

THE IMPACT OF PEER-TO- PEER LEARNING
ON ELITE COACH DEVELOPMENT – A CASE
STUDY OF THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE
PROGRAMME AT THE IRISH INSTITUTE OF
SPORT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover if the Pursuit of Excellence programme, by the Irish Institute of sport in Ireland, is having a positive or negative impact on elite coach learning and development; to identify the key theoretical considerations concerning elite coach learning and development; to identify the most effective sources of elite coach learning and development; and to identify the current state of elite coach learning and development in Ireland.

A qualitative approach was adopted and eight in-depth interviews were conducted with elite coaches in Ireland who are participants of the Pursuit of Excellence programme.

The results of the study revealed from this research that elite coaches in Ireland place high value on peer-to-peer learning in the community of practice, namely, the PEP programme run by the IIS. Overall, their experience of the programme has proven to be positive and constructive. All of the coaches highlighted the fact that they are benefiting from the PEP programme. Despite the benefits, there are a number of challenges facing the coaches on the PEP programme. The study also revealed that formal, informal, and non-formal learning are all important aspects of elite learning and development, with no one method serving the coaches' needs.

It is hoped that this study will be of practical value to the Irish Institute of Sport.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Background.....	1
1.3 Purpose of this study	1
1.4 Research Objectives	2
1.5 Research Questions	2
1.6 Methodology Summary	2
1.7 Structure of the Study.....	3
Chapter 2: Introduction	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Learning Theory	4
2.2.1 Behaviourism	5
2.2.2 Cognitive Theory	6
2.2.3 Constructive Theory	6
2.3 Definition of Coaching.....	7
2.4 Coach Development and Performance	9
2.5 Sources of Learning.....	10
2.5.1 Formal Learning	10
2.5.2 Problem-based learning	11
2.5.3 Informal Learning	12
2.5.4 Informal Mentoring.....	13
2.5.5 Past Athletic Experience.....	13
2.6 Community of Practice (CoP)	14
2.6.1 Professional Development	15
2.6.2 Personal Development	15
2.6.3 Self-Directed Learning	16
2.6.4 Sharing Knowledge.....	16
2.6.5 HP Environment – Peer Support.....	17
2.6.6 Reflection / Feedback	17
2.7 Peer-to-Peer Learning.....	18

2.7.1 Non-Formal.....	19
2.7.2 Continuous Professional Development.....	19
2.8 Elite Coach Learning and Development in Ireland	20
2.9 Conclusion.....	22
Chapter 3: Methodology	24
3.1 Introduction	24
3.2 Research Philosophy	24
3.3 Qualitative V's Quantitative.....	25
3.4 Research Design	25
3.5 Research Aim	25
3.6 Research Objectives	25
3.7 Sample/Participants	26
3.8 Sampling.....	27
3.9 Research Materials	27
3.10 Research Procedure	27
3.11 Data Analysis	28
3.12 Methodological Limitations	29
3.13 Ethical Considerations.....	29
Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings	30
4.1 Introduction	30
4.2 Research Question One	32
4.2.1 Theme One – Positive Experience.....	32
4.2.2 Theme Two – High Performance Environment.....	32
4.3.3 Theme Three – Knowledge Sharing	33
4.3.4 Summary.....	34
4.3 Research Question Two.....	35
4.3.1 Theme One – Coaching Skills & Practice	35
4.3.2 Theme Two – Self Assessment.....	36
4.3.3 Theme One – Work-Life Balance.....	37
4.3.4 Summary.....	39
4.4 Research Question Three.....	40
4.4.1 Theme One – Timing & Scheduling.....	40
4.4.2 Summary.....	41
4.5 Research Question Four	42
4.5.1 Theme One – Peer Support.....	42
4.5.2 Theme Two – 1-1 Mentoring.....	43
4.5.3 Theme Three – Problem & Scenario Based Learning.....	43

4.5.4 Summary	44
4.6 Conclusion	44
Chapter 5: Discussion	45
5.1 Research Question One: What are the coaches' experiences of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice?	45
5.2 Research Question Two: How has the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice style of learning impacted on the coaches professional and personal development?.....	49
5.3 Research Question Three: What are the main challenges the coaches face in a community of practice?	54
5.4 Research Question Four: What have been the most valuable aspect of the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice?.....	56
5.5 Conclusion	60
Chapter 6: Conclusion & Recommendations	62
6.1 Introduction	62
6.2 Positives and Negatives of the PEP Programme	62
6.3 Recommendations	64
6.4 Implementation Plan & Costings	65
Personal Learning Reflection	66
References	67
Appendices	77
Appendix 1: Analysis Coding Part 1	77
Appendix 2: Analysis Coding Part 2	91
Appendix 3: Analysis Coding Part 3	93
Appendix 4: Questionnaire	95
Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet	96
Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form	100

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This section of the dissertation presents an outline of the study: ‘The Impact of Peer-to-Peer learning on elite coach development – A Case Study of the Pursuit of Excellence Programme at the Irish Institute of Sport’. The chapter begins with a discussion on the research background and an outline of the principle aim of this study. This is followed by a description of the four key research objectives of this study. A summary of the methodology is also outlined, as is a synopsis of the study’s structure.

1.2 Research Background

The Irish Institute of Sport (IIS) was set up by the government in 2006. Their mission is to “support Irish Sports to reach World Podiums by driving excellence in the high performance system through the delivery of world class services” (2015a, p.115). In order to achieve this, they focus on three key components: Systems, Services, and People Development. As part of the People Development section, they are running coaching programmes to enhance the continuous professional development of both their athletes and their coaches.

The author will base her research on the Pursuit of Excellence Programme (PEP) at the Irish Institute of Sport (IIS). PEP was founded in 2009 and the programme was initiated to provide support to elite coaches to improve athlete development. The programme provides financial aid, whereby the coach can apply for a grant. Additionally, the programme provides learning and coaching professional development for elite coaches in Ireland. The PEP programme is built upon a communities of practice (CoP) concept, developed by Lave and Wenger (1991).

1.3 Purpose of this study

In the literature, evidence suggests that informal learning is becoming an increasingly popular source of learning for coach education. The PEP programme is based upon an informal style of learning. Since the beginning of the programme, there has been

no investigation to see whether or not the PEP programme is effective or if elite coaches in Ireland are benefiting from the programme. The purpose of this study is to investigate the efficacy of the PEP programme and if it is making an impact on elite coaches' learning and professional development. The author has a keen interest in the area of learning and development and hopes to pursue that area of the Human Resource field. The author also has an interest in sport, particularly high performance sport.

1.4 Research Objectives

The four research objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) Identify the key theoretical considerations concerning elite coach learning and development
- 2) Identify the most effective sources of elite coach learning and development
- 3) Identify the current state of elite coach learning and development
- 4) Develop recommendations for the PEP programme facilitated by the IIS for elite coach learning and development in Ireland

1.5 Research Questions

It is hoped that the findings of this study will benefit the PEP programme run by the IIS. In order to answer the four research objectives, the researcher has the following four research questions:

- 1) What are the coaches' experiences of peer-to-peer learning in a CoP?
- 2) How has the peer-to-peer learning in a CoP style of learning impacted upon the coaches' personal and professional development?
- 3) What are the main challenges the coaches face in a CoP?
- 4) What has been the most valuable aspect of peer-to-peer learning in a CoP?

1.6 Methodology Summary

For the purpose of this research project, the author has adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is the process of attempting to gain insights into participants' perceptions, attitudes, and motives (Rogan, 2003). The researcher feels that a qualitative method is the best way to analyse the thoughts and feelings of the elite coaches who are participating on the PEP programme. Eight in-depth semi-structured interviews took place, representing one third of the population on the programme. A

purposive sampling method was used in order to establish who should partake in the in-depth interviews. The main reason for this choice of method was due to the fact that the author wanted to interview people who could aid with the establishment of the study's research objectives.

Thematic analysis was used to extract relevant themes and patterns from the interviews.

1.7 Structure of the Study

Chapter one introduces the study and the principle aims of the research

Chapter two examines contemporary literature relating to learning and development of elite coaches. The author researched the key theoretical considerations of elite coach learning and development, the most effective sources of elite coach learning and development, and the current state of elite coach learning and development in Ireland.

Chapter three details the methodology used to conduct the research.

Chapter four summaries the key findings and analysis of the study.

Chapter five involves a discussion of the key findings and analysis of this study.

Finally, chapter six discusses the conclusions drawn from the study and outlines recommendations for the IIS.

CHAPTER 2:

INTRODUCTION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter develops an understanding of the literature that relates to three of the four objectives of this study. The last research objective will be discussed in the recommendations chapter.

The three research objectives that the literature review will focus on are as follows:

- Identify the key theoretical considerations concerning elite coach learning and development
- Identify the most effective sources of elite coach learning and development
- Identify the current state of elite coach learning and development in Ireland

In order to achieve this, various academic journals, books, and reports are investigated. The first part of this chapter will look at the key theoretical approaches to learning and development found in the literature. The second part of this chapter will look at what is coaching, what is coach development, along with the various sources of learning and development of elite coach learning and development found in the literature. The final part of this chapter will discuss the current state of elite coach learning and development in Ireland. This chapter will conclude with the purpose of this study and the four research questions that the researcher will investigate.

2.2 Learning Theory

Learning theory is extremely broad and complex and hard to define. Theorists and researchers have had various definitions of learning and learning theory. Sckunk (1991, p.2) defines learning as “an enduring change in behaviour, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience”, while Onions (1973, cited in Harrison, 2009) states that learning is a lifelong activity consisting of three processes:

- 1) To develop: to unfold more fully, bring out all that is contained in it.
- 2) To educate: to bring up from childhood, so as to form habits, manners and mental and physical aptitudes.
- 3) To train: to instruct and discipline in or for some particular art, profession, occupation, or practice; to exercise, practice, and drill.

While there are numerous definitions of learning, it is evident in the literature that there are three main theories associated with learning: Behaviourism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism. These will be viewed overall, which will provide context to the idea of coaching and learning within this thesis.

2.2.1 Behaviourism

Behaviourists believe that learning takes place when there is a change in behaviour as a result of external stimuli from the environment. They think that people can be trained to behave in a certain way. A key principle is repetition or the idea that ‘practice makes perfect’. By reinforcing behaviours, people can establish new habits; “The assumption of behaviourism is that people can be conditioned or ‘trained’, to behave in set ways if clear objectives are specified” (Steward & Rigg, 2011, p.114). This theory does not allow for the individual to think, or feel, about the process. According to Brockbank & Magill (2007) behaviourists are focused on the external stimulus, without attending to social meaning.

Steward & Rigg (2011) discuss the implications of behaviourism, stating that the learner is completely passive, unthinking, and unfeeling. They state that there is an assumption that the trainer can control the learning, though with little creativity and independent learning. As cited in Jean-Claude Lecas (2006), Thorndike (1928) decided to analyse ‘trial and error’, where the stimulus and connectionism are tested. If a learner discovers an act to be effective, it will be repeated until the consequences of the action no longer produce the desired response (Jarvis, 2004). Pavlov’s (1927) classical conditioning suggests that the subject learns to associate reward with stimulus, whereas Skinner (1951) believes that operant conditioning occurs when the response is shaped by the reward (Jarvis, 2004). Armitage, Bryant, Dunnill, Renwick, Hayes, Hudson, Kent & Lawes (2003) state that behaviourists believe that all learning

can be measured. According to Ertmer & Nerby (2013, p.48) “the learner is characterised as being reactive to conditions in the environment as opposed to taking an active role in discovering the environment”. Unlike behaviourist, cognitivists take a different approach to learning.

2.2.2 Cognitive Theory

Since the 1950’s, theorists and researchers have examined internal mental structures, seeing learning as transforming those structures (Brockbank & Magill, 2007). As cited in Stewart & Rigg (2011), Piaget (1971) states that cognitive learning theories view learning as the mental processing of new pieces of information into existing knowledge, through assimilation and accommodation. According to Garavan, Costine & Hearty (1997), the key aspects of learning associated with cognitive thought, include:

- A person develops a map of the world and extends the map through experience.
- New facts may be taken in which will call for extending (assimilation) or revising (accommodation) this map;
- Reflective or accumulative data can lead to insights about patterns and relationships (a holistic view of learning).

This theory relates to the human thought process, how perception and memory are used to retain information, and how learning takes places. Ertmer & Nerby (2013) state that the focus is on how students learn, how they address issues and how the information they receive is organised and stored in the mind. It is how they acquire knowledge. According to Winnie (1985), the learning process is shaped by the learner’s thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and values. Ertmer & Nerby (2013) suggest that cognitivism relates to making knowledge meaningful, helping learners organise and relate new information to the existing knowledge that they are already stored in their memory.

2.2.3 Constructive Theory

Following on from cognitive theory, constructive theory focuses on human development in the social world. The essence of the constructivist theory is that people

create their own understanding, ideas, and experience from their previous knowledge. Learners build personal interpretations of the world based on their own individual experience and interactions; they do not transfer knowledge from the external world into their memories (Ertmer & Nerby, 2013). In the literature, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has been most commonly linked with the learner's ability to problem solve on their own and their ability to problem solve with collaborating with peers or those with more experience. Vygotsky's (1978) work suggests that, when novices work and collaborate with those that are more knowledgeable or gain significantly more experience, this is where learning best takes place. The individual is central to the learning and may gain different knowledge than their peers. According to Steward & Riggs (2011), different individuals can come away from the same experience with different insights and what they learn from the same training course will differ because of their emotions, prior experience, or power in the situation.

This theory is far more complex than the behaviourist or cognitive learning theory. Having looked at the key theoretical considerations underpinning elite coach learning and development, the author will now discuss the definition of coaching, coach development, and the most effective sources of learning associated with elite coach learning and development.

2.3 Definition of Coaching

In the 1980's, Evered and Selman claimed that good coaching was a vital aspect of effective management. According to Chiaramonte & Higgins (1993), world-class competition requires coaching. No individual, no team, no organisation can ever truly become the very best that they can be without coaching. This brings about the question - what is coaching? As cited in Passmore (2010, pp.9-10), coaching is about "unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance". It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them (Whitmore, 2009). In addition, Rosinki (2003) describes coaching as "the art of facilitating the unleashing of people's potential to reach meaningful, important objectives".

From a Human Resource perspective, Noe (2008) suggests that a coach has three roles to play. Firstly, they can coach one-on-one where they provide feedback such as 360-

degree feedback and psychological tests. Secondly, they can help employees learn for themselves by putting them in contact with relevant experts where they can obtain feedback from them. And, finally, they can provide the employee with resources such as work experience, mentors, or access to courses.

