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# Doing hybrid management work in elite sport

The case of a head coach in top-level rugby union

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**Doing hybrid management work in elite sport: The case of a head coach in top-level Rugby Union.**

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Abstract

This paper examines a head coach's enactment of their hybrid role (i.e., it was comprised of leadership, management, and coaching responsibilities) in an elite level sport organisation. A methodological bricolage comprising a) participant observation and reflexive field notes, b) ethnographic film, and c) semi-structured and stimulated recall interviews was used to generate data during 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork with an international rugby union team. Data were iteratively analysed using Crossley's (2011) relational theorising. The head coach was found to strategically manage nuanced relations with, and between, more and less trusted collaborators in the organisation. This positioned her to maintain oversight and to influence the support, capital, resources and information flowing through relational networks towards the organisation's key mission. Strategic interaction that responded to others' thoughts, feelings and interests was used to generate buy-in, space and time to carry out the manager's agendas. The findings highlight the importance for researchers, policy makers, sport organisations, educators and practitioners of further engaging with management as an ongoing exercise in collective behaviour, which includes micropolitical struggles and exchange.

**Keywords:** coaching, leadership, interaction, Crossley, ethnography.

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## 1.0 Introduction

There has been a proliferation of hybrid management roles across various work sectors (McGivern, Currie, Ferlie, Fitzgerald & Waring, 2015), and is pervasive within healthcare (Llewellyn, 2001) and education settings (Lunn & Bishop, 2002). Hybrid roles engage practicing professionals (e.g., doctors) in the leadership and management of professional colleagues and other staff (McGivern et al., 2015). Currently, little is known about the ways in which hybrid roles are enacted generally (Ratcharak, Vogel, & Spyridonidis, 2018), and particularly within sport organisations where head coaches often hold hybrid roles that merge management, leadership and coaching practice. In this paper, we examine the relational dimensions of a head coach's performance of a hybrid role (i.e., one that comprised of leadership, management, and coaching responsibilities) in international rugby union. Our aim is to contribute a unique ethnographic case study of everyday work, which addresses a) how the head coach's practice was co-created in complex networks of relational interactions, b) how they engaged in organising these relations to define and provide context for the nature of their work, and c) how they drew upon conventions of interaction in organisational life to strategically pursue their personal and organisational goals. In doing so, this paper responds to "the usual (misleadingly) romantic, idealistic and individualistic ideas about leadership" (Learmonth & Morrell, 2019, p. 113), as well as to recent calls for more richly textured accounts of the complexities and relational dynamics of situated management practice (Alvesson, in press; Bartels & Turnbull, 2020).

The significance of this work is two-fold. Firstly, through multiple methods of data generation and extended period of investigation (Stenz, Clark & Matkin, 2012; Hoeber & Shaw, 2016), it provides an original account of the interdependent nature of hybrid

management work within a rarely accessed context; that of an international level sports team (Morrison & Lumby, 2009; Wagstaff, Gilmore & Thelwell, 2017). Secondly, through the utilisation of Crossley's (2011) theorising as the primary heuristic device, this study is one of the first to explicitly draw upon contemporary developments in relational sociology to generate new insights into, and representations of, managerial work and efforts to lead in sport organisations (Eacott, 2018; Tourish, 2019). In particular, our findings illustrate that the head coach as both a manager and a leader was not, as sanitised and unproblematic representations would suggest (see Learmonth & Morrell, 2019), a "self-contained and self-sufficient" or, indeed, "all-powerful" individual. Instead, the head coach operated strategically to become a prime mover among others in the everyday "social drama" of organisational life (Crossley, 2011, p. 2). Overall, we believe this paper contributes to our growing understanding of the dynamic complexity of managerial work and efforts to lead in sport organisations, especially as it is emergently produced (and reproduced, resisted and revised) in the connections and interdependencies that comprise them (Marchiondo et al., 2015; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Kwok et al., 2018). For us, such knowledge can not only support new vistas of inquiry within the disciplines of sport management and sport coaching, but it may also have significant implications for the preparation and on-going development of those undertaking management and leadership roles in sport organisations.

## 2.0 Review of Literature

In their recent text, Grills and Prus (2019) lament the overly functional and technical accounts of organisational life that have traditionally dominated the literature base. For them, the prototypic approach (i.e., what causes particular outcomes in organisational settings) adopted in much inquiry has led to a strangely inhuman representation of what is essentially a social and emotionally laden activity. Specifically, they believe that people have been largely presented as variables; be they dependent variables (that experience certain outcomes),

independent variables (that possess certain qualities or attributes), or intervening variables (people act as a medium through which structures exert influence or produce particular outcomes; Grills & Prus, 2019). Importantly, they argued that such work loses sight of human agency and the iterative and interactive making of everyday management work in-situ (Grills & Prus, 2019; Magill, Nelson, Jones & Potrac, 2017). Indeed, for them, joint and co-ordinated action "is not some neutral medium through which structural variables pass to produce some predicted and predictable outcome" (Grills & Prus, 2019, p. 6).

In order to redress this situation, Grills and Prus (2019) advocate for a scholarship of organisational life that conceptualises management as the products of relations between thinking, feeling, interacting, resisting and adjusting agents (or people; Grills & Prus, 2019). From this perspective, the day-to-day work of those occupying leadership, management and, indeed, hybrid roles (e.g., achieving understanding, providing direction, and coordinating actions) involves far more than the linear and unproblematic application of pre-packaged knowledge and methods. Instead, it entails iteratively influencing and shaping the behaviours, meaning making, and experiences of other individuals or groups of people through tactical interchange (Grills & Prus, 2019; Potrac, Mallett, Greenough & Nelson, 2017). While the targets of attempted influence have the ability to cooperate, they also have the potential to frustrate or resist plans, intentions, and activities. This can be done "reluctantly, elusively, obstructively, competitively" and, indeed, "oppositionally" (Grills & Prus, 2019, p. 3). Ultimately, Grills and Prus (2019) urge scholars to better recognise how managers are simultaneously tacticians and targets of influence and, importantly, how they engage with the dilemmas, constraints, and opportunities that this presents in everyday organisational life.

In seeking to better grapple with the issues outlined above, there have been increasing calls to explicitly engage with the relational dynamics of management, leadership, coaching, and hybrid work (e.g., Grills & Prus, 2019; Tourish, 2019; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Potrac, Smith &

Nelson, 2017; Llewellyn, 2001). Here, advocates of a relational approach believe that there is much to gain, both empirically and theoretically, from the systematic examination of the interdependencies, ties, dialectics, and co-constituted (inter)actions that comprise managers', leaders' and coaches' relations with others (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Einola & Alvesson, 2019; Potrac, Nelson & O'Gormon, 2016). Indeed, through the prioritisation of the often-ignored features of individual and collective meaning-making within organisations, as well as the enabling and constraining features of interaction and exchange within organisational networks, the "relational turn" can support the generation of accounts of sport work that better reflect their emergent, interactive and practical complexity (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Mauser, Liden & Hu, 2014, p. 50). In other words, relational sociology can enable the development of more nuanced understandings of the ways in which hybrid managers' actions, achievements and failures, are inextricably tied to "the situations in which they find themselves, the others involved, and the relations that they enjoy with those others" over time than has currently been the case (Crossley, 2011, p. 2).

