a player-led approach is implemented starting more narrowly and as the season goes by, and as the week goes by, becomes wider to allow the players to lead within the structure and the environment was exciting and an approach that the researcher will take into his own practice.

When setting out to do this research, the researcher wanted to see if, from the coaching and management point of view, there was a learning organisation model sitting behind rugby teams in New Zealand. As an educator, to be able to determine that learning was solidly a driving force in rugby teams, was not only a curiosity; it was a hope. To be able to have noted through the 11 interviews that there is effectively a learning organisation model behind the management of the New Zealand rugby teams helped to achieve the research objective.

Most excitingly, the researcher was able to discover that the New Zealand rugby management model was not only focused on learning, but most importantly, on developing people. By this, it means having a player-centered approach where the individuals and their

growth and development is what makes the teams function. It was important to see the ongoing collaboration, communication, and opportunities for players and leadership groups to participate actively within their environments. The researcher will take these examples away and use them, not only in the rugby space, but also in the other environments in which he participates.

Through this study, the researcher considers they have grown as a researcher, improved as an academic and opened the path to pursue further research. Having been able to identify areas of further research from this exercise will further his academic career and continue his research work in the following years.

One of the objectives for this research was to have an explicit piece of research work that could be taken back into the classroom and share with students; research that could also be used to contribute to New Zealand rugby, to the development and growth of not only the players but also the coaches and managers on how they can be more efficient on how they are using the management model. The work completed for this thesis this year, through a pandemic, and with the limitations and challenges that it brought are also part of the researcher's learnings. This research will contribute to the sport management papers taught by the researcher and also to our New Zealand rugby unions. The international connections the researcher has established over the years and that have also motivated this inquiry into New Zealand rugby, will benefit from this research as it is planned to share the findings of this management model with them.

Though this management model is being used in New Zealand rugby teams, it had not been explicitly described. In the process of this research, of talking with the interviewees and describing and diagramming how the communication networks function within the team environments, the researcher has described this management model explicitly. A management model composed of multiple networks interacting with each other, and requiring leadership

development, growth, and actions within each of those networks, depends on a highly interconnected ongoing reflection and review process.

This research sought to explore whether management teams at the different levels of New Zealand rugby applied a learning organisation model to drive performance. It found that it was a player centered management model based on continuous learning facilitated by ongoing reflection and review process assisted by technology. This trust-based management model focused on continuous improvement through learning and an organisational structure made up of leadership groups, which lead the communication, reflection and review process and the overall learning in consensus with the management team. The reason behind the performance was not in the management team; it was in the operation of a management model that relied strongly on the players, the player leadership groups and the ongoing and continuous communication that these groups had with the management team.

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