In sport, coaching is a fundamental part of an athlete's progress. Coaches are constantly looking for better ways to coach and develop their athletes to enhance their performance. In the literature, it has been difficult to understand coaching practice and to create models and processes to follow. Cushion (2007) states that, to date, models have been too simplistic and fail to include exactly what is needed for coaching practice; therefore, their contribution has been useful but limited. According to Park & Bales (2007), sport has become more specialised and coaching roles have grown to be more pedagogical, technical, and more demanding multi-tasking competencies (Salmela, 1996). A coaching excellence definition must reflect the highly variable roles that each sport coach assumes and it should reflect the constant personal changes and interactions between coaches and their athletes in training and competitive environments.

Traditionally, coaching has tried to develop models based on a single, comprehensible, definitive, and general stable coaching process. This view of coaching offers insights, but, arguably, does not sufficiently grasp the nature of coaching and the complexity inherent within it (Cushion, 2007). Coaching is a dynamic social activity that connects coaches and athletes and, therefore, there is no coaching model that can be followed step by step. Jones (2005) highlights the complexity of coaching, arguing that it is largely uncontrollable, incomprehensible, and imbued with contradictory values. Focusing on the practices and practitioner is vital rather than on the process. Wenger (1998) states that, while practice models have a focusing effect, they can also ossify practice around their inertness, thus hindering the very conceptual and practical development they are designed to promote.

The complexity theory has become an integral aspect of the research around coaching. According to Rayner (2008),

Complexity theorists emphasis openness to accident, coincidence and serendipity. Strategy is the emerging resultant. Rather than trying to

consolidate stability, the organisation is better to position itself in a region of bounded instability, to seek ‘the edge of chaos’.

Morrison (2008, cited in Attencio, Jess & Dewar, 2005) discusses this point further by saying,

the closer one moves towards the edge of chaos, the more creative, open-minded, imaginative, diverse and rich are the behaviours, ideas and practices of the individuals and systems and the greater the connectivity, networking and information sharing (content and rate of flow) between the participants

In other words, having a complex system which allows for ‘the edge of chaos’ is where the real learning in the community takes place, rather than following a systematic, structured process. The complexity learning communities approach incorporates more constructivist/situated learning approaches (Light, 2008) and proposes that professional learning is more effective and long term when a group interacts to learn within the context of joint enterprise and when they draw upon a shared repertoire of skills, discourses, and resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

It is from the complexity theory that the idea of community of practice arises, which the researcher will discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

2.4 Coach Development and Performance

Coach development and performance have been a topical issue since the 1980’s. Researchers such as Gould et al. (1987), Salmela (1995), Cushion et al. (2003), and Jones et al. (2003) have discussed the pathway of coaching from early experiences to developed practices. They have included previous sporting experience, learning, mentoring, formal coaching, and shadowing. The majority of research has been focused on the ‘participation’ context (Lyle, 2002). However, now there is an increasing interest in preparing performance coaches, especially those that are competing at an elite level (Salmela, 1994).

According to Gilbert, Cote and Mallet (2006), an extensive amount of research has been conducted relating to the development and progression of athletes from novice to elite. However, there has not been the same exploration into elite coach development. Woodman (1993) believes the key to improved coaching lies within coach education and development. Traditionally, continuous professional

development for coaches has been through formal coaching programmes and courses, which take place off site at specific times. These courses offer little opportunity to support or enable new learning with practice and are, therefore, often deemed ineffective (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2012).

Bloom, Salmela and Schinke (1995) found, in an investigation of training methods of coaches, that formalised and structured mentoring programmes were considered by participants to be the most important factor in their development and a worthwhile element of coach development. However, there is an increasing acceptance in the coaching literature that the best part of coach development, at least as perceived by the coaches, occurs outside of formal educational settings (Cushion et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2006). It is evident that there is a gap in the theory of coach development and coaching for performance. Various sources of learning have been used within elite coach learning and development.

2.5 Sources of Learning

Learning is an important aspect of any organisation or team to develop and improve.

Learning is important, not only for organisational survival, but also because the ability to learn faster than you competitor may be the only sustainable competitive advantage (Coetzer, 2007).

In the literature, there has been an ongoing debate around whether formal, non-formal, or informal learning is the most valuable to individuals, in particular, coaches.

2.5.1 Formal Learning

Formal learning is defined by Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner (2007, p.29) as “highly institutionalised, bureaucratic, curriculum driven and formally recognised with grades, diplomas, or certificates”. Formal learning has its advantages, such as having access to experts, formal assessment procedures, and recognition of achievement. It has the ability to lead to critical thinking skills. This has been shown to be critical to the success of high performance sports coaching (Mallett, Trudel, Lyle & Rynne, 2009). As cited in Choi & Jacobs (2011, p.240) “formal learning provides the critical thinking and independent learning skills that individuals need to perform well in demanding work situations” (see also Brockman & Dirk, 2006; Burns et al.,

2005). However, Mallett et al. (2009) also note learners in formal situations have less control and influence over what is being learned and that formal learning may lack context, meaning, and individualisation. Gilbert & Trudel (1999a-b) researched whether course attendance directly influenced the knowledge and practice of coaches. They found that the course only reinforced what the coach already knew from previous courses and his own self-directed learning. Maleté & Feltz (2000) researched the impact on coach efficacy that course education programmes had. They asked a group of coaches to complete a coach efficacy scale, both before and after the coach education course. They found that the course attendance impacted on the coaches' perceived ability to coach. However, there is no way of confirming this study made a difference to coach practice. Wright et al. (2007) found that coaches who had little coaching experience found coach education programmes useful. Other researchers discovered that coaches stated that attending coach education courses was a great way to meet other coaches (Irwin et al., 2004; Lemyre et al., 2007). In a study by Irwin et al. (2004) coaches also believed that they gained further knowledge and understanding from attending the coach education courses. Problem-based learning (PBL) has been noted in the literature as another means to facilitate formal coach education.

2.5.2 Problem-based learning

Jones & Turner (2006) state that PBL is an approach to teaching which uses realistic, problematic scenarios and subtle tutor questioning, to challenge and instil critical ways of thinking, to be subsequently transferred into practical situations; "PBL is based on four modern insights on learning: constructive, self-directed, collaborative and contextual learning" (Dolmans, De Grave, Wolfhagen and Van Der Vleuten, 2005, p.732). Its main aim is to develop competencies such as communication, critical, logical and analytical problem solving, reasoned with decision making and self-evaluation (Engel, 1999). Furthermore, it allows coaches to practice, debate and discuss real life problems and scenarios with their peers that they face daily in their lives.

"It has great learning potential for coaches (De Marco & McCullick, 1997; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001), echoing the establishment of a 'community of practice' with all its associated benefits" (Wenger, 1998) (Dolmans et al., 2005, p.190).

“Coaches reported learning from their engagement through novel work situations often using the phrases ‘thrown in the deep end’ to describe their exposure to tasks and responsibilities that were largely unfamiliar to them” (Rynne, Mallet and Tinning, 2010, p.322).

In a study by Jones & Turner (2006), their research provides no evidence to confirm that PBL has a significant impact on coach learning or practice, yet they claim that PBL can “help coaches towards higher goals of transferable knowledge, considered flexibility and lifelong learning” (Jones & Turner, 2006, p.199). Despite this, there are several challenges related to PBL. Firstly, designing effective problems is not an easy task. If the problems are too well structured, too simple, or do not challenge the coaches enough, they will not serve their purpose. Secondly, the facilitators and tutors can become too dominant in a group, causing tension and conflict. Thirdly, some groups may be dysfunctional by not getting fully involved (Dolmans et al., 2005). It is clear that further research of PBL in coach education environments is needed.

2.5.3 Informal Learning

Informal learning “is not intentionally structured; the control of learning is in the hands of the learner” (Choi & Jacobs, 2011, p.241). Similarly, Marsick & Watkins (2001) state that informal learning may occur in institutions, but is not typically classroom or structured and the learning lies in the hands of the learner. As cited in Mallett et al. (2009), for more elite coaches, “the large-scale programs have been shown ineffective in providing them with all that they need to be a successful coach” (Cushion et al., 2003; Gould et al., 1990; Lyle, 2002; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006; Fleurence & Cotteaux, 1999; Mallett et al., 2007; Rynne et al., 2008). According to Wenger (2000), learning is defined as an interplay between social competence and personal experience. It is a dynamic, two-way relationship between people and the social learning systems in which they participate. It combines personal transformation with the evolution of social structures.

The primary source of value creation lies in the informal processes, such as conversations, brainstorming, and pursuing ideas. Formal organisation designs and processes are still important, but they contribute to value creation to the extent that they are in the service of informal processes (Wenger, 2000, p. 244)

Coaching research has highlighted that coaches learn from various avenues such as informal mentoring (Bloom et al., 1998; Cushion, 2001), practical coaching experience with interactions with athletes and peers (Erickson et al., 2008; Fleurence and Cotteaux, 1999; Schempp et al., 1998; Wright et al., 2007), and previous experience as an athlete (Irwin et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2004).

2.5.4 Informal Mentoring

Colley et al. (2003) suggest that mentoring is the most visible example of practice where informal and formal learning meet. He goes on to further state that mentoring formalises a practice that is naturally informal (Colley et al., 2003). Mentoring has been associated with developing coaches' knowledge and expertise (Bloom et al., 1998), and it is also deemed to be an effective way for new coaches to learn their role (Bloom et al., 1998). However, Colley et al. (2003) has stated that there is a lack of research evidence to show that mentoring has not been justified, as it has not developed a theoretical base where policy and practice can be developed. It is, however, important to note that mentoring is still "gaining acceptance as a means of developing high-quality practitioners in a variety of fields, including coaching" (Jones, Harris, Miles, 2009, p.268). As cited in Jones et al. (2009, p.275), Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003, 2004) state that "most sportspeople and many coaches would freely admit that they have sought the advice of an experienced player or coach at some point in their career". Knowledge drawn from informal education was found to be the most important factor of development for coaches (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004). In spite of this, there is a growing desire to formalise sport coach mentoring (Cushion, 2006). Jones et al. (2009) believe that the next stage of coach development is to generate empirical evidence regarding mentoring in sports coaching, in order to produce more meaningful coach education programmes. It is also noted in the literature that reflection (Schon, 1987) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) are being looked at as possible avenues to structure mentoring (Cushion, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003).

2.5.5 Past Athletic Experience

In the literature, there is a key theme that elite performance coaches have learned about the coaching role as athletes (Irwin et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2003; Salmela, 1995; Schempp et al., 1998). Lemyre et al. (2007) said that being an athlete provided them

with an understanding of the rules of their sport and it allowed them to learn from other coaches. Past experience as an athlete helped coaches to understand athletes' feelings around performance and allowed them to be able to see things from the athletes' point of view (Irwin et al., 2004; Schempp et al., 1998). In Irwin et al.'s (2004) study, the elite gymnastics coaches found athletic experience to be the third most important learning source, however, they also stated that it could be detrimental in terms of lack of understanding and compassion towards the athletes. Schempp et al.'s (1998) research found that elite golf coaches found it an unimportant source of learning.

2.6 Community of Practice (CoP)

Another key area in the literature regarding informal learning is communities of practice. Community of Practice (CoP) is a concept which was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) to connect groups of people coming together for mutual learning and development. CoP are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interaction on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, 1998, p.4). CoP's are people who work in the same area or share the same interest, who come together to share knowledge, experience and also to learn from each other; "Members of communities of practice are practitioners with a shared competence or practice" (Seaman, 2008, p.274). CoP is characterised by three elements: joint enterprise, mutuality, and share repertoire.

1. **Joint Enterprise** – The community is bound together by sharing the same interest or profession. The group must work together to develop and gain knowledge. Members must be competent enough to understand the community well enough to be able to contribute to it, to recognise and address knowledge gaps (Wenger, 2000).
2. **Mutuality** – The community must engage with each other, share knowledge and trust each other. There should be trust and confidentiality amongst members, where they feel comfortable in discussing problems and issues that they may have; "They must trust each other, not just personally, but also in their ability to contribute to the enterprise of the community; so they feel comfortable addressing real problems together and speaking truthfully" (Wenger, 2000, p.230).

3. **Share repertoire** – the community share stories, experience, ideas, knowledge, and concepts. They must reflect on the community to ensure progress is being made. Wenger states that being reflective and self-aware enables a community to understand its own state of development from different perspectives and can uncover hidden possibilities to move forward (Wenger, 2000).

The three elements complement each other.

Without the learning energy of those who take initiative, the community becomes stagnant. Without strong relationships of belonging, it is torn apart. And without the ability to reflect, it becomes hostage to its own history (Wenger, 2000, p.230).

This group is created with the hope of gaining knowledge and further development. It is the community member's responsibility to participate, learn, and share learning within the CoP (Aznar, Borzillo & Schmitt, 2011).

In the literature, there are numerous benefits associated with CoP's, such as professional development; personal development; self-directed learning; knowledge sharing; reflection and feedback.

2.6.1 Professional Development

A key benefit for those participating in a community of practice is they develop their professional skills and practices. Monaghan (2011) describes COP as an excellent tool for helping individuals to the explicit and implicit rules of their profession, develop networks, and practice skills in a safe environment with mentors who are willing to share their experience and expertise with novices (Kriner et al., 2015). In a study by Retna Pak Tee Ng (2011), participants highlighted that they enjoyed relationships with each other and are able to raise issues, not only at a professional level, but at a personal level.

2.6.2 Personal Development

One of the main benefits of being in a community that is cited in the literature is personal development. Kriner et al. (2015) researched doctoral students' perspectives

of participating in a CoP. According to Kriner et al. (2015), participants may experience increased self-efficacy, higher self-esteem, and less marginalisation in a larger community. One student spoke about how the CoP provided support to her and other students to overcome their insecurities and build their self-confidence and self-efficacy. It allowed them to see themselves as scholars rather than students (Kriner et al., 2015); “It is through participation in communities that individuals develop and possibly adapt and thereby reconstruct their identities and practice” (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham & Clark, 2006). Also linked with personal development is the area of self-directed learning.

2.6.3 Self-Directed Learning

Kriner et al. (2015) also found that students were passionate about contributing to the CoP, as it provided them with the opportunity to develop their interests. One student said that what they learned was determined by themselves rather than an agenda being set for them. Their learning was self-directed; “The result is a stronger connection to the material because they are able to self-direct and self-select areas of interest that are of most relevance to their lives” (Monaghan, 2011, p.431). Furthermore, in a study by Monaghan (2011), participants developed their abilities to self-direct in a collaborative environment, their attitudes towards learning changed, they connected to theory and practice, and they gained in-depth knowledge.