While the benefits of adopting a relational perspective to study lived experience in sport organisations have received increasing recognition (e.g., Potrac, Nelson & O'Gorman, 2016), there remains a paucity of richly textured accounts that use this theorising to examine how practice actually "plays out in situated [inter]action" between the head coach, their assistants, athletes and other members of sporting organisations (Jones, Edwards & Filho, 2014, p. 201; Collinson, 2020; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Indeed, the limited available research in this topic area has been characterised by the use of quantitative structural methods to produce descriptive visualisations of social networks and relational ties (e.g., Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008; Kwok et al., 2018; Mehra et al., 2006), with more critical, interpretive research limited by the lack of direct examination of embodied practice (e.g., Potrac et al., 2015).

## 2.1 Conceptual framework

The principal heuristic device for this paper was provided by Nick Crossley's (2011) relational sociology. His contemporary theorising addresses *how* actors collectively drive interactions and networks of relations, and what they achieve together through their mutual influence. In developing his position, Crossley (2010, 2011) synthesised and positioned the ideas of eminent relational and interactionist scholars (i.e., Becker, Simmel, White, Goffman and Merleau-Ponty) within a larger and more explicitly relational perspective (Depelteau, 2011). Reflecting the broader "relational turn", Crossley's (2011) thesis is a reaction against the substantialism privileged in "classical" social inquiry, which conceives the fundamental units of reality to be relatively independent and static things, beings or essences (Emirbayer, 1997). Underlying substantialism are analytical dualisms (e.g., individual versus society; structure versus agency; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2016), which orient analysis towards, for example, the actions and traits of atomistic individuals as self-determined agents, *or* towards society as a stable, abstract object with established properties that act deterministically upon managers. In contrast, Crossley (2011) recognises that "society is constantly in the making, always becoming", and that "individuals, or rather actors, are formed and continually re-formed in and through interaction" (p. 17). Thus, his relational analysis dissolves traditional distinctions between the macro, meso, and micro. Instead, "there is only one level of social life for everybody" (Prandini, 2015, p. 6); these are the associations and transactions (the relations, or absence of such ties) of interdependent actors in different social fields (e.g., workplaces, sport teams, and nations; Crossley, 2011).

In terms of helping to address the aims of this study, Crossley's (2010, 2011) work holds several areas of potential. Firstly, his theorising recognises how the organisation of an individual's networks of relations, inclusive of their patterns of ties and interconnections (akin to *social structure*), generates "opportunities for, and constraints on, interaction" (Crossley, 2011, p. 342). That is, rather than acting as unfettered agents, anyone's efforts to navigate the

demands, expectations, and dilemmas of their social world are indelibly characterised by interdependence, power and social exchange (Crossley, 2010, 2011). Valuably, Crossley (2010, 2011) also highlights how the networks and relations in which people are embedded are temporal phenomena. Thus, organisational actors will have a "history of past and an expectation of future interaction and this shapes their current interactions" (Crossley, 2011, p. 28) which can, importantly, "transform the way in which they act, feel and think" towards themselves and others (Crossley, 2011, p. 30). Such insights can enable critical examination of how the head coach's attempts to influence others are dynamically constrained and facilitated by the figurations of their interactional networks; inclusive of how the potentially divergent norms and interests of various factions, alliances, cliques and clusters that comprised these social worlds unfolded over time. Overall then, Crossley's (2010, 2011) theorising may help to illuminate the local problems and possibilities of management and leadership work (Eacott, 2018), and offer a new way of explaining their relational, contextual and (micro)political dynamics (Crossley, 2010, 2011).

## 3.0 Method

### 3.1 Participants

The relational dimensions of a head coach's hybrid work were explored in a women's, international rugby union team (Northland, a pseudonym) over a 20-month period. Like many elite female athletes and coaches, Northland's staff and players combined their rugby roles with other careers and forms of employment (Harrison, Vickers, Fletcher & Taylor, 2020). The principal actor within this case study was Kate, Northland's head coach. A former international level rugby union player, Kate also had considerable experience as a club level head coach, and she had obtained one of the highest levels of coach education certification in the sport. As is typical for women's international rugby union teams, Kate selected her squad during the preseason period. This chosen group of players, assistant coaches, and support staff then met

for a series of training camps and friendly matches that were used as preparation for a high-profile, end-of-season, international tournament.
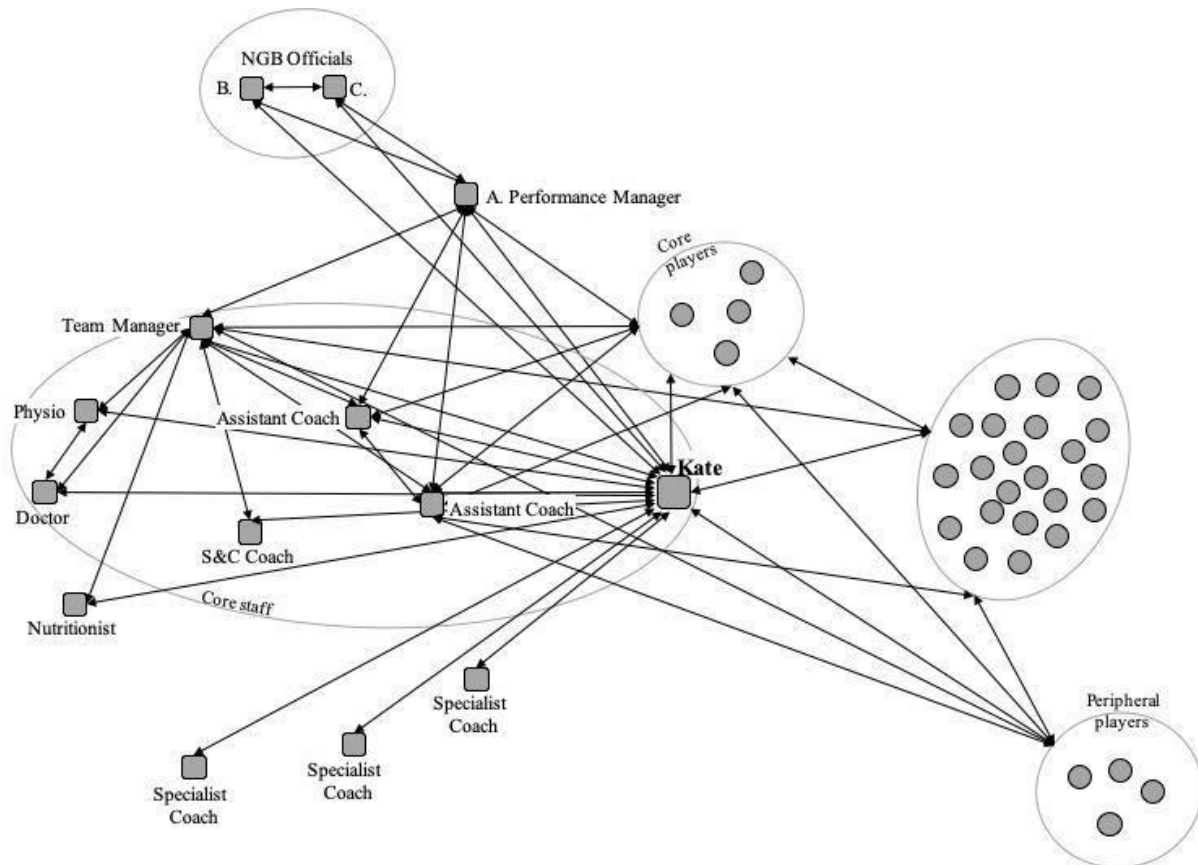


Figure 1. A network map of relations between core and peripheral actors in the Northland team.