2.6.4 Sharing Knowledge

Cited in Retna Pak Tee Ng (2011, p.42), knowledge is a property of relationships. Through complex responsive processes, knowledge is created and transformed through networks of human interaction (Stacey, 2011). Lesser and Everest (2001) describe COPs as an environment in which knowledge can be created and shared to improve the effectiveness of existing practices used in organisations (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). Furthermore, new knowledge and learning are properly conceived through communities of practice (Tennant, 1997). Sharing knowledge in an environment with peers is another aspect of CoP’s that was highlighted in the literature.

2.6.5 HP Environment – Peer Support

The main benefit for coaches in a community of practice is being part of an environment, group, and community of likeminded individuals, with whom they have shared interests and where they can share experiences. Previously, Rynne et al. (2010, p.321) stated that coaches were socially and professionally isolated. In a study by Rynne & Mallet (2014, p.18), they found that

the coaches indicated that they benefited greatly from being able to discuss coaching practice with a variety of other personnel, including coaches within and outside their sports and paraprofessionals (e.g. sports scientists, sports psychologists, strength and conditioning coaches).

According to Cushion, Armour and Jones (2003, p.217),

Observing the behaviour of more experienced coaches during practice and games and listening during informal periods leaves its mark on novice coaches. It is largely through such experiences that collective understandings being to develop, and the shared meanings about the occupational culture of coaching starts to take shape

While being in a supportive environment has a significant impact on elite coaches learning and development, reflection and feedback were also noted as being beneficial.

2.6.6 Reflection / Feedback

“We need to provide coaches with a mirror in which they can see their own programs and practices” (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003, p.223). The community of practice is a great place for coaches to reflect on their practices and experiences. As cited in Cushion et al. (2003, p.224), Kirk and Tinning (1990) suggest that, by opening up our professional practices to scrutiny by ourselves and our peers, we create the possibility of turning these areas of practice into “sites of contestation” (Kirk, 1988), where we can begin to address, practically and specifically, issues and problems (p.9). Additionally, Cushion et al. (2003) suggest that coaches reflect on their own coaching and the coaching of others when they assess participants through self and peer assessment. Therefore, they become familiar with giving constructive feedback that will enhance their learning experience. In education literature, a study done by Thompson, Sattler and Turns (2011) set up ‘studio environments’ for engineering students based on the Community of Practice theory and the Complexity theory. They

found that 73% of students found the peer interaction and feedback rewarding; some found it motivating and inspiring. The study also found that 65% found value in negotiation of meaning and shared knowledge. The students expressed the significance of, both receiving and giving feedback. They found the peer interaction and the shared knowledge equally as important.

While there are many benefits of a CoP, there are also many challenges. In a study by Rynne et al. (2010), when coaches were asked why they did not engage in certain learning activities, their response was often not having enough time to do so.

According to Probst & Borzillo (2008), there are five main reasons CoP's fail:

- 1) Lack of a core group actively engaged
- 2) Lack of one-to-one interaction between members
- 3) Members less willing to incorporate practices and ideas from other members into their daily practices. Also, members being reluctant to share ideas and practices with other members
- 4) Members do not view being in the CoP as meaningful to their work
- 5) Practice intangibility occurs when members fail to engage with one another so that they can demonstrate the practice to other members

While CoP's have challenges associated with them, there is clear evidence in the literature that there are many benefits from operating in a CoP. One of the most significant aspects is learning and interacting with peers.

2.7 Peer-to-Peer Learning

Peer to peer learning has been described as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping, 2005, p.631). Hanson, Trolan, Paulsen and Pascarella (2016) state that

peers learning involves interacting with others and learning by observing or explaining; having shared goals and divided tasks; having shared authority and responsibility to the task at hand; and results in making meaning through interactions with peers (Hanson et al, 2016, p.193).

As cited in Hanson et al. (2016), research has found that there have been many positive outcomes linked to peer-to-peer learning such as: willingness to take on difficult tasks, ability to retain more knowledge, increased critical thinking, creative thinking skills,

increased ability to transfer knowledge, positive attitude, time management, better communication skills and increased self-esteem (Boud, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 2004, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Topping, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

In the literature, peer-to-peer learning is also found to have an important impact on participants' psychological or affective well-being (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2009; Topping, 2005). Furthermore, in studies by Johnson & Johnson, they have found that working with peers has positively shaped their

emotional maturity, well-adjusted social relations, strong personal identity, ability to cope with adversity, social competencies, basic trust and optimism about people, self-confidence, independence and autonomy, higher self-esteem, increased perspective talking skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p.372).

Non-formal learning has been cited in the literature as contributing to elite coach learning and development.

2.7.1 Non-Formal

Non-formal learning has been defined as “any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide select types of learning to particular subgroups in a population” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p.8). Elite high performance coaches would be considered a subgroup in the population. According to Nelson et al. (2006), examples of non-formal learning include coaching seminars, conferences, clinics, and workshops. Research reveals that coaches take part in non-formal learning activities (Erickson et al., 2008; Schempp et al., 1998).

2.7.2 Continuous Professional Development

Maden and Mitchell (1993, p.12) define continuous professional development (CPD) as “the maintenance and enhancement of the knowledge, expertise and competence of professionals throughout their careers according to a plan formulated with regard to the needs of the professional, the employer, the profession and society”. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Suk Yoon (2001) state that traditional CPD generally takes place off-site, at specific times, with little follow-up afterwards, whereas recent forms of CPD generally take place on-site and are integrated into practice. As cited in Cushion et al. (2003), evidence suggests that the coaches' experience and interactions with other coaches are fundamental to the shaping of coaching habitus and coaching

practice. Coetzer (2007) discovered that newcomers and young employees were heavily reliant on their work supervisors as a source of learning. However, out of that group, those with just secondary school education seemed to be more reliant on on-the-job training. This highlights the fact that there is a need to both formal and informal learning in the workplace.

It is evident from the literature that a mixture of formal, informal and non-formal learning are all significant in elite coach learning and development. The study will now look at the types of learning and development in place for elite coaches in Ireland.

2.8 Elite Coach Learning and Development in Ireland

Coach development and education programmes have been on the rise in Ireland since the 1990's, with an attempt to develop the area. In 1992, The National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC) was established to formalise and develop coach education in Ireland. Then, in 1993, the National Coaching Development Programme (NCDP) was setup to assist National Governing Bodies (NGB) to work with the NCTC to develop coach education (Bertz & Purdy, 2011). The idea behind the setup of these bodies was to develop formal education programme for coaches to improve their ability to work with athletes at all phases of development, from beginner to elite (Bertz & Purdy, 2011). In 2008, the NCTC evolved into Coaching Ireland whose focus changed, becoming focused on developing Ireland's coaching development and education. From 2008-2012, a strategy was put in place to address the issues relating to coaching and coaching education (Bertz & Purdy, 2011).

In Bertz & Purdy's (2011) study, 10 coaches were interviewed and the following was found:

- All coaches recognised the need for formal coach education
- Formal coach education was of particular value in their early career, but diminished as their careers developed
- There was a strong emphasis on people to develop and foster knowledge
- Coaches were using unmediated learning strategies to draw ideas from interactions with other coaches
- Interaction took several forms (mentoring, shadowing, observation & informal conversations, particularly with coaches who had more experience)

- All coaches stated that it was their athletes that were setting and raising the bar in terms of their development
- All coaches highlighted the importance of trying things out in their coaching practice
- All coaches stated that they wanted an environment in which they could learn instead of just giving them information

Following on from Bertz & Purdy's Study, the Irish Institute of Sport (IIS) has developed various programmes to aid the development of coaches in Ireland. In 2009, The Performance Coach Pursuit of Excellence Programme (PEP) was established. It provides coaches within the Irish high performance sport system with the opportunity to apply for grant aid and expert support towards coaching professional development activities (IIS, 2009, PEP briefing document). The aim of this programme is to develop coaches, both in a personal and professional capacity by facilitating and assisting them to explore areas of development and provide them with learning opportunities that will develop their coaching practice. The programme essentially facilitates self-directed learning through a Community led learning, with mentorship support and providing professional development workshops. The PEP's ultimate goal is encourage coaches in constructing their own development path (IIS, 2009, PEP briefing document).

Purdy, Bertz & Keegan (2011) interviewed 19 coaches on the programme, with the intension of examining a number of issues regarding the coaches development. Their focus was to discover, 1.) the relevance of formal coaching courses, 2.) the importance of interacting, shadowing and mentoring opportunities, and 3.) the importance of context in identifying meaningful development opportunities (Purdy, Bertz & Keegan, 2011).

Following their research, they discovered that formal courses were mainly of benefit to those coaches who were less experienced, which had been cited in the literature (Irwin et al., 2004, Erickson et al., 2007). They also found that, of the experienced coaches, only 3 of the 19 had applied for formal courses, which were not available in Ireland (Purdy et al., 2011). In relation to the importance of interacting, shadowing and mentoring opportunities, exposure to a high performance environment overseas such as training camps, clinics and programme visits were strongly encouraged by 13

of the coaches. According to Purdy et al. (2011), the coaches stated that the value lay in interacting, shadowing and being mentored by the coaches who were more experienced and more successful.

Also, it was discovered in the research that 3 of the 19 coaches were interested in developing their managerial skills to prepare them for a transition to new roles. The PEP facilitated semi-structured workshops to manage the issues that were raised by the coaches. These issues included dealing with challenging and complex relationships (e.g. personal coaches; science; medicine and lifestyle professionals; parents; corporate governance; budgets; external institutions and media) associated with coaching elite athlete and the importance of professional development (Purdy et al., 2011).

Sharing of experiences, peer support, and “community building” was reported to be highly beneficial to those who took part in the workshops. They also emphasised that a development of coaches’ skills towards enhancing of people, rather than enhancing technical skills was seen to be of great importance to having a positive impact on their athletes (Purdy et al., 2011).

It is from both these reviews that the idea of a ‘community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) style environment was developed to support the learning and development elite coaches in Ireland.

2.9 Conclusion

The literature suggests that formal, non-formal and, particularly, informal or social learning impacts upon elite coach learning and development.

Following two reviews in 2011, the IIS changed how they deliver their learning and development to coaches in Ireland. From this, they set up a CoP within the PEP programme to enhance coaches ongoing professional needs.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the PEP programme has aided the elite coaches learning and development as it has not been evaluated since the beginning of 2011.

The researcher will seek to answer the following research questions in relation to the literature that has just been reviewed:

- 1) What are the coaches' experiences of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice?
- 2) How has the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice style of learning impacted on the coaches' professional and personal development?
- 3) What are the main challenges the coaches face in a community of practice?
- 4) What has been the most valuable aspect of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice?

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin with an insight into the key research paradigms of research and which philosophy the study is based upon. This chapter will identify the difference between a quantitative and qualitative approach, and outline the reason for implementing a qualitative methodology. The author will then proceed to discuss the research objectives, research design, and sample used. The chapter will then discuss the research procedure, the ethical consideration, and limitations of this study.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. The research philosophy a researcher selects contains important assumptions regarding the way in which they view the world (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). These views of the world underpin a research project and what methods will be used to conduct it. There are different approaches to reflect the different philosophical underpinnings of a research project (Quinlan, 2011). There are three fundamental ways of thinking regarding research philosophy: epistemology, axiology, and ontology.

Epistemology concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Saunders et al., 2007, p.102). Axiology is an aspect of research philosophy that revolves around the researcher's values and how it impacts upon a piece of research. Heron (1996) believes that researchers demonstrate axiological skill by being able to articulate their values as a basis for making judgements about what research they are conducting and how they go about doing it (Saunders et al., 2007, p.110). Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality or social entities (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.32). For the purpose of this study, the author chose to adopt an Ontological approach.

There are two aspects to Ontology: objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism portrays the position that social entities exist in a reality, external to social factors, whereas subjectivism supports the view that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (Saunders et al., 2007). A subjectivist approach best suited this study, as the researcher wanted to interpret the coach's experience on the PEP programme and draw meaning and knowledge on how they perceived the programme.

3.3 Qualitative V's Quantitative

Qualitative research is about trying to understand human behaviour and thoughts. Qualitative research is the process of attempting to gain insights into participant's perceptions, attitudes and motivations (Rogan, 2003). It is associated with concepts that are characterised by their richness and fullness based on your opportunity to explore a subject in as real a manner as is possible (Robson, 2002). Furthermore, the research is exploratory. Through open questions, it seeks to build themes and hypotheses (Creswell, 2003; Robson, 2002). Rogan (2003, p.99) describes quantitative data as "the collection of sufficient data to allow statistical analysis". Quantitative data relies on mathematic, statistics and probability theory. It assumes that a prior knowledge exists and that background information is readily available (Domegan & Fleming, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the author chose to adopt a qualitative research approach, as it was the best way to interpret the effects the PEP programme had on the coaches in the study.

3.4 Research Design

After deliberating over the various possible methods, the author decided on an approach that, in her opinion, was best for this study. For the purpose of this dissertation, the author adopted a qualitative approach. Once the qualitative approach was chosen, the author then had to decide on whether to conduct a focus group or whether to interview individual coaches.

The author conducted eight in-depth semi-structured interviews to obtain exploratory information. The author chose semi-structured interviews, as it allowed her to meet with the coaches on a one-to-one basis, where she could ask probing questions in order to discover the attitudes and beliefs of the coaches. By opting to have semi-structured, as opposed to structured interviews, it gave the author the flexibility to explore subjects that arose in the interviews that were, not only of interest to her, but of significant relevance to the study. It allowed the author to explore new paths that emerged that were not initially considered (Gray, 2004).

3.5 Research Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact that peer-to-peer learning had on elite coach development.

3.6 Research Objectives

- 1) Identify the key theoretical considerations concerning elite coach learning and development

- 2) Identify the most effective sources of elite coach learning and development
- 3) Identify the current state of elite coach learning and development
- 4) Develop recommendations for the PEP programme facilitated by the IIS for elite coach learning and development in Ireland

3.7 Sample/Participants

The Pursuit of Excellence Programme (PEP) was founded in 2009 by the Irish Institute of Sport. The programme was initiated to provide support to coaches to improve athlete development. The programme provides financial aid, whereby the coach can apply for a grant and provides learning and coaching professional development for the coaches. In 2011, a review of the programme was completed. There were three key factors highlighted by the coaches on the programme:

- 1) There were limitations of formal coach education,
- 2) Coaches found coach-peer-learning a significant source of learning,
- 3) Coaches felt that they needed to operate outside their comfort zone in order to develop as a practitioner.

After a review, the Podium Programme was developed to meet the needs of the coaches. The author will be focused on interviewing eight coaches from the Podium Programme.