Reporting to Kate were two assistant coaches (Clive and Alex), various specialist or guest coaches (e.g., kicking coach), a team manager, a physiotherapist, a doctor, a strength and conditioning coach, a nutritionist, and between 30 and 40 players selected from various university and club teams. Kate reported to the governing body's performance manager. Several other governing body representatives, who held superordinate positions to the performance manager within the overarching organisation, were also invested, but less frequently directly involved, in the team's day-to-day work. Figure 1 represents Kate's view that although each actor was connected to one another (more or less directly) through their

membership of Northland, differential relations were also evident. As the *head coach*, Kate positioned herself as the central protagonist, the designated leader and manager of Northland's social world, maintaining the most frequent, direct and most influential connections to others within the Northland network (Crossley, 2011).

During the timeframe of this study, the principal researcher was embedded, initially as a researcher, and then as a member of Kate's support staff, as Northland's performance analyst. This provided a privileged level of access to both the people and the everyday events and interactions that comprised this setting, which, in turn, enabled the detailed examination of how Kate enacted her hybrid work inclusive of the ways it was perceived, participated in, and responded to (Corsby & Jones, 2019). The research was carried out in accordance with institutional ethical procedures, with written and verbal consent obtained from Kate and the National Governing Body (NGB) of sport prior to the commencement of the study. Pseudonyms are employed throughout this article to protect the identity of the people and organisations involved (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015).

### 3.2 Ethnographic Fieldwork

Ontologically, this research was guided by a relational constructionism, in which the focus was on relationally constructed rather than found worlds (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). Epistemologically, relational constructionism positions knowledge as the product of social practices, those exchanges, interactions and negotiations that occur within networks of social relations (Cunliffe, 2008). A rigorous methodological bricolage (Veal & Darcy, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Nelson, Groom & Potrac, 2014) was utilised to generate the data for this study. This included a) participant observation and reflexive field notes, b) ethnographic film, and c) semi-structured and stimulated recall interviews.

### 3.2.1 Participant Observation and Reflexive Fieldnotes

I (the principal author) was fully immersed in the unfolding events and activities that comprised the Northland team setting for two full playing seasons (20 months). In addition to observing everyday interactions and relations in training and match settings, I also travelled with the team, stayed in the same locations/hotels, and attended meetings (e.g., full-team meetings, staff meetings, individual player meetings etc.), post-match reviews, social activities, and media events. Field notes were used to document the interactions and behaviours that occurred between Kate and the players, coaches, and support staff that comprised the Northland team. Here, the note taking moved between comprehensively recording the general rhythms and routines of everyday organisational life (Spradley, 2016) and more sensitively and selectively attending to events and interactions that "stood out" with respect to the specific aims of this study (Wolfinger, 2002). The overarching priority was to contextualise observations through vivid renderings of the "detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83).

Field notes were generated in two main ways. These included written notes in a diary and the use of a digital voice recorder. Here, the need to manage various weather conditions and seamlessly blend into the team setting informed the strategy used (Pole & Morrison, 2003). For example, using a digital voice recorder was preferable to writing notes during hours spent watching training in the rain and snow. On a daily basis, these notes were then reviewed and elaborated with summary commentaries (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Reflexive field notes were also used to critically develop "a politics of location" (Tierney, 1996, p. 380) for the first author and to meticulously (re)consider, check and challenge emergent theoretical interpretations explanations of the data (Sparkes, 2015). Overall, over 150 A4 pages of single-spaced field notes and in excess of four hours of voice notes were generated.

*3.2.2 Ethnographic film*

Numerous events, activities and (inter)actions in the team setting were filmed. Their purpose was to generate as comprehensive a record as possible of what went on in the field and provided a resource to which the authors could frequently return (Veal & Darcy, 2014; Edwards & Jones, 2018). The recordings also enabled a chronicle of events to be developed in situations where notetaking was deemed unfeasible or inappropriate, as well as when the speed or the complexity of situations may have been lost if written notes alone had been taken (Davies, 2008). For instance, post-match performance analysis meetings were videoed because they often included up to 30 people engaged in complex overlapping conversations. Thus, ethnographic film was particularly useful for a) reducing the cognitive load placed on the lead researcher (Aunger, 2004), b) enhancing the recall of events when reviewing and consolidating written fieldnotes, c) enabling stimulated recall interviews with Kate, and d) facilitating discussions with co-authors during the iterative analysis of the data set. In total, 3151 minutes of video footage and 582 minutes of audio recordings were made during the fieldwork.

*3.2.3 Semi-structured and Stimulated Recall Interviews*

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to explore Kate's thoughts and feelings as head coach, as well as the meaning that she attached to her actions and behaviours and those of others (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). In addition to allowing the exploration of events documented in the field notes, these interviews also enabled the principal researcher to access events that occurred outside of the observations (Ives, Gale, Potrac & Nelson, 2019). Semi-structured interviews with Kate were conducted in the lead up to, as well as after, training sessions and matches. Active listening, open-ended questioning, and various probes and prompts (i.e., elaboration, detail oriented, completion, and clarification) were used during the interviews to explore Kate's experiences of management work (King, Horrocks, & Brooks, 2019; Merriam & Tidsell, 2015).

Stimulated recall was also integrated into the semi-structured interviews. This entailed Kate recalling and reflecting on specific experiences (i.e., her decision- making, actions, and interactions with others), which were scaffolded through the use of the ethnographic film (Rowe, 2009; Dempsey, 2010). Kate was also involved in the selection of specific experiences to be reviewed. This not only helped to guard against a posteriori rationalisation, but it also supported the interpretive focus of this study on her personal meaning-making as a manager (Francis, 1997). Incidents were typically identified through casual conversations during and immediately after training sessions, matches and meetings. For example, on one occasion, Kate expressed concern that she had "not got the level right" immediately after a half-time team talk during an international match. The ethnographic film of this interaction subsequently became a focus for discussion in a stimulated-recall interview. During these interviews, Kate was encouraged to think aloud as a recording played and to also stop the playback at any time to comment on and explain her thoughts, feelings and (inter)actions with and towards others.

In total, 738 minutes of semi-structured and stimulated recall interview data were generated. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Similar to the recent fieldwork of Ives et al. (2019), this provided the research team with an opportunity to reflexively check, challenge and strengthen the generated analysis through the ongoing fieldwork (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

*3.3 Researcher Positionality*

In generating these data, I (the lead author) occupied a complex position in that I was simultaneously a participant in and an observer of the object of study. Moreover, I had a great deal of discretion in deciding what should be documented during the research (Wolfinger, 2002). This necessitated the constant, conscious renegotiation of my own position and relations (Edwards & Jones, 2018), as well as the continual monitoring and questioning of developing interpretations (Shenton, 2004). Valuably, my co-authors served as "critical friends" during

data generation and analysis. Our conversations often triggered further reflexive considerations both in relation to my role as a person in power (i.e. as a member of Northland), and in terms of the trustworthiness of the analysis (Smith & McGannon, 2018). These conversations also highlighted the struggles of fieldwork, principally related, in this study, to navigating my dual roles responsively and appropriately to my own networks of relations (e.g., as a staff member and a researcher etc.). As Ball (1990) argued, "the researcher must achieve a compromise between an ideal self-as-researcher and an acceptable and possible self in the field setting" (p. 158). At times, the tensions of these relations were keenly felt, such as when my rugby knowledge was "tested" in conversations with players, demonstrating that I needed to "prove my worth" to gain acceptance (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Indeed, it was through passing such tests that my initial status as a researcher (outsider), someone to be wary of, was revised. My changing status, moving towards being a trusted insider, was underlined as I later became a member of staff. Indeed, I was further reassured of my acceptance when I saw and felt no differences between the way Northland players, for example, interacted with me compared to how they interacted with other members of the coaching staff. At other times, being one of a "team" involved a level of intimacy, and a duty of care to my colleagues and the players, that meant maintaining sufficient distance as an ethnographer was particularly challenging (Purdy & Jones, 2013). I later highlight the empathy with which Kate enacted her leadership towards her players, as well as the empathy others felt for her in her challenging role. In this vein, I too was confronted with the difficulties and challenges Kate faced. I was compelled, as a result of our developing relationship, to consider what was best for her. I was also aware that if my presence or methods in any way corroded Kate's ability to do her job then my access to the field could be challenged or even removed. Kate acknowledged the empathetic nature of the fieldwork and its importance to making longitudinal fieldwork of this type possible:

It's never been to the detriment of the coaching time. It's fitted in... you're always asking "When is it going to be best for you?". It's been your flexibility in that process that has probably made, from my point of view, the process completely doable; your appreciation in terms of "Oh my god, this is not a good time".

Another consideration, as a male researcher working in a women's rugby team, with a female head coach, was the gendered nature of fieldwork (Bell, 1999). When questions about this were discussed with Kate, she dismissed any significance related to the researcher-researched gendered dyad. I too reflected upon the respect I held for Kate, generated through my awareness of her significant successes, achievements, qualifications and public regard. I brought this knowledge with me as part of my broader biography as a coach of women's rugby before I became a researcher. Thus, I felt no structural superiority as a male ethnographer researching a female head coach within the male-dominated culture of rugby union (Lumsden, 2009), nor did I encounter any sexist questioning of Kate's legitimacy in the role during my fieldwork. Yet, I (as a male researcher) found similarities to the claims made about the "typical" fieldwork experiences of women (e.g., Gill & Maclean, 2002), in that boundaries between men's space and women's space in Northland were marked (e.g., male and female changing rooms), meaning that I had to "keep in my place" at times. Thus, my view of Kate's world and her hybrid practice was, as in all ethnography, a partial one (Lichterman, 2017). Just as my identity and its meanings in the research context yielded access to rich, longitudinal data; so too, they situated me within social-structural hierarchies that yielded an incomplete picture of sports work at Northland. Although not the central focus of the present study, these considerations highlight the

need for future research that critically and explicitly explores the gendered and micropolitical dimensions of fieldwork in sport organisations.

### *3.4 Phronetic-iterative Data Analysis*

Taking our lead from the recent work of Gale, Ives, Potrac and Nelson (2019) and Ives et al. (2019), a phronetic-iterative approach to data analysis was adopted in this study (Tracy, 2019). Here, data generation and data analysis occurred concurrently and recursively over the course of the field work and beyond. This alternated between emic readings of the data and etic interpretations using relevant literature and theory (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). The emic analysis involved data immersion (i.e., [re]viewing and [re]reading the various data generated) as well as the primary coding of data (Tracy, 2019). During data immersion, notes were used to catalogue relationships and common threads within the data, as well as record provisional ideas about, and reflections on, their connections to the purposes of this study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Building on these notes, the primary coding cycle entailed capturing the essence of salient features of various data using short phrases (Tracy, 2019), not as hollow labels, but as budding relations between data and analytical insight (Saldana, 2013).

The etic analysis of data developed the initial emic readings by scrutinising, synthesising and categorising them into interpretive, explanatory concepts (Tracy, 2019). Here, through a process of secondary coding, the emphasis shifted to using literature and theory (e.g., Crossley, 2011) to make sense of themes generated in the initial emic coding. More specifically, the secondary-cycle coding supported the connection of possible interpretations of the data, relevant theoretical concepts, and the aims of the study (Saldana, 2013). The analytical memos used in this phase of analysis also acted as prompts for further data collection in the field (Tracy, 2019). Alongside the coding of data, the analysis entailed critical discussions between authors during the field work and, indeed, the drafting (and redrafting) of this manuscript. These discussions focused on developing, challenging, and refining the

analytical insights presented (Ives et al., 2019; Smith & McGannon, 2017). Rather than claiming to provide the definitive, singular and complete truth about the hybrid work of a head coach per se, we provide a reading that was influenced both by the aims of the study and our theoretical and paradigmatic beliefs (Denzin, 2017; Ives et al., 2019).

**4.0 Discussion of the Analysis**

Kate was clear that the hybrid nature of the head coach role in a national sport organisation necessitated being more than a competent coaching practitioner (i.e., technical and tactical instruction for skill development and performance); it also required engaging in the strategic leadership and management of people through interactions and relations (Fitzgerald & Ferlie, 2000; Llewellyn, 2001):

> It is about people management as opposed to actual genuine coaching, as a
> head coach. And very much about me getting the environment right for the
> coaching team and the players.

Mirroring the recent findings of Jones and Hemmestad (2019), Kate used analogies to make sense of how her hybrid work was aimed at influencing others in pursuit of a shared focus or core mission. For instance, she emphasised the need to make her players and colleagues feel that they were all "in it together", rather than separate entities:

> I don't want them to think that we're this entity that's on the sideline; we're
> all in this boat... well I call it the "bus", together... Ultimately, we're all
> working towards the same goals and the same aims, and that's really
> important to me.

Yet, how this was to be accomplished was no straightforward task. Indeed, Kate enacted her hybrid practice in a way that enabled her to both clarify and retain control over the goals, whilst engaging stakeholders (e.g., players, assistant coaches) in order to make them feel connected to the agenda through having a sense of responsibility and ownership over them:

It is crucial that everyone is working towards the same goals, shared goals,

which the players have their say in whilst balancing that with direction. So,

there is a time and a place for engagement, and a player centred ethos to what

we do, but similarly, there is also a place for [leadership]... not being scared

to hedge around that.

By sharing in a common mission, Northland members comprised a distinctive and coherent social world (Crossley, 2011). Even so, Kate recognised that, although these actors were aboard the same bus, they each held individual hopes, fears and aspirations, and had varying capacities to positively contribute to the destination of the bus. Consequently, she described the importance of interacting differently with each person, in the hope that she could best influence their contributions to the collective action of the Northland team, as well as to also protect and advance her own interests as the "driver" of the bus:

I don't think there was one player I didn't speak to [today]. Did I do it all the same?

No, because it is specific to them and meeting that individual need, and acknowledging

some people don't need that from you; some people need it at a different time from

you. So, of course they get treated differently at various points in time, but not in terms

of favouritism. That's how you tune that person in.