The eight coaches were made up of two females and six males. Their ages ranged from 30-65. Seven of the coaches were previous athletes, who had transitioned into coaching, while one did not come from a sporting background. Their years on the PEP programme varied from 1 year to being on the programme since it began in 2009.

3.8 Sampling

To gain permission to conduct the study, the researcher met with the CEO of the Irish Institute of Sport to propose her research topic. Once permission was granted, the author met with the Leader and Coach Developer of the Podium Programme, the gatekeeper, to gain more insight and knowledge into the programme. The role of the gatekeeper was to initially introduce the author into the programme, what it was about, and how it was run. A purposive sampling method was used to choose who would be interviewed. The researcher wanted to interview people who would advance the study's research objectives. The coaches on the programme and the programme leader were the best people who had experience of the programme. The gatekeeper then chose the eight coaches the author was going to interview. The author believes that the gatekeeper was the best person to choose the eight coaches, as he was the programme leader. The eight coaches came from all different sports, had been on the course for different lengths of time, and represented one third of the community on the programme.

3.9 Research Materials

The first step the author took was to check the availability of the coaches. Many of them travel quite frequently as part of their role and, therefore, it was important to conduct an interview schedule of where and when the interviews would commence (see Appendix 5). A Dictaphone was used to record the interviews and a laptop was used to transcribe them.

3.10 Research Procedure

Once the researcher received the eight names and contact details, she contacted them via email. In the email, the researcher attached an information sheet (see Appendix 5), explaining what the research was about, why the coaches were chosen, and ensured the coaches that all information gathered at the interview would be confidential. Attached in the email was a consent form (see Appendix 6), where each coach had to sign in order to participate in the study. A date and time was arranged of when the interviews would take place. The venues that were chosen were quiet and private.

The researcher chose to interview the coaches, as it would allow her to meet them face-to-face, where they could discuss the various questions in an open, safe, confidential environment. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews to allow for topics that arose to be explored in more detail, while also keeping an element of control over the interview so it did not go off the research topic. All participants were happy to be a part of the study and responded to the interview questions with great passion about their experience. They went into detail about the personal journey that they have been on while on the PEP programme.

All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and transferred to a laptop. Once all the recordings were transferred, the researcher deleted the original recordings from the Dictaphone, for Data Protection and confidentiality reasons. The recordings on the laptop were then transcribed. The researcher sent a copy of each transcription to the coaches of their interview to review. The researcher wanted to ensure that they were 100% happy with what they had said in the interview and that they wanted to proceed to be a part of the study. All coaches were happy and agreed to remain in the study.

3.11 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying and analysing patterns and themes in qualitative data. Clarke and Braun (2013) view thematic analysis as theoretically flexible because it does not require any theory of language or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences, or practices; “It is a form of pattern recognition with the data, where emerging themes become categories for analysis” (Fereday & Cochrane, 2006, p.82,). Thematic analysis will be used to extract themes and patterns from the interviews, which uses “extensive probing in the context of a personal interview to get a single respondent to reveal motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic” (Domegan & Fleming, 2007, p.172). The author’s intention is to gain a greater insight and knowledge into the community of practice on the PEP programme.

3.12 Methodological Limitations

- 1) The researcher interviewed eight coaches from the programme. Perhaps surveying the rest of the group may have added to the study.
- 2) The quality of answers to the interview questions were not the same across all coaches. Some went into great detail with their responses, while others have shorter responses.
- 3) The eight coaches were chosen by the gatekeeper and not the researcher. While the researcher agreed that they were the best person to choose the participants, there may be an element of bias around those who were chosen.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

The research was gathered through semi-structured interviews and therefore the ethical consideration was predominately concerned with protecting the participants being interviewed. As mentioned previously, the researcher gave the participants an information sheet and consent form to read and sign. This gave the coaches a full understanding of the research process. It also ensured them anonymity and stated that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, no information or detail in relation to their responses would be given to the Irish Institute of Sport or any of the PEP programme organisers.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the value of peer-to-peer interactions by coaches in the Community of Practice. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the author chose to adopt a Thematic Analysis Framework to analyse the data. Richie and Spencer's (1980) Framework Analysis has six phases that the author followed throughout the analysis of the data. The author will give a brief description of each phase and also a brief account of each phase of her analysis. The author will discuss the key themes and sub-themes found in the analysis of the data that are associated with each of the author's research questions.

PHASE ONE – FAMILIARISING YOURSELF WITH THE DATA	
Framework Description	Researcher
In the initial stage, the researcher should immerse themselves into the data until they are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Reading and re-reading the data will allow them to search for meanings and patterns. Taking notes of analytical observations that will help with the coding in the later phases	Once the interviews were transcribed, the author read and re-read the data several times until she was familiar with the Content. She took notes of words, ideas, and phrases that were used by more than one coach.
PHASE TWO – CREATING INITIAL CODES	
This stage involves the production of the initial codes from the data. Coding the data is an analytic process. It will highlight repeated patterns (themes) from the data set.	The researcher coded all of the transcripts
PHASE THREE – SEARCHING FOR THEMES	
Once all the data has been initially coded, the researcher will sort the different codes into potential	Once all the transcripts were coded the researcher reviewed her codes and drew up

<p>themes. At the end of this phase, the researcher will have analysed the data and produced themes and sub-themes</p>	<p>a table. This table consisted of the questions asked in the interviews and the coded responses from the coaches (See Appendix 4). Here the researcher began to see commonalities between the coaches and themes began to emerge.</p>
<p>PHASE FOUR – REVIEWING THEMES</p>	
<p>The researcher must review and refine their themes. If the themes do not fit, the researcher needs to consider whether the theme needs to be reworked or discarded. By the end of this stage, the researcher should have a clear idea of their difference themes, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data.</p>	<p>Here the researcher created a second table which showed the main themes and sub-themes that occurred in the data (See Appendix 1)</p>
<p>PHASE FIVE – DEFINING AND NAMING THEMES</p>	
<p>This phase requires the researcher to define each theme and conduct a detailed analysis. It is important to define what the essence of each theme is and give them concise, punchy names that will allow the reader to immediately understand what the theme is about.</p>	<p>The researcher then finalised her themes and sub-themes (See Appendix 2)</p>
<p>PHASE SIX – PRODUCING THE REPORT</p>	
<p>The final phase involves writing up an analysis, which should convince the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis. It must be concise, coherent, logical, non – repetitive and an interesting account of the story that the data will tell. Each theme should be clearly linked to the research question.</p>	<p>Please see analysis report below</p>

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2013)

4.2 Research Question One

WHAT ARE THE COACH'S EXPERIENCES OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

The researcher found three key themes and three sub themes emerging from the data that summed up the coaches overall experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice.

4.2.1 Theme One – Positive Experience

The group of coaches all agreed that the programme has been a positive experience for them. All coaches spoke about how they really enjoyed the programme and how it had a positive impact on them, personally, and on their coaching practice. Not one coach had any negative comments regarding their experience on the programme.

“It’s been really positive. The last 15 months we have spent as a group has been really good” (Coach 1)

“it’s been really positive because it has opened so many doors for me, it has given me so many opportunities to broaden the way that I coach and run the programme that I am involved in” (Coach 2)

“For me the experience has been very positive and constructive in terms of assisting myself” (Coach 4)

“It’s like a breath of fresh air what you get out of it from the peer-to-peer discussions” (Coach 8)

4.2.2 Theme Two – High Performance Environment

Another theme that occurred in the data was the importance of a high performance environment. The programme allows the coaches to come together in a community to discuss high performance sport, where they can support each other, seek advice, and learn from each other’s experiences. It is an environment of likeminded people, who are seeking to be better and achieve better results in their sports.

“It’s hard to put into words what it feels like to have the support and that you are in a like-minded environment” (Coach 6)

“...when you are in an environment with other sports you learn so much and pick up ideas from them and bring them back to your own sport and how you do things” (Coach 3)

“Having peers within sport in Ireland that face similar challenges to yourself” (Coach 7)

“Working with all the other coaches, you listen to a lot of good advice but you also realise they are in the same boat as you and come up with solutions to move along” (Coach 5)

4.3.3 Theme Three – Knowledge Sharing

Coaches value the fact that they can share their experiences with each other, in particular, the knowledge that they have gathered over their career. Some of the coaches spoke about sharing the highs and lows that they have experienced in their careers. They also discussed issues they were having and the other coaches gave advice and came up with solutions as they had faced similar issues in the past.

“Everyone is incredibly successful in their own field but their willingness to share their up’s and down’s was inspirational” (Coach 2)

“All of a sudden you had issues coming out that you were having and people were discussing how they might have managed them” (Coach 5)

“To share knowledge with your peers in this environment has been very beneficial” (Coach 7)

4.3.3.1 Sub-Theme One – Trust & Confidentiality

Some of the coaches highlighted the fact that trust and confidentiality was an important aspect of the community. The community of practice is a “safe environment” (Coach 4) for them to discuss ideas and issues that they have within their sports.

“...As the relationship builds you develop trust and you can share experiences....just even having someone that is in the same environment as yourself, going through the same types of scenarios they are just different people, you can share that confidentially and without any comeback” (Coach 6)

“...it felt like an open and confidential environment, so you knew anything you said wasn’t going to go outside the group” (Coach 1)

4.3.3.2 Sub-Theme Two– Comfort Zone

A couple of the coaches spoke about being put outside of their comfort zone. One coach in particular wanted to be pushed outside of his comfort zone, as he feels that is when he develops the most. Both coaches spoke about being out of their comfort zone, but described it as a positive because they felt it benefited them.

“... the whole thing made me uncomfortable. That was really important. I said that as the start that I wanted to be made feel uncomfortable because when I look back over my competitive career, the times I made good jumps in my development was when I was uncomfortable” (Coach 1)

“It is designed to make you uncomfortable to draw the best out of you” (Coach 4)

4.3.3.3 Sub-Theme Three – Reflection

Some of the coaches spoke about becoming more reflective as a result of their experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. They now take a step back and look at what they are doing and how they are doing it. This is a tool they have developed in order to improve their performance.

“I’m definitely more reflective about what I do. I ask myself ‘was that a good training session that I have done there? Could I have done it better? Why?’” (Coach 1)

“The whole idea of reviewing and reflecting...always seek to improve and do it better next time” (Coach 3)

4.3.4 Summary

Overall, the themes that arose regarding the coaches experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice were optimistic. All of the coaches expressed genuine benefits from the programme. Coaches found it to be a positive experience from being involved in a high performance environment, having the ability to share knowledge in an open, confidential environment. They enjoyed being pushed out of their comfort zone and reflecting on their learning.

The table, below, highlights the key themes and sub-themes for research question one.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Positive Experience	Trust & Confidentiality
High Performance Environment	Comfort Zone
Knowledge Sharing	Reflection

4.3 Research Question Two

HOW HAS THE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE STYLE OF LEARNING IMPACTED ON COACHES PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.3.1 Theme One – Coaching Skills & Practice

All of the coach's felt that their coaching skills and practice has developed as a result of the community of practice. Some of the coaches spoke about learning from each other, while others learned from seeing different styles and developed new skills that enhanced their own coaching practice.

"I was able to take his model adjust it a bit and make it work in my own sport. That was a huge change for my professional practice" (Coach 1)

"It has changed the way that I look towards coaching. It has really opened my eyes to different styles that are out there, the different ways of approaching athletes, the different ways of approaching the way I set up training and how to reflect on performances" (Coach 2)

"The whole programme has helped me prepare a lot better. It made me realise that coaches need to be prepared for competition, I would have always been very focused on the athletes and getting them ready for competition" (Coach 3)

"It has made me more knowledgeable. It has allowed me to change my practices and how I go about things. Even to how I create a bigger picture and decide where I am trying to go and work backwards, and put in the various different steps" (Coach 4)

"This type of learning has helped me deal with the day-to-day stuff, when problems occur" (Coach 7)

“There has been a huge change in my development in terms of the way I approach my day-to-day coaching” (Coach 8)

4.3.2 Theme Two – Self Assessment

Many of the coaches discussed how they are now being more self-aware, taking a step back and looking at their coaching practice and how they do things. They are assessing themselves and their performance.

“It helped me to assess where I was on the coaching ladder” (Coach 2)

“The whole programme made me sit up and look at brushing myself up. I grew in a lot of ways” (Coach 3)

“It has made me more efficient because it’s got me to stop and reflect about myself, my plans, my attitudes and demeanours towards things and assumptions” (Coach 4)

“It helped me look at myself, and the things that I do and then compare them to the best of what we have in Ireland and abroad” (Coach 8)

4.3.2.1 Sub-Theme One – The Hawkeye Project

The Hawkeye project on the PEP programme was where two coaches coupled up together from different sports to work on a project together. They spent time together analysing each other’s coaching practice. Many of the coaches found this useful in terms of their professional development.

“Doing the Hawkeye with X, where I actually shadowed a coach from a different sport. We spent a lot of time together, it was great ... I think he took a bit from me and I took a lot from him as well across all areas of my practice. He also offered me a lot of support. He was a good sounding board” (Coach 1)

“The peer-to-peer learning was the best part of the course for me. I was working with someone who was a recently retired elite athlete ...we shared a lot of notes together. We both learned from each other” (Coach 3)

4.3.2.2 Sub – Theme Two – Self Confidence

Some of the coaches spoke about self-confidence and how the programme has increased their self-confidence and self-belief in themselves.

“...it gave me huge confidence and self belief so I could actually move to the top of the coaching ladder in my sport” (Coach 2)

“My self confidence got better because I knew I could take on changes and make them work” (Coach 3)

“It’s given me the confidence to try and take some time to slow down and look at things from a strategic point of view.....it gives you the confidence to go away and try new ideas, seek out more knowledge to give you a better understanding of how you go about things” (Coach 4)

PERSONAL DEVELOPEMENT

4.3.3 Theme One – Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance was an apparent winner among the coaches. Most of them never seemed to have made much time for themselves before the programme. Now they have learned through PEP the importance of work-life balance and it has had a significant effect on their personal development.