A range of intertwined material, socio-professional, and most notably self-interests shaped individual actors' motives for being part of the international team and their (inter)actions therein (see Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). However, it was clear that the shared "definition of the organisation" (Kelchtermans, 2007, p. 483) – comprising cultural-ideological interests that legitimated the collective action of the team's members – was to prepare to compete in, and attempt to win, international rugby matches.

At the start of the first season, the scale of Kate's challenge was clear, especially because Northland's record prior to her taking charge included several years of very limited

success in international competitions. As the "master and commander of everything" Kate therefore organised her relationships to maintain the closest and most frequent interactions with a core group of "lieutenants" (other staff and players) who, she perceived, could best help to enact her role:

> Now we've got a completely united, in-post, confirmed management team, I
> now know I have got people around me that know my level... what I expect.
> That's really important when the buck stops at me.

In this way, Northland as a social world actually comprised differently configured networks of relations, oriented towards Kate as the head coach. As we will discuss, different positions within those interconnected networks generated various constraints and opportunities for their incumbents (Crossley, 2011). Northland's boundaries as a social world and the borderlines of its clusters of internal relations were denoted by who interacted with whom, about what and how. As we subsequently show, such boundaries were "set neither by territory nor by formal group membership but by the limits of effective communication" (Shibutani, 1955, p. 566). To be a member of the Northland team was to share in a framework of conventions about permissible and meaningful inter-action, which generated social order in the form of patterns of communication and rituals of engagement (Crossley, 2011). For instance, the team had a shared vocabulary of tactics and strategies including "lineout calls" and "backs moves", the knowledge of which was restricted to its members. It was tacitly understood that the transmission of such information was to be limited to only those who belonged to the specific network concerned (Crossley, 2011). In fact, early in the fieldwork, when I was identified as a "researcher", before I became a member of staff, players were initially wary of discussing the details of these tactics in front of me (the lead author). Such information was never discussed with outsiders (e.g., media journalists or supporters), and only with club teammates who had also been selected for Northland. In this sense, interaction was both communicative and

strategic (Crossley, 2011), it served to reinforce actors' inclusion or exclusion from Northland or one of its sub-networks. Indeed, we elaborate in the following sections how Kate's practice ensured certain information was openly shared with a cluster of core players while being withheld from a different cluster of more peripheral players. Drawing on Goffman (1959), Crossley (2011) explains that, generally, people "have the capacity to control information flow across the boundaries between the different circles in which [they] mix, and thereby to keep separate the identities which are specific to these circles" (p. 100). In other words, to do and maintain what it meant to be a Northlander required its members to reflexively manage their conduct because the conventions of membership of this social world were regularly tested in interactions with others (Crossley, 2011).

### 4.1 The Head Coach as a Hub within Networks of Interaction

As alluded to above, the reality of the research context as a social world was that Northland's members (e.g., coaches and players) were affiliated to multiple relational networks across a variety of social worlds (Crossley, 2011). Kate felt like a hub of interaction both within and beyond the social world of the Northland team. Connected to her role as head coach, for instance, she described how she coordinated, managed and lead the work of other stakeholders who were more and less directly connected to her team:

> Under-20s coaching staff: it's key that I engage and hold regular meetings
> with them, discussions that show we are working together to share resources,
> are aware of players who are moving up and down between squads, and
> ensuring we are working towards the same game plan, style of rugby, which
> will ease player transition and learning. Club coaches: it's crucial our
> coaching team and I work collaboratively with the clubs so we are aware of
> what each other needs in terms of working towards helping our players be
> successful. I have shared player feedback with them, and player goals, and

invited them to discuss how we envisage our game plan going forward. Northland Development Manager: I meet with her to ensure she is aware of what our plans are, I engage her in talent identification and development, and attend [recruitment] events within my role as Northland head coach to increase visibility and promote the notion that players who are good enough will get selected. Regional coaches: again, I need to link with these coaches with regards to player talent identification and development. Other coaches: as I've already said, and this is key for assessing whether elements of the Northland coaching programme delivery are being transferred into [club] games.

Kate was also conscious of the networks of relations in which her players, for instance, were enmeshed. Most played with or against one another in local clubs and/or universities and club and/or university leagues. Some players were siblings, others were studying the same university course, one couple were domestic partners, and still other players had grown up in the same geographic neighbourhoods. Even two of the coaches (Kate and Clive), all of whom were employed by Northland on only a part-time basis, undertook their main work for the same national public service organisation despite living at opposite ends of the country. Importantly, these "different patterns of connection generate[d] different opportunities, constraints and dynamics for those connected in them, both generically and according to the actor's specific location in the pattern" (Crossley, 2011, p. 14). More specifically, Kate was conscious that their day-to-day interactions would be discussed and compared by the players, and that perceived inconsistencies could cause conflict. For example, Kate reflected on the preparation and rehearsal undertaken by the coaching staff, in what Goffman (1959) described as the *back stage*, to ensure that their team performance was disciplined in front of the players and would

present the consistent impression she intended. This included learning from their unfolding experiences of how their management was perceived by the players, as Kate described:

> We make sure that things that happened there [in the past] do not happen again. We've learned a lot in the past two weeks particularly doing the selection for this match in terms of… messages: coaches saying different messages to different people. That meeting I had yesterday was to highlight a few things I need for us as a coaching team to be absolutely bang on the button about, a lot better at, because I want it to get better. I want it to be absolutely spot on.

As the above quote alludes, being points of intersection between multiple worlds and networks of relations was not always easy for Northland's management group. Their web of group affiliations brought sometimes competing demands (Simmel, 1955), as this fieldnote captures:

> As everyone arrived at the team's hotel for this weekend's training, the staff all gathered for a customary coffee in the hotel lounge. Clive [Assistant Coach] asked Kate [Head Coach] about her week at work. Using technical terms specific to an aspect of [their shared occupational context], she described how challenging her day job had been, adding: "You know what it's like?". Clive nodded empathetically, while the others looked on seemingly in the dark about the specifics of what was being discussed. "It's sometimes impossible to squeeze in doing this job (being Northland coach) when stuff like that happens", Kate added. As amateurs and semi-professionals, the other staff and players are similarly stretched, balancing their day-to-day employment, education, family lives and leisure interests

with coaching and playing at the highest level, so there was sympathetic

acknowledgment of Kate's challenges all round.

Kate also highlighted the difficulties involved in being positioned as a strategic national leader, especially in terms of convincing stakeholders, especially those outside of the immediate Northland context (e.g., club coaches), to "buy in" to her approach:

Sometimes I feel the club coaches don't understand where we need to be

heading or the reasons that lie behind what we are doing in terms of genuinely

trying to support these players to be able to compete at a higher level and

what that actually needs. There are differing viewpoints on that, so it's being

open to compromise in trying to find a way forward. But, "easy" was never

in the job description…

Resolving the competing demands of being at the intersection between different worlds meant, for example, that Kate had to use up her annual leave or request special leave from her full-time employment to accommodate and sufficiently recover from all the training and competition that accompanied her coaching position. Yet, occupying multiple social circles was also sometimes liberating (Crossley, 2011), because the individual benefitted from the support, capital, resources and information "that "flow[ed]" along these network pathways" (Chayko, 2015, p. 1420). For instance, Kate and Clive's multiple, shared affiliations (e.g., to coaching and working networks) engendered particular forms of coordination, communication and the co-production of meaning, such that, for example, Clive was able to understand and empathise more easily with the challenges Kate experienced as a manager in both her coaching and working worlds (a topic to which we will return later). In her own words, Kate explained:

[Clive] is brilliant at saying "do you want me to do that?". And I will be the

first to say "I'm blowing out my arse, I need to go to bed", or "I will not be

at breakfast today at half eight, I will be at nine o'clock." He gets that I've

got a pretty important, high-stress job, so he manages that with me.

In this example, being enmeshed together in overlapping networks of relations enabled others' professional interests to be more readily taken into account in their interactions, such that individuals at times refrained from certain courses of action and included other affiliates' well-being in the ends they pursued (Crossley, 2011).

Although their web of group affiliations often made competing claims on Northland's staff, it also enabled them to bring "different perspectives into play, against one another, carving out a distinct perspective for their self in the process" (Crossley, 2011, p. 86). In this regard, Kate described the value of developing resources (i.e., skills and knowledge), as she rose to the top of her profession, that could be transferred to her head coach role with the Northland team. Discussing the links between her main profession and her work as a coach, Kate said:

I mean I look at a national picture on a day-to-day basis. It's never just about

me and my team, it's about impacting the organisation, impacting the [public-

service organisation], it goes on and on and it's the same here. So, because I

work in an environment where it's never just about the micro; it's very

applicable in this job.

More specifically, when she first started coaching Northland, her experience of conventionally configured relations when managing large teams of colleagues in her day-job helped Kate to recognise that she needed more staff working closely with her to support her management of the team:

We changed from being just two coaches that worked with forty people to...

I've put in place things like we do micro-coaching, there's a ratio of one-to-

eight or 10. That has made a significant difference because that's creating an

environment where players are more confident to ask questions, push each other, speak to each other. It was about identifying that and then we could show the Performance Director that that's what I needed, that's what we've got to put in place if this is gunna work.

Similarly, Kate drew upon her own previous experiences as an international rugby player to inform her strategic interactions with players and fellow coaches. For instance, her prior relations with coaches (as a player) that she perceived to have lacked an appropriate work ethic informed her subsequent strategic conduct (see Goffman, 1959):

As a player, I've been in that environment where the players have had a really clear set of really high standards and the coaching team have been like "Oh well, we're off to so and so for the weekend". Well no. I don't treat it as a weekend's jolly, I am absolutely serious about doing a really good job for Northland, and I think they (the players) deserve that... I will work late, they see me working late, they see our team working late. They've seen us, analysing until the early hours of the morning in order that we've got a product to deliver the next day and it's been on the button every time.

Here, the importance of impression management in performance teams (e.g., Sosik et al., 2002; Potrac & Jones, 2009a) to maintain staff members' effective relations with those they seek to influence was clearly evident. Moreover, the identification of how indirect experience can inform subsequent management, leadership and coaching work extends Crossley's (2011) focus on the "temporal trajectory of interaction", which emphasised the impact of our direct interaction histories on our anticipation of future interactions with those same actors, by recognising – as he alludes but does not fully develop – that, "our perspective upon the world is formed by our relational position and history" (p. 19).

The lessons Kate learned from her past playing experiences appeared to create a "feel for the ways in which others [would] think and typically react" to her (Crossley, 2011 p. 88). This, in her own words, was essential to "putting herself in her players' shoes", which evidently helped her to develop empathetic bonds with players. Considering how her previous experiences informed her practice, Kate explained:

> When I speak to them (players) I get it, cos I have walked the walk and had to deal with it. I get it… what it's like. Speaking to some of these people who are like doctors, teachers and people like that, that are working shift systems that are absolutely incompatible, really, with being what you would call being a professional, elite athlete… it's having that understanding of what is a reasonable expectation, a reasonable set of standards to have.

As part of Kate's strategic interaction - her efforts to persuade others to "buy into" her approach (Potrac & Jones, 2009b) - empathy for her players was evident when she sometimes demonstrated situational flexibility by changing planned activities in order to ensure they were well rested after arriving into weekend training camps following busy weeks of work or study:

> They've worked a day and that's taken into account. You know, I will get to Northland and I'll gauge it and I'll cancel meetings because I have looked at them (players) and I've thought they're knackered, they're absolutely knackered. "Go and chill out, go and have a nice... you know, go and chill out with your mates, go and watch this film".

Her past experiences also underpinned her efforts to give off the right impression by participating publicly in the emotions experienced by players and other staff when their shared cultural-ideological interests were not achieved:

> I cried in front of them (players), in the changing room, after [Southland] destroyed us (last season), because that's how much I care... They understand

that we're not here just to coach, we absolutely genuinely care about them as

people and as players.

These examples show how Kate's past had a bearing on her present. Her history of relations shaped her desires, preferences and embodied know-how, which enabled Kate, in her contemporary practice, to demonstrate a sense of empathy and justice through her "intersubjective recognition that others are beings who think, feel and have plans and interests", just as she did (Crossley, 2011, p. 89).

Picking up a point of emphasis in the relational thesis, it is important to stress that social networks did not *cause* actions. Instead, as Crossley (2011) reminds us, different figurations "variously facilitate or inhibit the generation of trust, cooperation, good communication etc." (p. 145), which, in turn, encourages interpersonal harmony or conflict. Within the present study, by examining the interaction patterns of the coaching context, including "processes of collective identity formation, recruitment, and solidarity building" (Crossley, 2010, p. 353), it was possible to identify *sub-networks* and *clusters* within the broader networks of relations, which included *core* and *periphery* sub-groups among the Northland players (see Figure 1). As these two fieldnotes show, Northland's social figurations were visible on and off the pitch:

Patterns of relations and status among the players were conspicuous again at

lunch today. Although they were mixed together with more senior players in

the team meeting immediately before we were called through to eat, the

new[ly selected] players seemed to hold back as we left the room and joined

the queue for the buffet. Notably, through no explicit or formal rule, Sarah,

Lucy, Rachel, Erin and Natalie, seem frequently to be at the front of the

queue, and typically sit together to eat and in other social situations. In

contrast, the newbies stick together, keeping some distance, so that they can

follow the lead (and avoid stepping out of line) of those who appear to navigate with ease the norms and processes of Northlander life.

It seems clearly understood by new[ly selected] players that, when coaches pose open questions to the group, or a problem is presented that requires discussion and consensus within the team, that it is for the senior players' to take the lead. In several huddles during training today, as Kate and Clive constructed questions to clarify tactical options in different areas of the pitch, Abigail and Beth notably looked to the floor, avoiding any eye contact with either coach or senior player that might require them to contribute. Simultaneously, Sarah and Erin became animated, fixing the coach with their body language to indicate to them (and to the players around them) of their readiness to "have the floor" as soon as the coach finalised their points or questions.

Those players with the greatest centrality were found to have the most and closest connections between their peers; periphery players had weaker ties and fewer connections (Crossley, 2011). It was apparent through participant observation, for example, that a group of "senior players" sat closest to the core of the network. These were players who, typically, had been selected for Northland over many years, and were considered analogous to "seasoned warriors" or "battle-hardened troops" (Tuck, 2003, p. 191). They possessed socially desirable resources (in the eyes of and compared to their peers) – making them attractive to others in the scene (Crossley, 2011) – such as position-specific skills, tactical understanding and levels of physical conditioning, which meant that Kate depended upon them as reliable contributors to the cultural-ideological interests of the network as a whole (i.e. winning matches). By contrast, peripheral actors were often those newly selected into the team, who tended to show promise or potential in certain areas but were less dependable than their more experienced peers.