“We did a piece around work-life balance....knowing when to say no....giving myself time to relax” (Coach 1)

“My personal fitness and diet is better since I came on the programme. I am more conscious about it now” (Coach 5)

“... going to have a physical check-up, face your fears and have a look at yourself to see what was going on with you that was all supported through PEP. That summer I really reviewed where I was personally and said it was time I looked after myself” (Coach 6)

“The idea that your job is one thing and that I need to develop myself as a person and an individual as well and that comes from looking after yourself for starters. This was a new piece that was brought into the programme last year and it really gave coaches a reality check. We had a health screening and all sorts of stuff. That has definitely impacted on my personal development” (Coach 4)

“If I have a year calendar the first thing I now do is pick my holidays with my partner, when am I going away with my family, when am I taking time off....It’s a big thing for me and especially my family because when I was

competing everything else was pushed around me and I didn't spend as much time with them so that is a big thing for me personally" (Coach 1)

"It is really developing you as an individual and person. Even things like family. If things are happier at home, you can be much more productive in your job and you won't burn out at the same rate. I know now that I can shut the phone off for the weekend" (Coach 4)

"... balancing what makes me happy and helps to keep my family situation stable as well, taking time away from coaching, having down time, finding out what helps me perform better by going for a run or spending time with my wife because I just got married earlier this year" (Coach 8)

4.3.3.1 Sub-Theme One – Self Awareness

A number of the coaches spoke about becoming more self-aware, as a result of the programme. They are looking at their strengths and weaknesses and where changes need to be made.

"It has helped breakdown areas that I am very good at and areas that I am not very good at" (Coach 4)

"It has made me more self-aware from the learning; I know the areas where I was falling down" (Coach 7)

"It has really made me look at myself, if you want to make changes; you have to start with yourself" (Coach 2)

4.3.3.2 Sub – Theme Two – People Management Skills

Several coaches spoke about how their ability to communicate and interact with people has developed. One in particular mentioned that his people management skills that he has developed can be used outside of coaching practice and in other areas that he is working in.

"In terms of my development I do feel that I deal with the guys and the players differently now...they are starting to see that and from their response I think they like it" (Coach 5)

"There are a lot of things on the programme that aren't just specific to coaching. They are people skills, conflict management. I learned a lot of things that actually stretched outside my coaching role and into other jobs that I am doing" (Coach 1)

“It has given me huge confidence and really clear vision of where we want to go and how to communicate with people” (Coach 2)

4.3.3.3 Sub – Theme Three – Preparation And Planning

A few of the coaches spoke about how their preparation and planning skills have developed as a result of the programme.

“The programme highlights your strengths and weaknesses and give you the ability to plot more effectively what you can bring into the future whatever you decide to do” (Coach 4)

“I see myself in my own development that it could be another sport down the line. The stuff that I am learning and the stuff that I am going through, I need to prepare myself to have more capacity in the next number of years to be able to do that” (Coach 5)

“My preparation has improved” (Coach 3)

4.3.4 Summary

In summary, it is evident that the coaches have developed, both professionally and personally, as a result of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. They have developed their coaching skills and practice, become more self-aware of their actions and benefited from working together on the Hawkeye Project. They have become more self-confident and developed skills such as people management, preparation and planning skills. Many of them have discovered a work-life balance that has had an impact on both their professional and personal development.

The table, below, gives a review of the main themes and sub-themes associated with research question two.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPEMENT	
THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Coaching Skills & Practice	The Hawkeye Project
Self Assessment	Self Confidence
PERSONAL DEVELOPEMENT	
THEMES	SUB-THEMES

Work-life Balance	Self-Awareness
	People Management Skills
	Preparation & Planning Skills

4.4 Research Question Three

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES THE COACHES FACE IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

4.4.1 Theme One – Timing & Scheduling

A key theme that arose with the coaches when I asked them about the challenges they faced was the timing and scheduling of the programme. In their busy schedule, they found it difficult to make time for the programme.

“The travel and time commitment were big challenges for me” (Coach 3)

“For me it’s been the balance of the day-to-day work and the time that you invest into the programme” (Coach 8)

“...sometimes the dates were a problem, something would come in and I put that in front of the programme. Bills to pay, staff to pay” (Coach 5)

“Even just getting there. Daragh would be very good at arranging things and trying to help you out as much as he can but even with that making the time to get there is hard” (Coach 6)

“In our ever growing busy schedule, it’s time. I want to be at all the events but sometimes our programme does not allow it, between lack of coaches for coaching or we are out of the country. Trying to fit it in has been an issue for me” (Coach 8)

“Sometimes the scheduling of it but I appreciate the challenges the people have trying to put it together” (Coach 4)

4.4.1.1 Sub – Theme One – Volume Of Learning

Another barrier that some of the coaches mentioned was the high volume of learning on the days of the programme. Some of the sessions were seen as an information overload.

“The biggest challenge was getting the most out of the programme. Some of the days you felt it was a little bit of an overload on your brain. By 7pm you would be exhausted and feel like your brain couldn’t take anymore” (Coach 2)

“To me it’s been high demand on terms of volume, the amount of activities we get in but it has been a breath of fresh air what you get out of it from the peer-to-peer discussions, through the top class speakers and the top sports men and women that we get to meet through it” (Coach 8)

“The challenge is the volume of learning that sometimes comes out of it. You don’t necessarily feel that you have the time or the ability to take what you have learned and take some time to make it impact on your programme in your life” (Coach 4)

4.4.1.2 Sub – Theme Two – Pressure To Contribute

Another challenge which some of the coaches felt was that there was a pressure to contribute and add value to the sessions.

“Another challenge I find is big expectation. The standard among the coaches is high, I feel like I have to perform well in the groups because everyone else is. That is an expectation I have of myself” (Coach 2)

“In a lot of the workshops you want to be challenged to contribute and that your contribution is worthwhile” (Coach 6)

“The challenges are going away and coming back with thoughts and feedback and being put under pressure to contribute” (Coach 4)

4.4.2 Summary

The biggest challenge the coaches had was finding the time to attend the scheduled programme days. Another challenge was the amount of information and volume of learning that they were exposed to. They also felt that there was a pressure there for them to bring something to the table and add value to the programme.

The table, below, outlines the main themes and sub-themes related to research question three.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Timing & Scheduling	Pressure to Contribute
Volume of Learning	

4.5 Research Question Four

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST VALUABLE ASPECT OF THE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

4.5.1 Theme One – Peer Support

Peer support was found to be the aspect of the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice that the coaches found the most valuable. Having the support of those running the programme and the coaches taking part in the programme was very important to them.

“For me the value is the community. That support around your own practice that enables you to be better. I just don’t think you can quantify it. The programme is invaluable” (Coach 6)

“They harness around things that you are not good at, give you support and then they harness around the things that really excite you and get you thinking in a good space as an individual and as a group” (Coach 4)

“I think the peer-to-peer sessions have been of huge value....getting to know coaches on a personal level and having a community where you can trust people, where you can come in and sit down and tell them everything that you felt or are experiencing without being judged and them understanding because they are in the same situation”(Coach 8)

“They make you feel very wanted and comfortable and that they are there to help you at any time, it is never any trouble. That support is so valuable” (Coach 2)

“In PEP you are getting to know people for a reason because you are about to embark on a journey with these people so you are going to be invested in their successes and failures as well. This programme is different because people’s experiences are brought to the forefront and based on what is shared its shapes how the programme is going forward. It’s not the same thing every year, it’s completely different” (Coach 4)

4.5.2 Theme Two – 1-1 Mentoring

Another aspect of the programme that some of the coaches found valuable was the one-to-one mentoring they received from the Irish Institute of Sport staff.

“Specifically for me the one-on-one and the life style management has been the best for me” (Coach 5)

“We have the one-to –one mentoring as well so if you have any issues as any stage you have the support” (Coach 1)

“The mentoring with Dave Passmore and Daragh Sheridan has been fantastic. Without giving you the answers they seem to be able to make you find the solutions to the problems yourself” (Coach 2)

4.5.3 Theme Three – Problem & Scenario Based Learning

A key theme that occurred in the data that the coaches found extremely valuable was the problem based and scenario based learning. They seemed to have found this type of learning far more practical and useful than the traditional classroom style learning.

“I have found this programme more enjoyable because it wasn’t as theory laden and it was more practical to what happens on a daily basis when you are dealing with human beings. You are put into a scenario and have to deal with a crisis and examine how you reacted. It was very enjoyable and there was a hell of a lot of learning done in this environment” (Coach 7)

“I thought the problem based learning and the scenario based learning was unbelievable” (Coach 1)

“Going to temple more to do the problem based learning was a light bulb moment for me” (Coach 2)

4.5.3.1 Sub – Theme One – Hawkeye Project

As mentioned earlier, the Hawkeye project on the PEP programme was where two coaches coupled up together from different sports to work on a project together. Two coaches in particular found this experience to be really valuable.

“The Hawkeye project was a focused one-to-one. There was so much expected. We knew that we were going to learn from each other technically. We knew we were going to watch each other’s coaching skills but it was the stuff we didn’t expect that was much more powerful” (Coach 1)

*“...the number one for me was the peer-to-peer Hawkeye programme because it was out in the field and it was two coaches working together, making mistakes, making things happen, getting the fundamentals and feedback.”
(Coach 3)*

4.5.4 Summary

Peer support and one-to-one mentoring are the aspects of the PEP programme that coaches found the most valuable. Several of the coaches also found the problem based learning and scenario based learning very practical and useful. Some coaches found the Hawkeye project to be hugely beneficial to them.

The table, below, gives a review of the themes and sub-themes associated with research question four.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Peer Support	The Hawkeye Project
One-to-one Mentoring	
Problem & Scenario Based Learning	

4.6 Conclusion

The author followed a six-phase analysis framework to analyse her data. Each research question was presented and the relevant themes and sub-themes from the data were discussed in relation to it.

In the next chapter, the author will discuss and compare findings from this chapter with literature reviewed in chapter two.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION

This chapter will provide the reader with a discussion of the key themes that the researcher found in this study. The researcher will discuss these themes with the research found in the literature review. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the data found. As the methodology chosen for this project was thematic analysis, the researcher will discuss the various themes associated with each research question. These themes are framed under the study's research questions in a manner similar to the previous chapter.

5.1 Research Question One: What are the coaches' experiences of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice?

Positive Experience

In this research, the coaches found the experience of peer-to peer learning in a community of practice to be a positive experience. All of the coaches interviewed had something positive to say about the experience. One coach in particular stated that it had given him opportunities and developed his coaching practice. *"it's been really positive because it has opened so many doors for me, it has given me so many opportunities to broaden the way that I coach and run the programme that I am involved in"* (Coach 2). Another coach found it constructive, *"for me the experience has been very positive and constructive in terms of assisting myself"* (Coach 4). Another coach found the peer-to-peer discussions beneficial, *"It's like a breath of fresh air what you get out of it from the peer-to-peer discussions"* (Coach 8). Following on from that, one coach said *"It's been really positive. The last 15 months we have spent as a group has been really good"* (Coach 1). It is evident that the coaches' experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice has been extremely positive.

High Performance Environment

A key theme that arose in the research regarding their experience was the importance of a high performance environment. The community of practice allows the coaches to come together to discuss, debate and share their experiences. It allows them to support each other and seek advice in an environment of likeminded people. One coach said *“It’s hard to put into words what it feels like to have the support and that you are in a like-minded environment”* (Coach 6), while another coach expressed a similar opinion; *“...when you are in an environment with other sports you learn so much and pick up ideas from them and bring them back to your own sport and how you do things”* (Coach 3). According to Rynne et al. (2010, p.321), coaches previously stated that they were socially and professionally isolated. In a later study by Rynne & Mallet (2014, p.18), they found that *“the coaches indicated that they benefited greatly from being able to discuss coaching practice with a variety of other personnel, including coaches within and outside their sports and paraprofessionals (e.g. sports scientists, sports psychologists, strength and conditioning coaches)”*. One coach emphasised this point when he stated, *“Working with all the other coaches, you listen to a lot of good advice but you also realise they are in the same boat as you and come up with solutions to move along”* (Coach 5). According to Cushion, Armour and Jones (2003, p.217),

Observing the behaviour of more experienced coaches during practice and games and listening during informal periods leaves its mark on novice coaches. It is largely through such experiences that collective understandings being to develop, and the shared meanings about the occupational culture of coaching starts to take shape.

It is clear that participating in a high performance environment was a key benefit for the coaches who were in the community of practice.

Knowledge Sharing

In the literature, Wenger describes joint enterprise as a primary aspect of a community of practice. The community is bound together by sharing the same interest or profession. The group must work together to develop and gain knowledge. Members must be competent enough to understand the community well enough to be able to contribute to it, to recognise and address knowledge gaps (Wenger, 2000). This point is also found by the work of Urganhart et al. (2013) who suggested that learning is achieved by way of tacit knowledge shared through interaction, storytelling and

working together. They believe that interactions with colleagues facing similar problems and issues are key sources of learning. Additionally, gaining new knowledge is critical and that helping them to obtain new perspectives and knowledge will help to enhance their practice. The researcher in this study found that coaches appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences with other coaches and also hearing the coaches share their experiences. Some of the coaches spoke about the high and low points of their career. One coach said, *“Everyone is incredibly successful in their own field but their willingness to share their up’s and down’s was inspirational”* (Coach 2).

They also benefited from giving and receiving advice, along with discussing problems and issues they were facing in their everyday practice and had faced in the past; *“All of a sudden you had issues coming out that you were having and people were discussing how they might have managed them”* (Coach 5). Cited in Retna Pak Tee Ng (2011, p.42), knowledge is a property of relationships. Through complex responsive processes, knowledge is created and transformed through networks human interaction (Stacey, 2011). Lesser and Everest (2001) describe COPs as an environment in which knowledge can be created and shared to improve the effectiveness of existing practices used in organisations (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). Furthermore, new knowledge and learning are properly conceived through communities of practice (Tennant, 1997). It is evident that the coaches are grateful and benefiting from the knowledge that is shared in the community of practice, with one coach stating, *“To share knowledge with your peers in this environment has been very beneficial”* (Coach 7).

Trust & Confidentiality

A fundamental aspect of a community of practice is confidentiality amongst members. Wenger (2000) highlights that those participating must feel comfortable in discussing problems, stating, *“they must trust each other, not just personally, but also in their ability to contribute to the enterprise of the community; so they feel comfortable in addressing real problems together and speaking truthfully”* (Wenger, 2000, p.230). Some of the coaches stressed the fact that trust and confidentiality was an important aspect of the community. The community of practice is a *“safe environment”* (Coach 4) for them to discuss ideas and issues that they have within their sports. Other coaches

agreed with this point in the literature. One coach said, “...*As the relationship builds you develop trust and you can share experiences.....just even having someone that is in the same environment as yourself, going through the same types of scenarios they are just different people, you can share that confidentially and without any comeback*” (Coach 6), while another coach mentioned, “...*it felt like an open and confidential environment, so you knew anything you said wasn't going to go outside the group*” (Coach 1).

Comfort Zone

Morrison (2008, cited in Attencio, Jess & Dewar, 2005) discusses this point further by saying

the closer one moves towards the edge of chaos, the more creative, open-minded, imaginative, diverse and rich are the behaviours, ideas and practices of the individuals and systems and the greater the connectivity, networking and information sharing (content and rate of flow) between the participants.

In other words, having a complex system which allows for ‘the edge of chaos’ is where the real learning in the community takes place, rather than following a systematic, structured process. Creating an environment that pushes coaches outside of their comfort zone in a community of practice is crucial for significant learning to take place. A couple of coaches emphasised the importance of being pushed outside their comfort zone. One coach felt that when he is outside of his comfort zone is when he develops the most. “... *the whole thing made me uncomfortable. That was really important. I said that as the start that I wanted to be made feel uncomfortable because when I look back over my competitive career, the times I made goods jumps in my development was when I was uncomfortable*” (Coach 1). Another coach stated, “*It is designed to make you uncomfortable to draw the best out of you*” (Coach 4). Both coaches spoke about being out of their comfort zone but described the experience as positive because it pushed and benefited them.

Reflection

Another key element of a successful community of practice is the importance of reflection, in particular, reflecting in the community to ensure growth and development is occurring. Wenger states that being reflective and self-aware enables a community to understand its own state of development from different perspectives,

which can uncover hidden possibilities to move forward (Wenger, 2000). According to Cushion et al. (2003, p.223), “We need to provide coaches with a mirror in which they can see their own programs and practices”. Furthermore, as cited in Cushion et al. (2003, p.224), Kirk and Tinning (1990) suggest that by opening up our professional practices to scrutiny by ourselves and our peers, we create the possibility of turning these areas of practice into ‘sites of contestation’ (Kirk, 1988), where we can begin to address, practically and specifically, issues and problems (p.9).

In the research, a number of coaches spoke about becoming more reflective as a result of their experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. They now take a step back and look at what they are doing and how they are doing it. This is a tool they have developed in order to improve their performance. One coach said, *“I’m definitely more reflective about what I do. I ask myself ‘was that a good training session that I have done there? Could I have done it better? Why?’”* (Coach 1). Another coach spoke about reflection to improve practice, *“The whole idea of reviewing and reflecting...always seek to improve and do it better next time”* (Coach 3).

5.2 Research Question Two: How has the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice style of learning impacted on the coaches professional and personal development?

Professional Development

Coaching Skills and Practice

A key theme that arose in the research is how peer-to-peer learning contributed to the coaches’ professional development in the community of practice. All of the coaches mentioned that their coaching skills and practices had progressed. One coach spoke about learning from the work of another coach, *“I was able to take his model adjust it a bit and make it work in my own sport. That was a huge change for my professional practice”* (Coach 1). Another coach stated that they had also learned from other coaches’ different styles and practices, *“It has changed the way that I look towards coaching. It has really opened my eyes to different styles that are out there, the different ways of approaching athletes, the different ways of approaching the way I set up training and how to reflect on performances”*(Coach 2). One coach mentioned

how peer-to-peer learning had increased his own preparation, *“The whole programme has helped me prepare a lot better. It made me realise that coaches need to be prepared for competition, I would have always been very focused on the athletes and getting them ready for competition”* (Coach 3).

In a study by Monaghan (2011), participants developed their abilities to self-direct in a collaborative environment, their attitudes towards learning changed, they connected to theory and practice, and they gained in-depth knowledge. Like the participants in Monaghan’s (2011) study, one coach said *“It has made me more knowledgeable. It has allowed me to change my practices and how I go about things. Even to how I create a bigger picture and decide where I am trying to go and work backwards, and put in the various different steps”* (Coach 4). Another coach stated that peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice has helped him deal with *“the day-to-day stuff, when problems occur”* (Coach 7). Another coach has noticed a significant change in his development and coaching practice. *“There has been a huge change in my development in terms of the way I approach my day-to-day coaching”* (Coach 8). In the literature, it is apparent that participating in a community of practice develops coaches’ professional skills and practices. Monaghan (2011) describes COP as an excellent tool for helping individuals to understand explicit and implicit rules of their profession, develop networks, and practice skills in a safe environment with mentors who are willing to share their experience and expertise with novices (Kriner et al., 2015).

Self-Assessment & Confidence

Another theme that arose in the research was self-assessment. As a result of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice, coaches found that they were being more self-aware, taking time to look at their practice and how they operate. One coach stated, *“It helped me to assess where I was on the coaching ladder”* (Coach 2). Another coach said, *“The whole programme made me sit up and look at brushing myself up. I grew in a lot of ways”* (Coach 3). Similarly, one coach stated, *“It has made me more efficient because it’s got me to stop and reflect about myself, my plans, my attitudes and demeanours towards things and assumptions”* (Coach 4). Additionally, one coach, not only became more self-aware, but began to compare his practices to the competition, both domestically and internationally, *“It helped me look*

at myself, and the things that I do and then compare them to the best of what we have in Ireland and abroad” (Coach 8).

In the literature, Kriner et al. (2015) researched doctoral students’ perspectives of participating in a CoP. According to Kriner et al. (2015), participants may experience increased self-efficacy, higher self-esteem and less marginalisation in a larger community. One student spoke about how the CoP provided support to her and other students to overcome their insecurities and build their self-confidence and self-efficacy. Self-confidence was a sub-theme that surfaced in the research. Several coaches discussed how the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice increased their self-confidence and belief in themselves and their ability. One coach said, “...it gave me huge confidence and self belief so I could actually move to the top of the coaching ladder in my sport” (Coach 2), while another said, “My self confidence got better because I knew I could take on changes and make them work” (Coach 3). Correspondingly, another coach stated, “It’s given me the confidence to try and take some time to slow down and look at things from a strategic point of view.....it gives you the confidence to go away and try new ideas, seek out more knowledge to give you a better understanding of how you go about things” (Coach 4).

The Hawkeye Project

A sub- theme that occurred in the research was the benefit of a peer project called ‘The Hawkeye Project’. In this project, two coaches were coupled together from different sports to work on an assignment together. They spent time analysing each other’s coaching practice and found that it really benefited their professional development. One of the coaches said, “doing the Hawkeye with X, where I actually shadowed a coach from a different sport. We spent a lot of time together, it was great...I think he took a bit from me and I took a lot from him as well across all areas of my practice. He also offered me a lot of support. He was a good sounding board” (Coach 1). The other coach highlighted the significant impact the peer project had on him, “The peer-to-peer learning was the best part of the course for me. I was working with someone who was a recently retired elite athlete....we shared a lot of notes together. We both learned from each other” (Coach 3).

In a study by Retna Pak Tee Ng (2011), participants highlighted that they enjoyed relationships with each other and are able to raise issues, not only at a professional level, but at a personal level.

Personal Development

One of the main benefits of being in a community that is cited in the literature is personal development. As mentioned above, Kriner et al. (2015) suggested that participants may experience increased self-efficacy, higher self-esteem and less marginalisation in a larger community. Similarly, it is “through participation in communities that individuals develop and possibly adapt and thereby reconstruct their identities and practice” (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham & Clark, 2006).

Work-Life Balance

A theme of great magnitude that was discovered in the research was the area of work-life balance. Each and every coach spoke about the importance of work-life balance. Before they are a part of the community of practice, the majority of them did not seem to have made much time for themselves and constantly made work a priority. Since being a part of the PEP programme, they have learned to have more of a balance and it has had a considerable effect on their personal development. Some coaches spoke about their health and well-being. One coach said, “*We did a piece around work-life balance....knowing when to say no....giving myself time to relax*” (Coach 1), while another said, “*My personal fitness and diet is better since I came on the programme. I am more conscious about it now*” (Coach 5). One coach said she received support, “*... going to have a physical check up, face your fears and have a look at yourself to see what was going on with you that was all supported through PEP. That summer I really reviewed where I was personally and said it was time I looked after myself*” (Coach 6).

One of the coaches began to look at himself differently, realising that life outside of work was just as important, “*The idea that your job is one thing and that I need to develop myself as a person and an individual as well and that comes from looking after yourself for starters. This was a new piece that was brought into the programme last year and it really gave coaches a reality check. We had a health screening and all sorts of stuff. That has definitely impacted on my personal development*” (Coach 4).

A further feature in the area of work-life balance was the area of family. Many coaches were guilty of putting work before family and not spending enough time with them. One coach stated, *“If I have a year calendar the first thing I now do is pick my holidays with my partner, when am I going away with my family, when am I taking time off...It’s a big thing for me and especially my family because when I was competing everything else was pushed around me and I didn’t spend as much time with them so that is a big thing for me personally”* (Coach 1). Another coach said that the community is not just about developing you for your role as a coach but that it is also about developing you as an individual, *“It is really developing you as an individual and person. Even things like family. If things are happier at home, you can be much more productive in your job and you won’t burn out at the same rate. I know now that I can shut the phone off for the weekend”* (Coach 4). Following on from that, another coach found a way to keep the balance between family life, coaching and alone time, *“... balancing what makes me happy and helps to keep my family situation stable as well, taking time away from coaching, having down time, finding out what helps me perform better by going for a run or spending time with my wife because I just got married earlier this year”* (Coach 8).

Self-Awareness / Development

A number of the coaches spoke about becoming more self-aware, as a result of the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. They are looking at their strengths and weaknesses and where changes need to be made. *“It has helped breakdown areas that I am very good at and areas that I am not very good at”* (Coach 4). Another coach said, *“It has made me more self-aware from the learning; I know the areas where I was falling down”* (Coach 7). Agreeing with this point of view Coach 2 stated *“It has really made me look at myself, if you want to make changes; you have to start with yourself”* (Coach 2).

People Management Skills

Several coaches spoke about how their ability to communicate and interact with people has developed. One in particular mentioned that his people management skills that he has developed can be used outside of this coaching practice and in other areas that he

is working in. *“In terms of my development I do feel that I deal with the guys and the players differently now...they are starting to see that and from their response I think they like it”* (Coach 5). One coach finds that the people management skills he has learned are useful to him in coaching and in other jobs that he does, *“There are a lot of things on the programme that aren’t just specific to coaching. They are people skills, conflict management. I learned a lot of things that actually stretched outside my coaching role and into other jobs that I am doing”* (Coach 1). Another coach mentions who the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice has thought him people management skills *“It has given me huge confidence and really clear vision of where we want to go and how to communicate with people”* (Coach 2).

Preparation And Planning

A few of the coaches spoke about how their preparation and planning skills have developed as a result of the programme. *“The programme highlights your strengths and weaknesses and give you the ability to plot more effectively what you can bring into the future whatever you decide to do”* (Coach 4). One coach realised that he needs to prepare himself to be able to take on more in the coming years *“I see myself in my own development that it could be another sport down the line. The stuff that I am learning and the stuff that I am going through, I need to prepare myself to have more capacity in the next number of years to be able to do that”* (Coach 5). While one coach simply expressed, *“My preparation has improved”* (Coach 3).

5.3 Research Question Three: What are the main challenges the coaches face in a community of practice?

Timing And Scheduling

A major theme that arose with the coaches when I asked them about the challenges they faced was the timing and scheduling of the programme. In their busy schedule, they found it difficult to make time for the programme. One coach said, *“The travel and time commitment were big challenges for me”* (Coach 3). One coach found it challenging to balance the programme with work, *“For me it’s been the balance of the day-to-day work and the time that you invest into the programme”* (Coach 8). Another coach found some of the dates of the programme challenging, *“...sometimes the dates were a problem, something would come in and I put that in front of the*

programme. Bills to pay, staff to pay” (Coach 5). Of a similar view, one coach said trying to get there sometimes was a challenge, “Even just getting there. Daragh would be very good at arranging things and trying to help you out as much as he can but even with that making the time to get there is hard” (Coach 6). The timing of the programme was a challenge for coach 8 as sometimes he is out of the country, “In our ever growing busy schedule, it’s time. I want to be at all the events but sometimes our programme does not allow it, between lack of coaches for coaching or we are out of the country. Trying to fit it in has been an issue for me” (Coach 8). He agreed with other coaches that the scheduling is a challenge for him, however, he was aware of the difficulty in trying to accommodate all participants of the programme. “Sometimes the scheduling of it but I appreciate the challenges the people have trying to put it together” (Coach 4).

In a study by Rynne et al. (2010), when coaches were asked why they did not engage in certain learning activities, their response what often not having enough time to do so.

Volume of Learning

Another barrier which some of the coaches said was that there was a high volume of learning on the days of the programme. Some of the sessions were seen as an information overload. *“The biggest challenge was getting the most out of the programme. Some of the days you felt it was a little bit of an overload on your brain. By 7pm you would be exhausted and feel like your brain couldn’t take anymore” (Coach 2). Another coach stated that, “To me it’s been high demand on terms of volume, the amount of activities we get in but it has been a breath of fresh air what you get out of it from the peer-to-peer discussions, through the top class speakers and the top sports men and women that we get to meet through it” (Coach 8). Agreeing with this point, another coach said, “The challenge is the volume of learning that sometimes comes out of it. You don’t necessarily feel that you have the time or the ability to take what you have learned and take some time to make it impact on your programme in your life” (Coach 4)*

Pressure To Contribute

An additional challenge which some of the coaches felt was that there was a pressure to contribute and add value to the sessions. *“Another challenge I find is big expectation. The standard among the coaches is high, I feel like I have to perform well in the groups because everyone else is. That is an expectation I have of myself”* (Coach 2). Likewise, another coach believed, *“The challenges are going away and coming back with thoughts and feedback and being put under pressure to contribute”* (Coach 4). One coach stated that they wanted to be challenged and wanted their contribution to be valuable; *“In a lot of the workshops you want to be challenged to contribute and that your contribution is worthwhile”* (Coach 6).

5.4 Research Question Four: What have been the most valuable aspect of the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice?