Reflecting their core or periphery status, Kate included and excluded different Northland members from formal sub-networks of decision making about life as a Northlander; actors' constraints and opportunities varied according to their position in the network (Crossley, 2011). Where this concerned the team's playing strategy, for instance, senior players' inclusion in meetings rested on Kate's perceptions of their trustworthiness and reliability. These attributes were often connected to individuals' memberships of networks beyond Northland. Indeed, core players (e.g., Sarah) were thus held in closer relations because Kate perceived their skills and knowledge (resources) had been honed with better club coaches and in better club leagues (other social worlds) than those experienced by more peripheral players (e.g., Abigail, a newly selected player). These players' differential resources, generated in their different networks of relations, consequently influenced Kate's *differential associations* as a manager - the social proximity or distance she maintained to members of the network (Bottero & Prandy, 2003). Where Sarah, for instance, was known to be able to consistently implement a key element of Northland's strategy, she generated trust, which was manifest by much more regular interactions with Kate:

> I know when I speak about things, if I say to [Sarah] "Double threat" she
> knows immediately what I am talking about. You know, some of them do,
> because the standard of coaching on a weekly basis is better in their club. So,
> there will be some things that I don't have to repeat, or I don't have to break
> down into little blocks in order to get to the end result.

In contrast, Abigail, who Kate felt played for a weaker club team in a substandard club league, was perceived to be incapable of the same level of trustworthiness as Sarah and other core players. Consequently, Abigail, along with other periphery players, engaged in much less observable interaction with Kate:

Abigail is clueless on the wing at the minute. She'll never even remotely think

she's got to run that line, let alone stand out behind that other player. It's a

case of as and when and how much overload we give them (the periphery

players) of information, for me.

Such differential associations created different sets of opportunities and constraints for actors

in the organisation (Crossley, 2011). Most notably, the senior players (including Sarah) were

invited by Kate to collaborate in shaping key decisions related to the members' and team's

interests, including their on-pitch game plan and off-pitch social activities, while periphery

players were excluded from these influential sub-networks. This is exemplified in Kate's

contrasting statements about the contributions of core and periphery players to Northland's

game plan:

I see my role in this set up as sitting down with these key people - with Sarah,

Lucy and possibly one other, maybe Rachel - and say, "Right we're gonna go

to a four-man [sic] option" (lineout strategy). "How do you think that would

look? Where do you think we've got the benefits? Which personnel do you

think?" Because that (game plan), for me, will then translate on to the pitch.

To be quite frank, I don't need Abigail to be able to read the game plan,

because she's never going to be in key effective decision-making roles

(playing positions).

## 4.2 Hybrid Management Work as Conventions of Interaction

Kate's differential associations to core and periphery players highlights one example of

a pattern of interaction (convention) in the coaching context. To be a senior player was to

occupy an *unofficial* position in the social world "constituted both by their pattern of ties to

others…and by the resources they ha[d] available to them and c[ould] make available, through

exchange, to others" (Crossley, 2011 p. 179). Such unofficial structures and identities emerged in the absence of formal rules about how, for example, Northland's game plan should be devised and enacted (Crossley, 2011). Yet there were numerous institutionalised prescriptions that shaped members' identities, interactions and relations with others. Notably, Northland's governing body employed Kate to the official position of head coach. To occupy any such position within an organisation, Crossley (2011) explains, ensures we always "interact with others in a particular capacity… and the capacities or identities are enmeshed within complexes of conventions" (p. 163). Indeed, for Kate, to be the team's lead coach was to stand in relation to her players; equally, by definition, Clive and Alex were only assistant coaches insofar as they assisted Kate as head coach.

The shared conventions associated with differential positions in the social world, indicative of the division of labour, were learned through coaches', players' and others' involvements together in the organisation. Being oriented to such conventions helped actors to make sense of each other's actions and supported social integration by indicating the chains of obligations that linked Northland's members (Durkheim, 1964). Kate's understanding of the conventions surrounding her position as Northland head coach, for example, was partially generated by institutionalised definitions and expectations, set out in her contract of employment and in a formal job description. These encompassed managing the national performance plan, devising the team's game plan, overseeing session planning and content delivery, deciding team selection, maintaining player discipline and welfare, and defining team culture and values. Kate personally felt the legitimate authority to enact these responsibilities (Raven, 1983), not only from being labelled as a superior in the organisation, but also from the expectations (conventions) held by those that she was positioned in relation to (e.g., players, assistant coaches). For example, despite deciding to devise the game plan in collaboration with her senior players, she described how the team would often look to her to decide a course of

action that would allow everyone to move forward together when tensions, challenges or uncertainty were experienced:

> At certain points, people will want to look to me to make a decision. "Right, this is what I am looking for" or "This is what we're trying to... this is our outcome, this is our end goal". There's a point where [the players] need direction and need to know that this is what we're doing.

Thus, power was not located within Kate or any other individual, but rather in relations and interactions between members of the social world (Crossley, 2011). Indeed, the role(s) carried out by the manager(s) in this context were not simply captured in a set of predefined obligations, but something that was worked out and negotiated, "made and re-made in interaction" (Crossley, 2011, p. 170).

Highlighting the interrelated, mutually dependent nature of management within organisations, Kate sometimes struggled to maintain her own socially negotiated expectations due to the (in)actions of others to whom her own obligations as head coach were inextricably tied. For instance, when the medical staff failed to inform the team manager, who would typically brief Kate on available training numbers, that several players were injured, its detrimental effect on her ability to quickly adapt existing training plans was evident. This issue links to the previous discussion of Kate's concern to manage players' impressions of her as a hard-working, organised head coach, and her desire to guard against perceptions that the coaches were "on a jolly". Explaining the impact of her reliance on others to stick to conventions of interaction, Kate said:

> I need to know how many fit players I have because we design session plans. You know, [going from] 30 to 24 [players] is a significant difference... and that really annoys me. Like, they [medical staff] don't realise, that's the kind of information that I want [Team Manager] to tell me, so that I can genuinely

focus just on the coaching. At the moment, I find that I've got to be on top of

everyone else in order to be able to coach.

As Crossley (2011) pointed out, to be effective, knowledge of role-related expectations must be shared and reinforced. Kate's ability to competently enact some locally established conventions of interaction (e.g., having an organised training plan) relied upon others in her network complying with different conventions of interaction (e.g., medical staff promptly informing her of injuries). Kate's initial response to this lack of information was to remind her colleagues of the importance of such information, and subsequently to actively and regularly prompt the medical staff for injury updates. Over time, these prompts subsided, as the new convention to ensure that injury updates were promptly passed on had become diffused through the network of relations and was regularly acted upon and, thus, reinforced through interaction (Crossley, 2011).