Peer Support

In the literature, peer-to-peer learning has been described as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping, 2005, p.631). Hanson, Trolian, Paulsen and Pascarella (2016) state that “peers learning involves interacting with others and learning by observing or explaining; having shared goals and divided tasks; having shared authority and responsibility to the task at hand; and results in making meaning through interactions with peers” (Hanson et al., 2016, p.193). As cited in Hanson et al. (2016), research has found that there have been many positive outcomes linked to peer-to-peer learning, such as: willingness to take on difficult tasks, ability to retain more knowledge, increased critical thinking, creative thinking skills, increased ability to transfer knowledge, positive attitude, time management, better communication skills and increased self-esteem (Boud, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 2004, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Topping, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

The researcher found that coaches felt peer support was the most valuable piece of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. The community as a whole, from the support staff running the programme and the coaches taking part in the programme, was important to them. One coach commented, *“For me the value is the community. That support around your own practice that enables you to be better. I just don’t think you can quantify it. The programme is invaluable”* (Coach 6). Another coach stated, *“They harness around things that you are not good at, give you support and then they*

harness around the things that really excite you and get you thinking in a good space as an individual and as a group” (Coach 4). Another coach said that peer-to-peer learning has been valuable in particular from a personal level, “I think the peer-to-peer sessions have been of huge value....getting to know coaches on a personal level and having a community where you can trust people, where you can come in and sit down and tell them everything that you felt or are experiencing without being judged and them understanding because they are in the same situation” (Coach 8). Coach 2 said she felt included and comfortable in the community of practice and that was the most valuable aspect for her, “They make you feel very wanted and comfortable and that they are there to help you at any time, it is never any trouble. That support is so valuable” (Coach 2). One coach stated that being in the community of practice was like being on a journey, gaining insight into other coaches’ experiences. It is what shapes the programme and it’s how it grows and develops year on year; “..In PEP you are getting to know people for a reason because you are about to embark on a journey with these people so you are going to be invested in their successes and failures as well. This programme is different because people’s experiences are brought to the fore front and based on what is shared its shapes how the programme is going forward. It’s not the same thing every year, it’s completely different” (Coach 4)

Mentoring

Another aspect of the programme that some of the coaches found valuable was the one-to-one mentoring they received from the Irish Institute of Sport staff. One coach stated that the mentoring was the greatest aspect of the programme for them, “Specifically for me the one-on-one and the life style management has been the best for me” (Coach 5). Another coach said that the mentoring gives them support around any issues that they are facing, “We have the one-to –one mentoring as well so if you have any issues as any stage you have the support” (Coach 1). Coach 2 expressed how the mentorship was fantastic and helped her to come up with solutions to the problems she encountered, “The mentoring with Dave Passmore and Daragh Sheridan has been fantastic. Without giving you the answers they seem to be able to make you find the solutions to the problems yourself” (Coach 2).

In the literature, mentoring has been associated with developing coaches’ knowledge and expertise (Bloom et al., 1998) and it is also deemed to be an effective way for new

coaches to learn their role (Bloom et al., 1998). According to Colley et al. (2003), there is a lack of research evidence to show that mentoring has not been justified, as it has not developed a theoretical base where policy and practice can be developed. It is, however, important to note that mentoring is still “gaining acceptance as a means of developing high-quality practitioners in a variety of fields, including coaching” (Jones, Harris, Miles, 2009 p.268). As cited in Jones et al. (2009, p.275), Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003, 2004) state that “most sportspeople and many coaches would freely admit that they have sought the advice of an experienced player or coach at some point in their career”. Knowledge drawn from informal education was found to be the most important factor of development for coaches (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004). It is clear from this research that the coaches found the mentoring of considerable value to their coaching practice and, indeed, their personal development. In spite of this, there is a growing desire to formalise sport coach mentoring (Cushion, 2006). Jones et al. (2009) believe that the next stage of coach development is to generate empirical evidence regarding mentoring in sports coaching, in order to produce more meaningful coach education programmes. It is also noted in the literature that reflection (Schon, 1987) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) are being looked at as possible avenues to structure mentoring (Cushion, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003). It is clear that further research like this project around mentoring within a community of practice would add value to the current literature on coach learning and development.

Problem Based Learning

A key theme that occurred in the data that the coaches found extremely valuable was the problem based and scenario based learning. They seemed to have found this type of learning far more practical and useful than the traditional classroom style learning. *“I have found this programme more enjoyable because it wasn’t as theory laden and it was more practical to what happens on a daily basis when you are dealing with human beings. You are put into a scenario and have to deal with a crisis and examine how you reacted. It was very enjoyable and there was a hell of a lot of learning done in this environment”* (Coach 7).

In the literature, “Coaches reported learning from their engagement through novel work situations often using the phrases ‘thrown in the deep end’ to describe their exposure to tasks and responsibilities that were largely unfamiliar to them” (Rynne,

Mallet and Tinning, 2010, p.322). Another coach stated, *“I thought the problem based learning and the scenario based learning was unbelievable”* (Coach 1). Agreeing with the coaches above, Coach 2 said *“Going to temple more to do the problem based learning was a light bulb moment for me”* (Coach 2).

In the literature, Jones and Turner (2006) state that PBL is an approach to teaching which uses realistic, problematic scenarios and subtle tutor questioning, to challenge and instil critical ways of thinking, to be subsequently transferred into practical situations. “PBL is based on four modern insights on learning: constructive, self-directed, collaborative and contextual learning” (Dolmans, De Grave, Wolfhagen and Van Der Vleuten, 2005, p.732). Its main aims are to develop competencies such as communication, critical, logical and analytical problem solving, reasoned with decision making and self-evaluation (Engel, 1999). Furthermore, it allows coaches to practice, debate and discuss real life problems and scenarios with their peers that they are faced with daily in their lives; “It has great learning potential for coaches (De Marco & McCullick, 1997; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001), echoing the establishment of a ‘community of practice’ with all its associated benefits” (Wenger, 1998) (Dolmans et al., 2005, p.190).

While the coaches in this study suggested that they found the PBL valuable and beneficial, there is evidence in the literature that there can be several challenges to PBL learning. Firstly, designing effective problems is not an easy task. If the problems are too well structured, too simple, or do not challenge the coaches enough, they will not serve their purpose. Secondly, the facilitators and tutors can become too dominant in a group causing tension and conflict. Thirdly, some groups may be dysfunctional by not getting fully involved (Dolmans et al., 2005).

The Hawkeye Project

As mentioned earlier, the Hawkeye project on the PEP programme was where two coaches coupled up together from different sports to work on a project together. Two coaches in particular found this experience to be really valuable. One coach described the project as powerful, *“The Hawkeye project was a focused one-to-one. There was so much expected. We knew that we were going to learn from each other technically.*

We knew we were going to watch each other's coaching skills but it was the stuff we didn't expect that was much more powerful” (Coach 1). The second coach said that the project was the most important aspect of the programme for him, “...the number one for me was the peer-to-peer Hawkeye programme because it was out in the field and it was two coaches working together, making mistakes, making things happen, getting the fundamentals and feedback.” (Coach 3).

5.5 Conclusion

The objective of research question one was to find out what the coaches experiences of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice are. The themes that arose in this study around the coaches' experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice were all positive. All of the coaches felt that they benefited from participating on the programme. The coaches enjoyed being part of a high performance, support environment, where they have the ability to share knowledge and experience in an open and trusting environment. They also stated that they enjoyed being pushed out of their comfort zone and reflecting on their experiences and learnings.

The objective of research question two was to discover how peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice style of learning impacted on the coaches' personal and professional development. From this research, it is apparent that the coaches have developed, both professionally and personally, as a result of peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. From a professional and personal perspective, they have developed their coaching skills and practice, their self-awareness has increased, and they have benefited from working together on projects such as the Hawkeye Project. They have become more self-confident and developed skills, such as people management, preparation and planning skills. Many of them have discovered a work-life balance that has had an impact on their professional and personal development.

The objective of research question three was to determine what the main challenges coaches face in a community of practice. It was clear from the findings that the biggest challenge and difficulty the coaches had was finding the time to attend the scheduled programme days. They also found that the volume of information and learning that was presented to them on those days was too much to take in all at the same time. Another challenge they faced was the feeling of pressure to contribute to the learning and add value to the programme.

The objective of research question four was to learn what has been the most valuable aspect of the peer-to-peer learning in a community of practice. It is clear that the coaches found peer support and one-to-one mentoring the most valuable to them. A number of the coaches also found that problem based and scenario based learning was very practical and useful. Two coaches found the Hawkeye project to be hugely beneficial to them.

The researcher discussed the themes that were discovered in the findings of this study. The researcher also examined the relevant literature relating to those topics. In the next chapter, the researcher will conclude with the positive and negative aspects found in this study, and make some recommendations to the IIS to improve the PEP programme. By doing so, it adds value to the elite coach learning and development in Ireland.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the conclusions and recommendations of this study based on the analysis of the data discussed in chapter five. It will also include an implementation plan for the recommendations made. These conclusions and recommendations are linked to the four research objectives generated at the beginning of this study:

- 1) Identify the key theoretical considerations concerning elite coach learning and development
- 2) Identify the most effective sources of elite coach learning and development
- 3) Identify the current state of elite coach learning and development
- 4) Develop recommendations for the PEP programme facilitated by the IIS for elite coach learning and development in Ireland

6.2 Positives and Negatives of the PEP Programme

From this research, it can be seen that elite coaches in Ireland place a high value on peer-to-peer learning in the community of practice, the PEP programme run by the IIS. Overall, their experience of the programme has proven to be positive and constructive. All of the coaches highlighted the fact that they are benefiting from the PEP programme. The coaches took great pleasure and highly benefited from being a part of a high performance environment, where they were supported, not only by their peers, but also by the facilitators running the programme. Having the ability to share knowledge, expertise, and experience among other coaches in an open, confidential, and trusting environment was so valuable to them, with some finding it hard to quantify that value. The coaches expressed how they liked to be pushed from their comfort zone, as that is where they feel they learn the most. They also spoke about the benefit of reflecting on their experiences and learnings.

This study discovered the impact the peer-to-peer learning in the community of practice, the PEP programme run by the IIS, and its effect it had on the coaches' personal and professional development. All coaches spoke about how they had developed, both personally and professionally, on the programme. Coaches stated that their coaching skills and practices had developed and changed since starting the programme. Some coaches mentioned that they had become more aware of their actions and started to self-assess themselves to improve. A number also mentioned that they had become more self-confident in their abilities and that they had benefited from working on group projects, such as the Hawkeye. They have developed a number of skills such as communication, people management, preparation and planning skills. Many of them have discovered a work-life balance that has had an impact on both their professional and personal development.

It is fair to conclude that the most valuable aspects of the peer-to-peer learning in the community of practice are peer support and one-to-one mentoring. Many of the coaches found the problem based learning really practical and useful for their coaching practice. Two coaches also stated that the Hawkeye project was very valuable to them.

However, while the study found there are a number of benefits to the programme, they also discovered that there are some negative aspects and challenges that the coaches face. It is obvious from the findings that the biggest challenge and difficulty the coaches have is time. It is not easy for them to take the time out of their hectic schedules to attend the programme days. Another key finding was that the volume of learning and information on the days of the programmes are too much. Coaches felt that they were overloaded with information and found it very hard to process it all. An additional challenge that appeared in the findings was that they felt there was pressure to contribute to the group and to add value; however, some did note that this was pressure they put on themselves.

We can conclude that peer-to-peer learning in the community of practice, the PEP programme run by the IIS, is working. While the positives and benefits of the peer-to-peer learning in the community of practice, far outweigh the challenges and negatives, it is important to address these anyway, to improve the programme and enhance elite coaches' learning and development in Ireland.

6.3 Recommendations

After analysing the key findings in this study, the researcher recommends the following:

- The execution of the PEP programme needs to be more refined to cater for the coaches' needs. The coaches have stated that the biggest challenge they have is finding the time to attend the programmes days. A greater level of analysis regarding timing and scheduling needs to happen.
- The researcher recommends a learning sharing platform be put in place to allow coaches to be able to access the information that is presented to them on course days. An e-learning platform would allow coaches to access the information without having to attend the programme days, if they are out of the country or cannot make the programme day due to scheduling conflicts. They also found that the volume of learning was a challenge. Having an e-learning platform in place would allow the coaches to manage their volume of learning with their own schedules.
- The researcher recommends the expansion of the Hawkeye Project. This project was deemed to be of significant value to the coaches that took part in it. This project should be expanded so that all coaches take part in a peer project where they can work on a task and share the experience with a peer/peers.
- It is evident that this community of practice has been of huge benefit to the coaches. The coaches on the programme were elite coaches from the main sports in Ireland. The researcher suggests that smaller communities of practice be set up in each of the coaches' individual sports. This will bring together, not only the elite coaches, but volunteer coaches, assistant coaches and all those who are working within each sport. This could be further filtered down to coaches working with certain age groups, or certain stages of an athlete's development within specific sports.
- Another recommendation is to place a greater emphasis on the coaches on the programme. All of the coaches found that the programme enhanced their professional development. Increased self-confidence, self-awareness, work-life balance etc. The researcher believes a greater emphasis on the personal development of coaches will enhance the professional development of coaches.

- A key finding in the research was the value of the one-on-one mentorship. An expansion of this service by the IIS will see an impact on the coaches learning and development. At present, there are two mentors working with the coaches. Perhaps an additional mentor will allow for the coaches to have more time with them to improve their coaching skills and practice.
- The researcher recommends that further course days, consisting of problem based learning, occur. There is key evidence in the research that the coaches benefited from taking part in this type of learning. Recording videos of the coaches in action and sharing them on the e-learning platform will allow other coaches to see their peers in action and increase their learning.

6.4 Implementation Plan & Costings

- On the 28th of September 2016 the researcher will present her finding to the sponsor, the IIS and agree an action plan to change and develop the PEP programme.
- As mentioned above, in the recommendations, the researcher will suggest another coach developer be hired to support the coaches. An estimated costing of this position will be €40,000.00 per year.
- The researcher will recommend an e-learning platform be created to allow coaches and facilitators to access and share information, knowledge and experiences. An estimated costing for this is €10,000.00, to get set up.

PERSONAL LEARNING REFLECTION

From completing this dissertation, I learned about the various different types of learning and that all of these types of learning can assist in an individual's learning and development. There is not one style that is better than the other; each style can assist coaches and individuals at different stages or different scenarios. Learning is truly dynamic and complex. In order to fully understand what coaches need, more research needs to be undertaken. I have learned about how to operate a community of practice and I have also seen first-hand the benefits it has on individuals learning and development. The biggest challenge of the dissertation and the masters was balancing full-time employment and the course. This proved difficult at times and was very stressful. As a result of this project, my communication skills, writing skills, interview skills and critical thinking skills have developed. I personally developed great relationships with those on the PEP programme at the Irish Institute of Sport and hope that these connections will grow in the future. I felt very out of my comfort zone in the beginning of this project. My confidence has developed as a result of the dissertation and I now feel that what I have learned I can take into my career and use going forward. It has been a great experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Analysis Coding Part 1

Question 1: What has been your overall experience of peer-to-peer learning in the CoP?			
Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
Positive Fearful Comfortable Great experience Open & Confidential Environment	Positive Opportunity Broaden coaching practice Change Practice	Great experience Learned a lot Enjoyment Learn from peers P2P review – Hawkeye Educational Wake up call Useful	Positive Challenging Enlightening Practical HP Environment Sounding Board Methods of practice Safe & Inclusive En
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
Really good HP Environment People discuss issues Great Leaders Positive	P2P review – Hawkeye Learned, experience another env, diff sport HP Env- like minded people	Positive Learning HP Environment Share Knowledge with Peers	Really Good Enjoyable HP Environment Learned from experienced coaches – styles, practices

	Trust Share experience Confidential Curragh – bond relationships	Discuss challenges/issues/s olutions Beneficial	Good Experience
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Question 2: How did the CoP experience affect your perception of self-efficacy as an emerging World Class coach?

Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
Soft Skills Confidence	Self Assessment HP Environment- like minded people Confidence – self belief to move to top of coaching ladder	Self Reflection Confidence grew Need for Change HP Environment- reassurance all coaches in the same boat	HP Environment- Journey Reflection – attitudes, plans Confidence Strategic thinking Setting a framework Organisational Skills Physical & Mental well being Time management Opportunities- sports/cultures Impact on Practice Support

Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
<p>Change of position/structure</p> <p>National coach to PL</p>	<p>Challenging</p> <p>HP Environment- network, reassurance, not on your own</p> <p>Support</p>	<p>Learning Best Practice</p> <p>HP Environment</p> <p>Workshops – sharing knowledge & expertise</p>	<p>Coaching practice- styles, reflect on performances, view & analyse</p> <p>Enlightening</p>

Question 3: Can you tell me how this type of learning has impacted on your professional development? Please give examples.

Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
<p>Time</p> <p>HP Cultures- people on your side</p> <p>Competency Based Environment- Kieran Ward – implanted model</p> <p>Hawkeye- learned, developed practice, support, sounding board, bounce ideas.</p>	<p>Structured Programme – clear expectations</p> <p>New Ideas & ways of training</p> <p>Science support to knowledge</p> <p>Modernise Culture</p>	<p>Preparation- coach prep concept</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Reassurance- Coaches in same boat</p> <p>HP Environment – Learn from IIS, tutors and coaches</p> <p>P2P Learning – Hawkeye – learned from each other & shared notes</p> <p>Support System- all functioning</p>	<p>Knowledgeable</p> <p>Change Practice</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>HP Environment – feedback</p> <p>People Management</p> <p>Reflection & Review</p> <p>Debrief</p> <p>Confidence</p>
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
<p>Practice</p> <p>IT Skills</p> <p>Management Skills</p> <p>Time Management Skills</p> <p>Healthier</p> <p>Family</p>	<p>Need Analysis Based- Taylor made</p> <p>Relationship Building Skills</p> <p>Conflict Resolution</p> <p>Practical- coaching philosophy</p>	<p>Problem based learning</p> <p>Scenario Learning- come up with solutions to challenges/issues</p> <p>Feedback</p> <p>Challenging</p>	<p>Coaching Practice</p> <p>Time Management</p> <p>Lifestyle</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Achieve Results</p>

Change of Position		Team Work	Planning
Self Awareness			Debriefing
			Self Awareness

Question 4: Can you tell me how this type of learning has impacted on your personal development? Please give some examples.

Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
People Skills Conflict Management Lifestyle- Taking time off, Prioritise Health, Time to Relax, Family Planning	Confidence Clear Vision Communication Skills Self Reflection Feeling accepted Fantastic Opportunity Presentation Skills	Confidence Preparation Ability to question & challenge Creating Change & making change happen	Self Focus Lifestyle- Healthier Individual Development Open to change Ability to handle challenges Confidence Family- happier home
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
Self Awareness Preparation IT Skills Lifestyle- fitness & diet People management Finances	Face Fears Self Awareness Lifestyle- Physical & Mental Structure & support Debrief Stronger Person	Self Awareness Others point of view- competitors, peers – decision making skills	Energy Time Management Planning Debriefing Lifestyle- family – good balance

Question 5: What have been the main benefits for you in the CoP programme?			
Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
HP Environment- like minded people Trust Feeling Uncomfortable- jump in development Scenario based learning Different every time More Reflective	HP Environment- inspiring, like minded people, opportunity to interact with coaches, share knowledge, supportive, find good solutions, refreshing, feel secure, and help each other, real honesty.	HP Environment- contacts & links New Ideas Pushing elite edge Reviewing & Reflecting- seeking to improve Good Experience	Ever Evolving Flexible, Challenging HP Environment- inspiring Investing in your potential Uncomfortable Friendships/network Reflection Lifestyle- health Self Awareness Self management Support Access to programme leaders
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
Changes in Organisation- more success- material benefits	Being Measured, Assessed Feedback Identify Needs	Self Discovery HP Environment 1-1 Mentoring	HP Environment- insight to coaches practice, achieve results, balance home life

Mental Health	HP Environment-	Debrief	
Delegation Skills	valued safe	Better Focus	
HP Environment	Support		
1-1 Mentoring	PBL		
Giving Advice	Scenario Learning		
Different Person	Opportunity		

Question 6: What have you found to be the main challenges of the CoP programme?			
Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
No answer	Out of comfort zone New skills – PowerPoint Overload short time High expectation Positive challenge	Travel & Commitment Presentation to HP Environment	Scheduling & Time Volume of learning HP Environment- pressure to contribute Hard conversations Soul searching
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
Dates & Timing Not coaching	Time Personalities Programme Challenging HP Environment- challenge to contribute Intimidating- self perception	Schedule & Time Programme- keep participants stimulated and creating extra knowledge	Time High Volume – activities Unbelievable experience- P2P discussions, top class speakers, HP Env, Army- perform under pressure

Question 7: How does the CoP model of learning compare with other coaching programmes you have

Been on?

Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
Implement Learning People skills Management Skills Leadership skills More than formal course	Different- much better Encouraging Challenging Confidence Personal Journey – improve as a person People Management skills Better Standard of coaching Communication Unique, fantastic	PBL Scenario learning Discussion & Listening Projects & Presentations Guest Speakers Hawkeye – most useful	Journey People’s experience Interest in who you are Fun Constantly different & evolving Motivating Benefits practice Enjoyable Challenging
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
HP Environment Intense Continuous Improvement Less Directive Behavioural	Different Practical Application	Enjoyable Practical Scenarios - crisis	Practice; HP Environment Better solutions to problems Enjoyment Sounding Board

			Valuable Strongest Programme
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Question 8: What aspects of the programme have you found the most valuable?			
Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
Lectures- powerful PBL SBL Hawkeye 1-1 Mentoring Coaching Philosophy	1-1 Mentoring Feel wanted Support PBL – Team based SBL Progress from last year- stronger person	Hawkeye Coaches ready to perform concept Making Change Happen Chart you life story Confidence Communication Practical application	Connections Support Sounding Board Challenging Listeners Invested in you Evolving and changing Life ling friends Quality of contributors Honesty Feedback
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
1-1 Mentoring Lifestyle Management	HP Environment Support	Self Development HP Environment- P2P Exchanges	HP Environment- P2P sessions- trust, safe env, non-

Clear vision & direction		Exchanges- different teams environments	judgemental, understanding PBL SBL
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Question 9: What suggestions would you have to make the CoP more effective?

Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
Timing of projects Social aspect of group- opportunities to learn & discuss ideas outside structured days	Less topics on workshop days- focus in-depth on less Hard to improve – IIS- great job	Poor attendance- consequences Not optional Mentors- projects Management Leadership Teamwork PBL	Style/methods of feedback P2P – More Hawkeye Long-term Participants- mentors
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
No	Interactive activities Challenge Needs Analysis Assessment & Feedback	1-1 Mentoring CoP in boxing	Continue to grow- push limits Uncomfortable Challenging

Question 10: Any additional comments?			
Coach 1	Coach 2	Coach 3	Coach 4
Hawkeye- powerful- didn't expect to learn so much Fun Support Check coaches env informally	Staff- programme success Inspiring Valuable	Excellent Season Review – social gathering	No
Coach 5	Coach 6	Coach 7	Coach 8
Invest in you as a person Great sounding board Journey- better yourself Fantastic	Grateful Challenging Rewarding	Enjoyable Beneficial Long may it continue	Thankful Best of their abilities Enjoyable

Appendix 2: Analysis Coding Part 2

QUESTION 1	KEY THEME	SUB-THEME
	POSTIVE	HP ENVIRONMENT (LIKE MINDED PEOPLE) SHARE KNOWLEDGE CONFIDENTIAL LEARNING
QUESTION 2	CONFIDENCE	HP ENVIRONMENT REFLECTION SELF- ASSESSMENT
QUESTION 3	IMPROVED COACHING SKILL/PRACTICE (SOFT & TECHNICAL)	HAWKEYE SELF- AWARENESS DEBRIEF
QUESTION 4	LIFESTYLE	PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SKILLS SELF- AWARENESS PREPARATION/PLANNING
QUESTION 5	HP ENVIRONMENT	UNCOMFORTABLE SCENARIO BASED LEARNING DEBRIEFING
QUESTION 6	TIMING/SCHEDULE	VOLUME OF LEARNING

		PRESSURE TO CONTRIBUTE/ADD VALUE
QUESTION 7	PRACTICAL	PERSONAL JOURNEY ENJOYABLE SHARE LEARNING/SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS
QUESTION 8	MENTORING 1-1	PROBLEM BASED LEARNING SCENARIO BASED LEARNING HAWKEYE PROJECT SUPPORT
QUESTION 9	TEAMWORK	MENTORING FEEDBACK CHALLENGE
QUESTION 10	SUPPORT	SOUNDBOARD VALUBLE

Appendix 3: Analysis Coding Part 3

Research Question One

THEME	SUB-THEME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT • HIGH PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT • KNOWLEDGE SHARING 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRUST & CONFIDENTIALITY • COMFORT ZONE • REFLECTION

Research Question Two

THEME	SUB-THEME
<p>(A) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COACHING SKILLS & PRACTICE • SELF-ASSESSMENT <p>(B) PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WORK- LIFE BALANCE 	<p>(A) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THE HAWKEYE PROJECT • SELF-CONFIDENCE • REFLECTION <p>(B) PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SELF-AWARENESS • PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SKILLS • PREPARATION & PLANNING SKILLS

Research Question Three

THEME	SUB-THEME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIMING & SCHEDULING 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VOLUME OF LEARNING • PRESSURE TO CONTRIBUTE

Research Question Four

THEME	SUB-THEME
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PEER SUPPORT• ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING• PROBLEM BASED LEARNING• SCENARIO BASED LEARNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• THE HAWKEYE PROJECT

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

- 1) What has been your overall experience of peer-to-peer learning in the CoP?
- 2) How did the CoP experience affect your perception of self-efficacy as an emerging World Class coach?
- 3) Can you tell me how this type of learning has impacted on your professional development? Please give examples.
- 4) Can you tell me how this type of learning has impacted on your personal development? Please give examples.
- 5) What have been the main benefits for you in the CoP programme?
- 6) What have you found to be the main challenges of the CoP programme?
- 7) How is the CoP model of learning compare with other coaching programmes you have been on?
- 8) What aspects of the programme have you found the most valuable?
- 9) What suggestions would you have to make the CoP more effective?

Appendix 5: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PLEASE KEEP THIS PAGE FOR YOUR INFORMATION

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Thank you for taking time to read this information leaflet.

STUDY TITLE: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Learning on Elite Coach Learning & Development – A Case Study of the Pursuit of Excellence Programme at the Irish Institute of Sport.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The aim of the study is to discover if peer-to-peer interactions by coaches are of value to them and their sports. I have chosen coaches who are participating on the Podium Programme (PEP) funded by the Irish Institute of Sport (IIS) as the design of their programme is based on the Communities of Practice Model (CoP).

CoP is a concept which was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) to connect groups of people coming together for mutual learning and development. CoP's are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interaction on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, 1998, p.4). CoP's are people who work in the same area or share the same interest that come together to share knowledge, experience and also to learn from each other.

CoP is characterised by three elements; joint enterprise, mutuality and share repertoire.

- Joint Enterprise – The community is bound together by sharing the same interest or profession. The group must work together to develop and gain knowledge. Members must be competent to understand the enterprise well enough to be able to contribute to it.
- Mutuality- The community must engage with each other, share knowledge and trust each other. They must trust each other, not just personally, but also in their ability to contribute to the enterprise of the community; so they feel comfortable addressing real problems together and speaking truthfully.
- Share repertoire- the community share stories, experience, ideas, knowledge and concepts. They must reflect on the community to ensure progress is being made.

This study could help develop PEP even further based on the feedback from its participants.

WHY YOU HAVE YOU BEEN CHOSEN?

You have been selected to be interviewed for this study because you are a key stakeholder in helping to understand the impact of the PEP run by the IIS. All information which you can give me about your experiences of PEP will be very useful so please give as much detail as possible and answer as honestly and fully as you can. There are no wrong answers!

The questions which I will ask you will be very straightforward, simply asking you to think back on your PEP experience and share with us your insight around how the experience has impacted your perspective. With your consent, I will tape-record the interview. However, your identity will not be revealed to any third party at any time. A number will identify you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I VOLUNTEER?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw from the study without difficulty. This will not affect your participation in PEP.

If you agree to participate you will be requested to participate in an interview where nine questions will be asked. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW

If you do decide to withdraw from the study at any point you can request to have your data removed from the study.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM MY PARTICIPATION?

While there will be no direct benefit from participation, the study will make an important contribution to the PEP. As such, the findings from this study will be presented to the NCI and the IIS. However no individual participant will be identified in any publication or presentation. Individuals will not be offered any monetary or other rewards for their participation.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS INVOLVED IN PARTICIPATING?

There are no risks associated with participation. Any inconvenience involved in taking part will be limited.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE?

If you decide not to participate you will not be affected in any way.

CONFIDENTIALITY

As this is an interview, the conversation will be recorded and transcribed. All information collected as part of the study will remain confidential to the research. Your name will not be

associated with any comments you make during the interview. Once all interviews have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed and the de-identified transcriptions will be kept in an encrypted file for a period of 5 years.

CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any further questions about the research or if you wish for updates you can contact:

SarahJane Walsh: sarahjanewalsh83@gmail.com or 087-6616319

Appendix 6: Participant Consent Form



BE ASSURED THAT THIS CONSENT FOR WILL BE STORED SEPARATELY TO THE DATA

**The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Learning on Elite Coach Learning & Development – A
Case Study of the Pursuit of Excellence Programme at the Irish Institute of Sport.**

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH QUESTION

- I have read and understood the attached Participant Information Leaflet YES NO

- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study YES NO

- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions YES NO

- I have received enough information about this study YES NO

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time
without giving a reason. YES NO

- I agree to take part in an interview YES NO

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name in print: _____

Thank you

Student name: SarahJane Walsh

Student number: X13121669

School: Business

Course: Human Resource Management

Degree to be awarded:

Master of Arts in Human Resource Management

Title of Thesis:

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate:

For completion by the School: The aforementioned thesis was received
by _____ Date: _____

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school