Although conventions simultaneously constrained what Kate was expected to do and how she would do it, she was also able to draw upon and orient her actions towards them in her strategic conduct with others (Crossley, 2011); interactions that she utilised to maintain and advance desirable working conditions amidst various intersecting professional interests (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002). For instance, all of Northland's other representative teams followed protocols to ensure that certain clothing, carrying sponsors' logos, would be visible to the watching media during training and matches. As head coach, Kate was formally responsible for the team's discipline in this regard. However, she distanced herself from any role in policing this policy, saying "I don't need to whack a stick, to say, 'No, you've got the wrong t-shirt on'. That's just... I'm not going to go there." Kate also gave her assistant coaches freedom to plan and deliver training sessions without her exercising excessive control over them. In turn, however, she expected to be able to step in and make a point during their sessions without any resistance:

> Do I feel it's got to come out of my mouth all the time? No, they're (assistant coaches) perfectly capable of delivering that. If they think all the time, "I was doing this session and [Kate] breezes in and goes... 'Everybody, stop a minute…'" *God*! There will be times when I have to do that, but I want the staff to feel like they can coach and they are involved in the coaching process.

> [The assistant coaches] know if I step in and I say something, I've got almost free licence to do that. I will step in and just say it; I won't just stand there and think will I mention that later on?

By distancing herself from some aspects of her formal responsibilities, or as Goffman (1969) put it, by choosing not to "press [her] rightful claims too far" (p. 75), Kate negotiated the micro-relations of her management context in search of favourable returns and reciprocal obligations from her closest allies (e.g., players and assistant coaches).

Because the head coach held a central position in the social world (see Figure 1) in terms of control over the flow of resources (e.g., through selection), others were also highly dependent on her (Crossley, 2011). Yet this potential power advantage was rarely exercised in terms of coercion – the threat of loss, negative outcomes or punishment (French & Raven, 1959). Instead, mirroring Molm (1997), Kate tended to use exchange, recognising the risks and costs of overt coercion might outweigh its rewards, and that her bargaining power was strong (Crossley, 2011). For example, when she first joined Northland during an extended period of loses in international competitions, Kate had been heralded – given her unrivalled success as a club coach – as their potential saviour. Achieving such success, she believed, would require substantial change in Northland's playing strategies and tactics:

> I watched Northland play in the [previous] World Cup and they did not know what to do [tactically]. I watched them... I watched them create loads and loads of pressure and quick ball with four-man [sic] overlaps and they

couldn't send it down the field because they couldn't catch and pass. That's

never gonna... you're never gonna get anywhere playing rugby like that. So,

for me, it was about coming in and it had to mean... it had to be about change.

Following her appointment, Kate could have simply imposed a new game plan, without consulting the players. However, she needed the relatively small pool of players in Northland to consent to the alternative vision and remain available for selection if it was to succeed. In this regard, Kate recognised the risks of coaching differently (Avner, Denison, Jones, Boocock & Hall, in press). Coercively implementing a new approach with players who had been used to training and playing a certain way for a long time, some of whom were already questioning their personal investment in international rugby given the lack of rewards achieved in recent years, could have had negative implications. As Kate explained, "We could lose people, definitely. We could lose people on the way, but I think that there will be other people who will go, 'I want to be a part of that'." Consequently, despite excluding most players (especially those on the periphery) from discussions about the game plan, Kate sought to generate buy-in by emphasising to all Northland members that the team's new tactics had been co-produced with the senior player group. In reality, Kate had carefully controlled access to this group and the discussions they had, helping to ensure that the "agreed strategy" was a close approximation of her personal ideology of rugby game play. In this way, Kate strategically interacted with core players, offering the illusion of empowerment to "generate the necessary professional support, space, and time to carry out [her] programs and agendas" (Potrac & Jones, 2009b, p. 224). In turn, Crossley (2011) explains "by dint of a central network position" this core group of players would be "highly influential in shaping the tastes of others" (p. 194). Indeed, Kate's closely held lieutenants, in return for being afforded status positions within the

social world, helped to convince other actors in their network to respond positively to change brought about by her everyday work.

**5.0 Conclusion**

In seeking to redress dominant, unitary representations of management and leadership (Grills & Prus, 2019; Ferkins, Shilbury & O'Boyle, 2018; Learmonth & Morrell, 2019), this paper offers rare insight into the emergent, interactive, and practical complexity of one head coach's everyday work. Indeed, the novelty and significance of this study rests on its application of Crossley's (2011) theorising to address fundamental concerns of management and organisational inter-change; namely, the co-ordination of action and pursuit of order amid the constraining and enabling qualities of networks of relations (Grills & Prus, 2019). Our analysis illustrates how the hybrid management, leadership and coaching work of one head coach involved positioning herself, through mindful, iterative (inter)action, as a central mover among others in the everyday social drama of organisational life (Crossley, 2011; Grills & Prus, 2019). Indeed, rather than solely relying upon the possession of desirable personality traits, vision and charisma, this paper demonstrates how a) the head coach, as a hub of interaction, purposefully cultivated and managed nuanced relations, privileging some relational bonds over others, not only with but also between more and less trusted collaborators in their social networks, b) this positioned the coach to maintain oversight and to influence the support, capital, resources and information flowing along these network pathways towards the team's key mission, and c) in seeking to remain influential in these ways, the coach engaged in strategic interaction that responded to others' thoughts, feelings and interests, which generated from them "buy-in", space and time to carry out the manager's agendas. This study is among the first to respond to recent calls for a scholarship of actual management practice; one that a) examines the situated nature of people's acting and relations through intimate familiarity with the context, and b) explores the complexities and dynamics (inclusive of its dilemmas and

contradictions) that are part of managerial work and efforts to lead (Alvesson, in press). Our analysis contributes to an emerging, interactionist oriented paradigm in coaching, management and leadership scholarship, which argues for a more realistic and sophisticated portrayal of the (micro)political, emotional and relational nature of workplace interaction than has been achieved to date; one that ultimately reflects the phenomenological essence of the activity inclusive of its hybrid complexity (Grills & Prus, 2019; Tourish, 2019; Roderick, Smith & Potrac., 2017; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

We do not suggest that the findings from this case study can be uncritically generalised to wider hybrid management work. Instead, we argue that Kate's strategic management of nuanced relations with, and between, collaborators in the organisation could be used as a resource to stimulate wider critical reflection regarding the essential relational nature of management, leadership and coaching work (Jones, 2009). The potential applied utility of this analysis may best be realised through the concerted action of researchers, policy makers, sport organisations, educators and practitioners to recognise and engage with hybrid management work not as heroic individualism, but as an "ongoing exercise in collective behaviour" (Grills & Prus, 2019 p. 80). We therefore suggest that sport organisations, such as World Rugby and FIFA (among others), may wish to consider the inclusion of educational content that goes beyond the notion of insulated dyadic relationships (e.g., Jowett, 2017) to examine the workings of power and exchange in larger networks of interrelated actors (Crossley, 2011). To support these endeavours, acknowledging that the findings of this research are specific to one context, we propose that further empirical investigation should focus on extending our understanding of the practical accomplishment of sport work by examining how it is undertaken in a variety of settings. Potentially productive topic areas include a) how managers' everyday micropolitical practice generates trust, cooperation, and productive working conditions within groups who hold nuanced interests and expectations

(Piot & Kelchtermans, 2015), and b) how figurations of differential relations as well as tactical exchange contribute to uneven access to resources, conflict and co-operation as managers (and others) engage in influence work (Grills & Prus, 2019). For us, studying the situated, enacted details of hybrid management work would support the generation of a knowledge base that reflects the struggles and exchanges that comprise this social endeavour.

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